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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 24 July 2018

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: On today's Order Paper it is noted that on 27 July 1918, Major Francis Bennett-Goldney, Royal Army Service Corps, Member for Canterbury, died from injuries sustained in a car accident while serving as honorary assistant military attaché in Paris; and that on 22 August 1918, Captain the hon. Oswald Cawley, Shropshire Yeomanry and 10th (Shropshire and Cheshire Yeomanry) Battalion The King's Shropshire Light Infantry, Member for Prestwich, was killed in action near Merville, France. We remember them today.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Secretary of State was asked—
NHS Services: Online Access

1. **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): What recent progress has been made on providing patients with online access to NHS services. [906605]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): It is a great honour to be here, Mr Speaker.

There is good progress in patients using online services in the NHS—about a quarter of patients are now registered to access general practitioner online services, up from about a fifth a year ago—but there is much more to be done to use technology in the NHS for the benefit of patients and clinicians alike.

Alan Mak: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment. Healthcare delivered by app is increasingly popular with patients in Havant and across the country. Will my right hon. Friend reconfirm his Department's commitment to the first ever NHS patient app, and update the House on the timetable for its roll-out?

Matt Hancock: The roll-out of technology right across the NHS and, indeed, social care is good for patients and good for clinicians. I have seen countless examples of that in just my first two weeks in this job. I pay tribute to the Centre for Policy Studies report, which was launched by my predecessor and authored by my hon. Friend, which demonstrates how apps can be useful for making healthcare easier to access for patients. Apps are popular with patients, and I cannot wait to drive that forward.

22. [906629] **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on his new appointment? Another new technology that really matters is MRI scanners. We have had a big fundraising campaign in Bishop Auckland for ours, but the problem with such fundraising campaigns is that they are of course easier in wealthy areas than in poor areas. Will the Secretary of State pay attention to evening out this uneven distribution of resources?

Matt Hancock: Yes, of course I will. I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her work to raise funds for the MRI scanner in Bishop Auckland, which benefits from great levels of philanthropy in some areas. The whole purpose of having a national health service is that, wherever people live in the country, they can get high-quality healthcare, free at the point of delivery, according to need. I stand by that principle, and I honour it.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State to his post. He will know that no regulator is prospectively examining the safety and effectiveness of diagnostic apps in use in the NHS. I wrote to his predecessor recently following concerns that were raised with me about Babylon's apps, which could be missing symptoms of meningitis and heart attack, for example. What steps will the Secretary of State take to ensure that, as these technologies are rolled out, patients have can have absolute confidence that they have been properly evaluated for safety and effectiveness? Will he set out how he will take that forward?

Matt Hancock: The Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee makes a really important point. There is no greater enthusiast for technology than me—as you well know, Mr Speaker—but the thing about new technology is that the rules sometimes need to be updated to take changes in technology into account. The response when there are challenges such as the one my hon. Friend raises is not to reject the technology, but the opposite: to keep improving the technology so that it gets better and better, and to make sure that the rules keep up to pace. I spoke to Simon Stevens at NHS England about this only this morning—we have had a series of conversations in the past couple of weeks since I have been in post—and he is reviewing this exact question. I am absolutely sure that we will get to the right answer.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State familiar with the “GP at hand” online service? It is a partnership between a private company and a Fulham GP surgery, and it has poached thousands of profitable patients from GPs all over London, to the alarm of the British Medical Association and of GPs generally. My clinical commissioning group is investigating it, and in the meantime CCGs have blocked Babylon's expansion to Birmingham on safety grounds. This is creating a two-tier system for GPs, so will the Secretary of State investigate it?

Matt Hancock: I am acutely aware of the question that the hon. Gentleman raises, not least because I am a user of the Babylon service myself—it is my GP. The important thing is to ensure that the rules are kept up to date so that we can get the benefits of the new technology, but make sure that it works in a way that ensures everybody gets high-quality primary care.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Warm congratulations to the Secretary of State.

Whether it is online consultations or more traditional, face-to-face ones, will the Secretary of State join me in thanking all the NHS staff who do fantastic work in taking care of my constituents in Chipping Barnet?

Matt Hancock: I certainly will. I pay tribute to the NHS workforce and the social care workforce who, every day of their working lives, give up their time to serve their community, to serve their fellow man and woman, and to ensure that we have the healthiest nation we possibly can. I love the NHS, as does everybody in the House. Almost everyone is touched by the NHS at some of the most difficult times in their lives. I pay tribute to the workforce.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his new position. I note his intention to extend online NHS services, but I hope that he will provide more detail about how he intends to guarantee patient safety, given that the Care Quality Commission reported this year that 43% of online GP and pharmacy services are currently unsafe. Will he reverse the cuts to capital funding so that safe technology can be installed? Furthermore, what steps will he take to ensure that elderly and vulnerable patients, who find it difficult to access online services, will still have the certainty of sustainable community surgeries?

Matt Hancock: Those are really important questions. On funding, I announced only last week £487 million to improve technology and technology services to ensure that they can be as high quality as possible. On patient safety, the key is to keep improving technology so that it gets better and better. On universal access, we must use technology in such a way that patients who want to access services through technology can do so, as that frees up resources so that more can be done for those who do not want to use technology, meaning that we preserve universal access.

Drug-related Harm

2. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on policies to tackle drug-related harm. [906606]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I attended the most recent cross-Government board meeting, which was held in June and chaired by the Home Secretary, to discuss the implementation of the drugs strategy. We know that drugs can devastate lives and damage our communities. The Government's approach remains clear: we must do everything that we can to prevent drug use and support people through successful treatment and recovery.

Ronnie Cowan: Given the recent statistics showing that drug-related deaths in Portugal are three per million, compared with the UK figure of 64 per million, does the Minister agree that the UK Government should follow Portugal's example and make drug policy reform a matter primarily for Health and Social Care, rather than the Home Office?

Steve Brine: The truth is that we work together. In July 2017, the Government published a comprehensive new drugs strategy, setting out what we think is a balanced approach that brings together the police, health, and community and global partners to tackle the illicit drugs trade, and to protect the most vulnerable in our societies who are struggling with drug dependency and help them to recover and turn their lives around. I know the hon. Gentleman takes a very different view, but that is our approach.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): My nine-year-old constituent is currently having up to 400 epileptic seizures every week, and his family believe that medicinal cannabis may be beneficial. Will my hon. Friend update the House on what progress is being made regarding the use of medicinal cannabis for epilepsy sufferers?

Steve Brine: Obviously, our thoughts are with my hon. Friend's constituent. A two-part review is going on. In the first part, the chief medical adviser considered the evidence available for the medicinal and therapeutic benefits of cannabis-based medicinal products, and found conclusive evidence of the benefits of those products. Part 2, which will be led by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, will provide an assessment, based on the balance of harm and public need, of whether we need to do anything regarding the misuse of drugs regulations. While the review is under way, we have established, as an interim measure, the expert panel of clinicians to advise Ministers on any licence applications from senior clinicians, which helped Alfie Dingley, for example.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): What action is the Minister taking with colleagues in the Home Office in respect of the drug Xanax, which is reputedly freely available at very low prices, and is more addictive than heroin? What action is he taking to raise awareness and deal with rehabilitation?

Steve Brine: We are very aware of this drug and its dangers. A few months ago, I responded to an Adjournment debate on the matter that was secured by the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous). We are watching the issue very closely. I will find out some more details and write to the right hon. Gentleman. I know that he takes a close interest in this, and we will speak about it.

Maternity Care

3. **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve safety in maternity care. [906607]

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinage): Our national ambition is to halve the rates of stillbirths, neonatal and maternal deaths, and serious birth-related brain injuries by 2015. We are working with our partners to implement the maternity safety strategy, and new data shows that the stillbirth rate in 2017 was the lowest since records began in 1927.

Victoria Prentis: Our three children were all born in periods of extremely hot weather. I ask the House to think of the families of Banbury who have to travel for up to an hour and a half or even two hours, if they are lucky enough to have their own car, to Oxford to give

birth in a full obstetric unit. May I encourage the Minister, in her drive to ensure that maternity care is safe, kind and close to home, to ask the new Secretary of State to visit us in Banbury soon so that he can assess the situation for himself?

Caroline Dinéage: I completely understand my hon. Friend's concerns. She has been an incredibly strong advocate and campaigner on this very issue. As she knows, no permanent changes will be made until the work is carried out by the independent review panel, which is looking at attempts to recruit obstetric staff for her local services. I thank her very much for the offer of a visit; I am sure the Secretary of State will look at it very closely.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): Dr Neal Russell volunteered to help in the fight against Ebola. Today he has returned his Ebola medal in protest at the healthcare hostile environment for migrants caused by a new charging regime, which has led to vulnerable pregnant women here in the UK being too afraid to get maternity healthcare. Will the Minister suspend her Department's charging regime, pending the completion of a thorough and independent public health assessment?

Caroline Dinéage: That is incredibly sad news. We hate to hear of anybody who has done such incredible service in the pursuit of great healthcare around the world taking such drastic steps. We have an incredibly strong departmental ambition for NHS maternity to provide the safest, highest quality care in the world. That is something we will continue to aspire towards.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): The maternity unit at Harrogate Hospital is award winning due to the skills and compassion of its fantastic team. What action is my hon. Friend taking to encourage more people into maternity care and midwifery careers?

Caroline Dinéage: The Department's maternity safety ambition plans are to train more than 3,000 extra midwives over the next four years. As part of that, we will be working with our partners to develop new training routes to become registered midwives so that, along with other roles in the NHS, maternity and midwifery can attract the best and retain the most talented staff.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): According to the Royal College of Midwives, the national shortage of midwives is running at nearly 4,000 and is particularly acute in areas like mine in east London, with its very high property prices and rising birth rates. How does the Minister intend to address that?

Caroline Dinéage: There are in fact 2,300 more midwives in the NHS than there were in 2010, but the hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. We want to continue to attract the best people into midwifery, which is why we are providing an extra £500,000 to the NHS to cover the clinical placement costs for 650 additional students in 2019-20.

Childhood Obesity

4. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce rates of childhood obesity. [906608]

14. **Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce rates of childhood obesity. [906620]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): We published the second chapter of our world-leading childhood obesity plan on 25 June. It builds on the progress we made since the publication of chapter 1 in 2016, particularly on the reformulation of products that our children eat and drink most. We will continue to take an approach that is based on evidence and we are determined to act.

Nigel Huddleston: I warmly welcome the Secretary of State to his post. I am sure that he was as alarmed as I was to learn that the proportion of 11-year-old children who are obese is now greater in the UK than the US. What more can we do to educate children and their parents about the benefit of a balanced diet and healthy life start?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on this matter. It is critical that we have a cross-Government approach. The obesity plan is led by the Department of Health and Social Care, but it is a cross-Government plan. There is a whole range of actions we need to take—from education through to culture and broadcasting—to make sure we get it right.

Dr Johnson: One of the reasons why tackling obesity in children is so important is the fact that it has such long-term detrimental effects on health. Now that the Government have published chapter 2 of their childhood obesity strategy, will the Secretary of State outline how it will have a long-term impact on children's health and tackle issues such as diabetes and heart disease?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that obesity, especially in children, is one of the underlying conditions that often leads to much worse long-term health conditions. Some 22% of children aged four and five in reception are overweight or obese; that number is too high and we have to act.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State to his new post, which is one of the toughest jobs in Parliament. Having worked with him on other things in the past, I am sure that his energy will come through in the Department.

I have a vested interest in the welfare of young children as we are expecting our 11th grandchild in October. Will the Secretary of State look closely at the relationship between obesity in later childhood and the diet of mothers during pregnancy? Early research shows that there is a link, so will he look at it carefully?

Mr Speaker: A veritable football team of Sheermans.

Matt Hancock: I am sure that they will grow into that, Mr Speaker.

I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Gentleman has done, which I have watched with admiration from elsewhere. I will certainly look at the point that he raises, which is very important, and we will take a fully evidence-based approach.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his new job. Today's figures show that levels of severe obesity in children are at a record high, so will the Government speed up their childhood obesity strategy to tackle this urgent public health challenge?

Matt Hancock: We published chapter 2 less than a month ago. There is further work to do, because that sets out a whole series of areas in which we are going to take action, and I am already working on pushing it faster.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I know that the Secretary of State has a track record of evidence-free, nanny-state policies from his time in DCMS. Can we expect more of the same in his new Department, or is he going to try out some Conservative principles, such as individual freedom, and individual and parental responsibility?

Matt Hancock: I am delighted to see that the teamwork between my hon. Friend and I is going to continue. You might be surprised to know, Mr Speaker, that there are some things on which my hon. Friend and I agree. One is the importance of individuals taking responsibility—a critical part of public health and tackling obesity—supported by an enabling state.

Mr Speaker: The Secretary of State is working extremely hard. I hope that he will take it in the right spirit if I say that I do not think he has yet quite secured the Shipley vote.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Sarah, who runs the Devonport Live café in Devonport, one of the poorest parts of the country, used to provide cookery classes for local young mums, but she cannot do that anymore because of a lack of funding to provide the support, facilities and food to help young mums—especially those on low incomes—to get the skills that they need to cook healthy meals for their children. What support can the Secretary of State give to young mums and to people such as Sarah who want to provide cookery lessons to support tackling childhood obesity?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Funding is available from lots of sources, not just taxpayers. Nevertheless, he will have noted that I have already started talking about the importance of getting funding out into the community, whether that is through social prescribing or wider public health efforts, to make sure that we try to tackle health problems at source and keep people out of hospital as much as possible, rather than spending all the money on sorting things out later in hospital.

HPV Vaccine

5. **Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the provision of the HPV vaccine to boys. [906609]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): Our expert group, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, issued its final advice on HPV vaccination for boys on

18 July. I have carefully considered its advice, and I wanted to tell the House first that the Government will introduce a nationwide HPV vaccination programme for adolescent boys. This will bring clear health benefits for boys, providing them with direct protection against HPV infection and associated disease, including a number of cancers.

Sir Paul Beresford: I declare an interest as a very, very part-time dentist.

I am delighted by the response, but given the importance of head and neck cancer prevention for both sexes, but especially for males, who are twice as susceptible, will the Minister supplement this programme with a catch-up programme, as was done for girls in 2008, to make the vaccine available for 14 to 18-year-old boys?

Steve Brine: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming this. The British Dental Association has been key in lobbying on this issue, as has—I give credit where it is due—*The Mail on Sunday*, which has campaigned on it for a long time. I have asked NHS England and Public Health England to work together to advise me on the implementation of the programme, including with regard to the issue that he raises, which makes a lot of sense and for which there is precedent from the girls' programme. I will of course consider the advice and confirm the implementation plan as soon as possible.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on that announcement. The vaccine also plays its part in protecting against sexually transmitted disease. Will he say something about the fact that syphilis is now at its highest rate since the second world war and that there are strains of gonorrhoea resistant to treatment? What are the Government going to do about this?

Steve Brine: They are linked but separate issues. Yes, the HPV vaccine is very important for adolescent boys, for men who have sex with men and for people before their sexual debut. Sexual health is of course a huge challenge. We work closely with local authorities—top-tier local authorities are all public health authorities—and, through the ring-fenced public health grant, which is £16 billion during this spending review period, we are providing those services.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Cancer survival rates are now at an all-time high thanks to the brilliant and dedicated work of clinicians, including at Cheltenham General Hospital, but prevention is better than cure. Will the Secretary of State direct his customary energy towards prevention work, including vaccinations, but also tackling risk factors such as obesity?

Steve Brine: Yes, he will. I am pleased to say that prevention is one of the Secretary of State's three key priorities. The HPV vaccine is a key prevention measure, while one of the drivers behind the child obesity plan was Cancer Research UK's very clear advice that being overweight was one of the big risk factors, alongside diabetes, in cancer. Yes, prevention is always better than cure.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I welcome the Government's acceptance of the JCVI's recommendation to extend the vaccination

programme to adolescent boys, but the Minister will know that there are huge regional differences in the take-up of the vaccination among girls. What steps will he take to tackle these regional differences before and during the roll-out to boys?

Steve Brine: The shadow Minister is absolutely right to raise this issue, which she also raised with me in the Westminster Hall debate on the same subject introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale), who has done a lot in this area. I have already spoken to Public Health England about this in respect of the girls' programme, and I will be speaking to it again now that we have announced the boys' programme, because the equality of doing the dual programme must be matched by the equality of its taking place in her constituency as much as in mine in Hampshire.

BAME Blood, Stem Cell and Organ Donors

6. **Eleanor Smith** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to increase the number of BAME blood, stem cell and organ donors throughout England. [906610]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): We urgently need more black, Asian and minority ethnic donors to save lives through the gift of organ donation. That is a priority for the Government. Last week, I launched a national campaign to address myths and barriers and bring attention to the life-saving power of organ donation. It is crucial that these messages be properly tailored to enable everyone to participate.

Eleanor Smith: In 2017-18, only 133 people from the BAME community in this country donated an organ. While they are still living, BAME people make up a third of the people on transplant waiting lists and have to wait over a year longer than white patients. I know that the Government announced a new campaign, following NHS Blood and Transplant's annual report on organ donation, within the BAME community, but it fails to address many of the recommendations in my report "Ending the Silent Crisis", published in June. I sent a copy to the Minister, along with a request for a meeting, but I have yet to receive a response. Will she agree to meet me after the recess to discuss the recommendations in my review?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I am sorry the hon. Lady has not received a response, because I instructed my office to say I would agree to meet her. I commend her work in this area, because it is very important that we tackle this injustice. Central to that is reaching out to those communities and engaging with them in a way that inspires them. We have found in our work over the last year that there is a sense of distrust among some minority ethnic communities towards health providers. I will be bringing out some tools in the autumn and would encourage all Members to reach out to their minority ethnic communities to tackle the fact that, as she says, a third of people on transplant waiting lists are from black and Asian communities and that we need more donors.

Adult Eating Disorders

7. **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve access to NHS adult eating disorder services. [906612]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): The Government are committed to improving eating disorder services for adults. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has updated its guidelines, and NHS England recently completed a national review of provision and is considering next steps. We will also be ensuring that people remain properly served as they transfer between children's and adults' services.

Mr Cunningham: Two thirds of adults wait more than four weeks and one third wait 11 weeks for treatment. What are the Government going to do about it, in the light of the review that the Minister has just mentioned?

Jackie Doyle-Price: As I have said, NICE has published its new clinical guideline on the recognition and treatment of eating disorders in people over the age of eight, including adults, and we will make clear to NHS organisations what we expect of them. We are ensuring that we meet the waiting times for eating disorder treatment, and we are delivering against those standards.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Data from NHS Digital show that the number of beds for people with serious mental health conditions, such as eating disorders, has fallen by nearly 30% since 2009. The Government say that they are committed to ensuring that everyone with an eating disorder has access to timely treatment, but according to the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter)—who I believe is also an NHS doctor—there is often a long wait for patients with eating disorders who need beds for urgent in-patient care. Does the Minister agree with him?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Lady's starting point was "since 2009". It is certainly true that there was a decline then, for a number of reasons, not least the fact that we are improving treatment in community settings rather than acute in-patient beds. Our Five Year Forward View began in 2014, and we have been delivering improvements in the number of beds and staff since that date.

Leaving the EU

8. **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect on the health and social care sector of the UK leaving the EU. [906613]

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): The Government are undertaking a wide range of analysis in support of our EU exit negotiations and preparations. Our overall programme of work is comprehensive, thorough and continuously updated.

Rosie Duffield: Brexit poses major challenges for the NHS and, in particular, the beleaguered and neglected hospitals of East Kent. Can the Minister reassure me—and the Royal College of Midwives and other bodies—that we will be able to recruit much needed migrant worker staff to the health and social care sector and will encourage them to stay after March 2019?

Stephen Barclay: We will remain committed to attracting the brightest and best. The hon. Lady says that her area is “beleaguered”; I remind her that the Kent and Medway sustainability and transformation partnership received £101.2 million more than it received in the previous year.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Nearly 10,000 EU citizens work in the social care sector, caring for some of the most vulnerable people in society. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that there will be no shortage of people working in that sector once we have left the EU?

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important point. The Home Secretary recently announced a settlement scheme to enable those staff from the European economic area to remain. However, it is also important for us not to scare EU nationals, and to point out that there are now 4,500 more non-UK EU nationals working in the NHS than there were two years ago, at the time of the referendum. There is often a sense that there are fewer, but that is not the case.

20. [906627] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The number of vulnerable adults in Newcastle is rising by 20% each year. The over-85 population is set to rise by 60% in the next decade, and additional cost pressures will mean £30 million in extra costs over the next three years. How is Newcastle City Council supposed to meet the adult social care budget, given the cuts that have been made in it? I ask the Minister please not to mention the adult social care precept, because it does not even begin to cover those costs.

Stephen Barclay: I would have expected the hon. Lady to welcome the additional funds that have been announced—not just the £2 billion for social care, but the extra £20.5 billion a year, in real terms, that will be delivered through the long-term funding settlement. Instead of criticising that funding, the hon. Lady should welcome the Government’s commitment to increasing funds for the NHS and ensuring that it remains fit for the future.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the big benefits of our leaving the European Union is that we will not be sending billions of pounds a year to Brussels, and can instead spend that money on our health service, as per the new funding settlement?

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to draw the House’s attention to the fact that there are a number of benefits from leaving the EU, not just in terms of the dividend to which he refers, but in terms of flexibility, for example in—[*Interruption.*] Labour Members do not seem to want to hear about the opportunities: opportunities on life sciences for example, in terms of getting medicines through in shorter timescales; opportunities on immigration; opportunities on professional qualifications; opportunities even on food labelling. It is important that we take those opportunities, as my hon. Friend says.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I too welcome the Secretary of State to his place. Membership of the European Medicines Agency has enabled early

access to new drugs for UK patients through a single Europe-wide licensing system for a population of 500 million. Can the Minister clarify whether it is still the Government’s intention to remain a member of the EMA, and perhaps explain why on earth they voted against the EMA amendment last Tuesday?

Stephen Barclay: As the hon. Lady will be aware, we accepted the amendment, and it is our intention to work as closely as possible on that as part of taking that forward—[*Interruption.*] To correct the—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. To be fair, it is a speedy correction.

Stephen Barclay: This is a near instantaneous correction, Mr Speaker, to recognise that what I should have clarified is that, following the vote in the House, it is our intention to work as closely as possible with that, and we recognise the point the hon. Lady makes.

Dr Whitford: It is still rather hard to understand why the Government voted against it in the first place. There is no current associate membership of the EMA for the UK to re-join as a third country, so if it is not possible to stay in the EMA what is the plan to avoid delays of up to a year in the licensing of new drugs for UK patients?

Stephen Barclay: There are a number of things that can be taken advantage of. We can use the flexibilities we have in terms of assessments with shorter timescales so that we can prioritise UK drugs that are bespoke to the UK market. There will be opportunities as part of this, as well as our working closely with European colleagues.

NHS Workforce

9. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What steps he is taking to tackle workforce shortages in the NHS. [906614]

17. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What steps he is taking to tackle workforce shortages in the NHS. [906623]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): We now have more professionally qualified clinical staff working in the NHS: over 41,000 more since 2010, including over 14,000 more doctors and over 13,000 more nurses on our wards.

Peter Grant: The majority of NHS staff in Scotland will benefit from a 9% pay rise over the next three years; their equivalents in England will get a much lower increase, and we do not even know if the funding for that is secured. Does the Minister have any concerns that nurses in England may choose to relocate to Scotland where they could be paid almost £1,000 more and work for a health service whose Government actually value its work?

Matt Hancock: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman asks that question, because it is worth looking at some of the facts. Over the five years to 2017 health spending increased by 20% in England but by only 14% in Scotland. As a consequence, people are 30% more likely to wait 18 weeks for treatment in Scotland than in England, and the increase in the number of nurses and doctors in

England has been higher than in Scotland. Perhaps the SNP should look at how we have been performing in the NHS in England and learn from that.

Patrick Grady: In that case, perhaps the Secretary of State will join the Royal College of Nursing in welcoming the action by the Scottish Government to enshrine safe staffing levels and ratios in law. Given that there are over 36,000 vacant nursing posts in the NHS in England, when will he follow the Scottish Government's lead and bring forward legislation on safe staffing levels?

Matt Hancock: I have seen what has happened, and maybe the reason why the SNP has had to do that is that in England we have increased the medical workforce faster than in Scotland. When the performances improve in the Scottish NHS, we in England will start to take lessons, but until then I will concentrate on making sure we get the very best NHS right across the country.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Barely two years after the shock closure of Deer Park medical centre in Witney, the people of Witney are now deeply concerned over the future of Cogges medical centre. Please will Ministers explain what they are doing to help with recruitment and retention of GPs in rural areas, and will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the provision of GP services in our market towns?

Matt Hancock: I or the Minister of State would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. Making sure that our GP services are of high quality and can respond to the health needs in the local community is absolutely mission-critical to getting prevention right, and I hope that my hon. Friend's insights will feed into the long-term plan to guarantee the future of the NHS.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State and remind him that when he tours the high streets of Britain he will find an increasing number of acupuncturists, herbal medicine practitioners, reflexologists, yoga practitioners and many more, and they all have one thing in common: none of them is available on the health service. Will he introduce a review that takes into account patient experience and practitioner experience?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's long campaign in this area, and I very much look forward to working with him on it to ensure that we get the right evidence-based approach to using all kinds of medicines and technologies for the benefit of patients.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I welcome the new Secretary of State to his post. He has said that the whole workforce of the NHS and social care should have the chance to fulfil their potential, but the care workforce has an annual turnover of 27% and a vacancy rate of 7%, and, sadly, care staff learned last week that they would not even be paid the national minimum wage for sleep-in shifts, which will potentially drive even more people away from working in social care. Will the Secretary of State demonstrate the leadership that this Government have lacked on this issue and ask the Chancellor to change the regulations on the national minimum wage for sleep-in shifts, to show care staff that they matter?

Matt Hancock: I value every person who works in the NHS and in social care, because everybody plays a part in improving the wellbeing and the health of the nation. I care deeply about that. On the question of sleep-in shifts, I saw the decision by the court and I have already had conversations with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, which leads on this regulation, to ensure that we can get the rules right for the future.

Alcohol Dependency

10. **Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con):** What plans the Government have to improve support for the children of alcohol-dependent parents. [906615]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): Alcohol addiction has a devastating impact on individuals and their families, and it is unacceptable that children bear the brunt of their parents' condition. That is why we are investing £6 million over three years to support vulnerable children living with alcohol-dependent parents. I pay tribute to the former Secretary of State and to the shadow Secretary of State for their leadership in making this happen.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I thank the Minister for his answer, but this is obviously a much wider problem, affecting more than just the children of alcohol-dependent parents. Will he tell the House what more can be done to ensure that people in the wider community can access that kind of help?

Steve Brine: We are working on an alcohol strategy, which is being led by the Home Office, and I have spoken to a number of stakeholders in the last two weeks at the various roundtables I have been holding. On the question of alcohol-dependent parents with children, we are working through local authorities, which is important, but as part of the investment that I have mentioned, there is also £500,000 going into expanding the helpline provision for children who find themselves in this position. I have heard time and again when talking to children affected by this that being able to say that they are not alone in this is often a great place to start. The helpline will be very important in that regard.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I welcome the comments made by the Public Health Minister today. I also welcome how open he has been to cross-party lobbying on this issue, including from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), the shadow Secretary of State. The £6 million is welcome news. Just to put it in perspective, more than 4,000 children phone Childline each year about alcohol use—it is the biggest concern that children have about their parents when they ring that service. We have something in Doncaster called the Family MOT—Moving On Together—and I hope the Minister will take the opportunity to see some of the good practice that is going on around the country. Will he tell us more about how that £6 million is likely to be spread around the country?

Steve Brine: I probably cannot do all of that without trying Mr Speaker's patience, but I should like to thank the right hon. Lady, who is one of my predecessors, for the work that she does through the all-party parliamentary

group on children of alcoholics, and with the charity Adfam. Charities and other third sector organisations will play a key part in putting in bids to work with local authorities, as part of the £6 million. Public Health England is leading on that, and I look forward to having ongoing discussions with her and with other Members who I know have a deeply held personal interest in this matter.

Pregnancy: Smoking Rates

11. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps he is taking to help reduce the rates of smoking during pregnancy. [906616]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): Smoking rates are at their lowest ever, but we need to make more progress on tackling smoking in pregnancy, as I outlined in the general debate last Thursday. We are determined to redouble our efforts in this area, because smoking is still the biggest preventable killer in our country today.

Bob Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Smoking rates among pregnant women are still stubbornly high. What steps can he take to encourage the partners of pregnant women to give up smoking so that both partners play a part in preventing damage to the unborn child?

Steve Brine: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which he made in last week's debate. Public Health England and NHS England will continue to work with local areas in our constituencies to promote evidence-based ways of identifying and supporting pregnant smokers to quit. The overall ambitions in the tobacco control plan, which I published a year ago last week, will touch the general population, which of course includes the partners of pregnant women.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Has the Department carried out investigations into the effects of vaping during pregnancy? If so, what are the results?

Steve Brine: Vaping and e-cigarettes were part of the Stoptober campaign that we ran last October through Public Health England. I am often criticised for not promoting vaping enough, and I am sometimes criticised for promoting it too much, which possibly gives me a steer. The advice is clear that the best thing to do, whether someone is pregnant or otherwise, is not to smoke.

Mistakes in Healthcare

12. **Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support families and patients affected by mistakes made in the healthcare system. [906618]

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): Families and patients are at the heart of our work to improve patient safety, which is why all NHS organisations are subject to a statutory duty of candour and should be open and transparent with patients and families when things go wrong. Last week, the National Quality Board published new guidance for NHS trusts to help them better support, communicate and engage with bereaved families and carers.

Derek Thomas: I thank the Minister for that response, but since I was elected three years ago I have come across several examples of families who have lost loved ones who went to hospital for repeat interventions from the health service, yet died from undiagnosed conditions, many of which could have been avoided. The problem is that those families have found getting answers and finding anyone to accept responsibility fruitless, so what more can the Department do to help them?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. Those who have lost loved ones in that way need answers when things go wrong. The recent bereavement guidance is clear that, when notified of a death, families and carers should be told that they can comment on the care of the person who has died and raise any concerns. From next year, medical examiners will offer greater scrutiny for the bereaved, increasing transparency and offering them the opportunity to raise concerns.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): In a recent report, Healthwatch Greenwich drew attention to the fact that many local GP practices are still wrongly refusing to register patients, often vulnerable ones, unless they have ID or proof of address. What more can the Minister do to ensure that each and every GP practice is following the Department's guidance?

Caroline Dinenage: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question, and I will certainly look more closely at the issue.

Draft Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 (Remedial) Order

13. **Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): What assessment he has made of the extent to which the draft Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 (Remedial) Order 2018 meets his Department's policy objectives on equality. [906619]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): The revised remedial order laid last week addresses the potential inequalities that were identified by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, but it also goes further, ensuring that a sole applicant biologically related to the child will always be able to apply for a parental order regardless of their relationship status. That is a step forward for equality.

Andrew Percy: On behalf of the all-party parliamentary group on surrogacy, I thank the Minister for meeting us recently and for laying the order, which removes an inequality. Surrogacy helps to build families, be they heterosexual, same-sex or individuals, so what more can she do to promote it?

Jackie Doyle-Price: My hon. Friend is right. There has been considerable growth in surrogacy arrangements in recent years, but I am unsure whether the law has kept pace with the changing practice. We have been revising the guidance to ensure that everyone can approach the matter with greater certainty but, more specifically, I have commissioned the Law Commission to have a good look at the law in the area so that we can ensure good practice in this country without driving people overseas.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): What action is the Minister taking to ensure that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on equal access to IVF are adhered to, so that people such as my constituent Rebekah Hambling, who sadly lost her IVF baby to group B strep, are not denied further rounds of IVF in North East Lincolnshire because they would still have been eligible in other CCG areas?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I agree with the hon. Lady. It is unacceptable that seven CCGs offer no IVF treatment at all, which is establishing a postcode lottery. We keep reminding NHS England and CCGs of the NICE guidelines and we expect them to follow them.

Mr Speaker: I call Bim Afolami. Not here. This is a rum state of affairs. I hope the fellow is all right. He was here earlier, but he has beetled out of the Chamber at a most inopportune moment. Well, there is nothing to be done, and the grouping breaks down, but I hope Bim's okay. Reports would be welcome.

Cancer Strategy

16. **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that the recommendations of the cancer strategy will be implemented by 2020. [906622]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I, too, hope my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) is okay.

Saying that gave me a crucial few seconds. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: It is very good of the hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden to drop back in on us. Unfortunately, he beetled out of the Chamber at a most inopportune moment, just before his question was reached. If he sits there, and if he is a good boy, we might get to him in due course. We have moved on now, which is most unfortunate.

Steve Brine: We are very clear that achieving the 62-day standard is not a prerequisite for transformation funding, but the better the performance against the standard, the more funding alliances will receive. Most have now received 75% to 100% of the funding requested. This is taxpayers' money, so we must ensure alliances are operationally strong and ready to achieve transformation.

Mr Baron: I welcome the new Secretary of State to his post.

There remains the inconvenient truth that, despite all Governments bombarding the NHS with process targets in recent decades, cancer survival rates are not catching up with international averages. The last Government's estimates suggested that that needlessly costs 10,000 lives a year as a result. Will the Minister work with the new Secretary of State, in drawing up the next cancer strategy, to put outcome indicators at the very heart of the process? For example, holding the local NHS accountable for its one-year figures would encourage initiatives to promote earlier diagnosis, cancer's magic key.

Steve Brine: I thank my hon. Friend for his work chairing the all-party group on cancer over many years, as I know he is about to step down. He has two answers

in one here. Yes is the answer. Improving cancer patient outcomes will be the seam that runs through the centre of the NHS's long-term plan, like the proverbial stick of rock.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Only 5% of the NHS cancer budget, about £385 million a year, is spent on radiotherapy, and that underinvestment is affecting patient access to advanced modern radiotherapy and outcomes. Is it not time to make the cancer drugs fund a cancer treatment fund and extend those opportunities?

Steve Brine: We are looking at the future of the cancer drugs fund as part of the new 10-year plan. There is a radiotherapy review at the moment, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware. Knowing him, he will be engaging with the review in his area. He talks about the latest radiotherapy and, of course, we have the new proton beam therapy treatment coming online in London and Manchester, for which children and patients are currently sent overseas. That is a great step forward, but there is an awful lot more to do, which is why the 10-year plan will have cancer at its heart.

Artificial Intelligence

18. **Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): What assessment he has made of the opportunity for artificial intelligence tools to improve the provision of healthcare. [906624]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): The Government believe that artificial intelligence and other digital technologies have the potential to transform health and care services. Our work on that includes investing over £400 million in tech transformation, which I announced last week. There is much more to do.

Mr Dunne: I also welcome my right hon. Friend to his new role. He will bring tremendous energy and enthusiasm, particularly into the information advantage that we know is needed to transform the NHS. Does he share my view that not only will this transform patient outcomes but we can use artificial intelligence to improve patient treatments? What are his initial views of the obstacles standing in the way of rapid uptake of such technologies?

Matt Hancock: There are huge opportunities for AI to improve patient outcomes and to make life easier for staff. In answer to the second part of my hon. Friend's question, it is all about getting interoperable data rules and standards in place so that different systems can talk to each other in a secure, safe and innovative way.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: When we were at university together there was nothing, in my judgment, about the hon. Gentleman's intelligence that was artificial.

Ian Austin: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is not just artificial intelligence. The development of other life sciences and new technologies can have a massive effect on improving people's healthcare, such as the development of treatments like Orkambi for people with cystic fibrosis. Will the Secretary of State make it an important priority to cut through the impasse between NHS England and the manufacturer, Vertex, so that people with cystic fibrosis can finally get access to the drugs they need?

Mr Speaker: As the Clerk advises—his is the intellectual copyright—the hon. Gentleman has used his intelligence artificially to shoehorn his preoccupation into a question to which it has no other relation. But he has got away with it on this occasion, as it is the last day and we are all in a summer mood.

Matt Hancock: I welcome the power of new technologies to bring new drugs to the table. NHS England has made a very generous final offer to the manufacturer of Orkambi. Having spoken to those involved again over the past couple of days, I understand that a meeting has been offered to the company but not taken up. The company can break this impasse by accepting the very generous offer on the table.

Children's Mental Health: Social Media

19. **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help protect children's mental health from the harmful effects of social media. [906625]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): Our chief medical officer is leading a systematic review of international research to improve our understanding of social media use and children's mental health. We are also working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to consider what more can be done to reduce potential harm to children's mental health from social media. This is being done through the Government's upcoming internet harms White Paper, which is due later this year.

Mary Robinson: The longer people spend online, the more likely they are to experience cyber-bullying. Research by Childline, a service of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, shows that the number of young people seeking counselling as a result of online bullying has increased by 88% in just five years. What are the Government doing to improve research on this issue and to better understand the potential harms?

Jackie Doyle-Price: My hon. Friend is right to highlight this, but it is worth bearing in mind that there are also positive effects from engagement on social media. The relationship between social media use and its impact on mental health is not conclusive. That is why the chief medical officer is carrying out a review of all the evidence in this area, so that we can understand and shape future policy. That report will be due next year.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The Government acknowledge that we are seeing an increase in the number of children suffering with their mental health. We have only to look at the figures on the number of children turning up at accident and emergency in a crisis to know that that is the case. This is a serious state of affairs. Why then are the Government releasing their response to the consultation on the Green Paper on young people's mental health later this week, when we are in recess, and thus avoiding scrutiny in this House?

Jackie Doyle-Price: Respectfully, I say to the hon. Lady that this is a response to the consultation on the Green Paper, which has had considerable debate in this House. The suggestion that we have avoided scrutiny really does not pass.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker; news of my death has been greatly exaggerated, Sir.

I thank the Minister for her previous reply. She will be aware that there is considerable concern about certain images on social media, particularly those relating to self-harming, and the effect they have on young people's mental health. Will she set out the Government's response in dealing with this issue?

Mr Speaker: I know the hon. Gentleman, who has returned to the Chamber in rude health, is in fact deeply grateful to me for my generosity in accommodating him, notwithstanding his rather eccentric disappearance, and the fact that he did not mention it was a mere oversight.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I can confirm that the Government will be publishing their online harm White Paper by the end of this year to address the very subject my hon. Friend mentions.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I have asked the previous Secretary of State whether he would agree to engage in my all-party group inquiry on social media and the impact on young people's mental health. May I ask this Minister to go a step further and engage in our oral evidence sessions, which are starting when the House returns in September, about how we can find solutions to the problems that the impact of social media causes to young people's mental health?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I would be more than happy to engage with the hon. Gentleman and the all-party group on this issue, because it is important we do as much as we can to learn and to get as much evidence as possible in this area.

South Tees CCG

21. **Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): If he will ensure that funding for services commissioned by South Tees clinical commissioning group will not be reduced as a result of that group being placed in special measures. [906628]

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage): I reassure the hon. Lady that the level of funding allocated to South Tees CCG will not change as a result of the group being placed in special measures.

Anna Turley: I appreciate the Minister's reply, but does she agree that, instead of dismissing this as a failure of bookkeeping, as her colleague in the Tees Valley has done, she should look carefully again at the rising demand in our area and at the unique challenges we face as a result of high levels of deprivation, ageing demographics and the economic shock we suffered three years ago? Will she look again at a fairer funding allocation to make sure that we can serve everyone's needs in the Tees Valley?

Caroline Dinéage: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this issue. Prevention is a key aspect of the new Secretary of State's focus as the Department moves forward. NHS England will support all CCGs that are in special measures to return to financial balance. It

also provides a bespoke package of support, along with a higher level of monitoring and oversight, to ensure that the money is always spent wisely.

Topical Questions

T2. [906632] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): We have proposed £20 billion more funding for the NHS to guarantee its future, and I am looking forward to working with everyone in the NHS and the social care system on a long-term plan to ensure that that money is well spent. Today, we have published for the House the 2018-19 pay settlement for doctors and dentists. It represents the highest pay settlement since 2008. I regard it as a first step and look forward to a wider conversation on pay and improvements to help to make the NHS the best employer in the world.

Patrick Grady: Will the Secretary of State update the House on the progress of Baroness Cumberlege's review of the use of mesh implants? Will he confirm whether the inquiry will liaise with the Scottish Government and whether it will hold any evidence sessions in Scotland? There are plenty of women, including some in my constituency, who had operations in England but now live in Scotland. Their voices must be heard in the inquiry.

Matt Hancock: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We published information on this issue just last week. We absolutely will consult the Scottish Government and all interested stakeholders. It is a very important matter to get right.

T5. [906636] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Last year, 7.3 million people were prescribed antidepressants, including more than 70,000 children. That is an increase of more than 500% in the past 20 years. In welcoming the Secretary of State's announcement on social prescribing, may I, as co-chair of the all-party group on mindfulness, ask him what part mindfulness and other evidence-based non-drug options will play in the strategy? Would he like to undertake a mindfulness course, and in doing so join the now more than 150 other MPs and Lords who have done so at Westminster?

Matt Hancock: I would be absolutely thrilled to. I have previously participated in mindfulness training. In fact, the former chairman of my local Conservative association became a mindfulness instructor, which shows how much we take it seriously locally. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work on this issue. He will have seen that, even in my first two weeks in this role I have already spoken out in favour of moves towards social prescribing and the broader prescribing of less intervention and less medicinal methods, where possible, because medicines do of course have their place. The work that he has done on this issue over many years is to be applauded.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State to his post. May I take a moment to thank all the NHS and social care staff who are caring for vulnerable patients in this intense summer heat?

The new Secretary of State inherits waiting lists at 4.3 million, with more than 3,000 patients waiting more than a year for an operation. He inherits a situation in which 1,700 patient requests for hip and knee operations have been refused, and in which patients in Sussex are now expected to endure "Uncontrolled, intense, persistent pain" for six months before they receive hip or knee treatment. Does he consider such increased rationing to be fair?

Matt Hancock: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. Like him, I pay tribute to the work of NHS and social care staff in this summer heat. There are of course pressures on the NHS—I fully acknowledge that—and he raises a couple that I have already raised with NHS England. What he did not mention was that since 2010 there are 6,000 more operations every day and 1,800 more emergency admissions every day.

Jonathan Ashworth: Since 2010, the NHS has suffered the biggest financial squeeze in its history, and the rationing that I referred to is a consequence of that squeeze.

Let me ask the Secretary of State about general practice, which he will know is facing a severe workforce crisis, with GP numbers down by 1,000 and many GPs worried about the patient safety implications of the Babylon app, which we have already discussed this morning, and its funding implications for their model of practice. When Babylon itself admits that it is still testing it out, when Hammersmith and Fulham CCG says that

"there is evidence of concern regarding the risk to patient safety" of expanding the service, and when Birmingham and Solihull CCG questions whether Babylon can operate in an effective and safe manner, why does the Secretary of State dismiss concerns about patient safety and say that the rules simply need to be updated? Will he tell us what specific rules will be updated to allay concerns about patient safety?

Matt Hancock: It is almost as if it was not just my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) who popped out, but the shadow Secretary of State, who obviously was not here for the earlier discussion. Getting more resources and increased resources into primary care and to GPs in particular is absolutely mission critical to the long-term sustainability of the NHS. I am delighted that there is record GP recruitment at the moment and that the work that has been done to increase GP training is bearing fruit. On the question of new technology, as we discussed over a series of questions earlier, yes, it is important to make sure that it works well and that the rules are right but, if we turn our backs on new technology, we are turning our backs on better care.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new position. Despite having incredible NHS staff, our hospital in Harlow, the Princess Alexandra Hospital, is not fit for purpose in terms of its building. We desperately need a new hospital. Will he visit Princess Alexandra Hospital as Secretary of State and will he please make sure that we get the new hospital that we urgently need in the constituency of Harlow?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to the work that my right hon. Friend has done over many years making the case for his hospital, which I have heard loud and clear. I always enjoy visiting Harlow, especially when I am his guest. I hear the case that he puts and look forward to visiting soon.

T3. [906633] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Last month, a constituent contacted me about the care of her adult son who needed to be admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act 2007. She was told that no beds were available anywhere in the country. The following day, a bed was identified but when, after three hours' wait, the ambulance had not arrived, the bed was filled by another patient. Three days later, he was finally admitted to hospital. The head of mental health at Nottingham City Council told me that this is not an infrequent occurrence. Secretary of State, how is this an acceptable standard of mental healthcare?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): Clearly, the sequence of events that the hon. Lady has outlined is completely unacceptable. We have obviously set out clear expectations on NHS England to commission sufficient beds to enable local placements where possible and specialist care where a more acute service is required. It is up to NHS England to ensure that sufficient services are commissioned and I will readily take up that case with NHS England.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new position.

On Friday, a retired NHS consultant visited my surgery to talk about carpal tunnel syndrome. It appears that some of the operations are not going to happen now, and he said that they can happen at general practice level for about a third of the cost that they happen at hospital level. Is there an opportunity, yes, to save money but also to do things better by moving surgery out to community facilities? Can we explore such opportunities before these decisions are taken?

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): My right hon. Friend raises an important point about ensuring that procedures are done in the right place at the right cost, but primarily in a way that is best for the patient. I am happy to meet her to discuss the specifics of that and to see whether a change can be made.

T4. [906634] **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Despite previous reassurances from Health Ministers, I continue to receive reports from constituents of waiting times for referrals to child and adolescent mental health services in excess of nine months and, with an extremely high threshold for support, many are turned away. The Government spend less than 1% of the NHS budget on children's mental health. When will the Department stop failing our children and gives CAMHS the investment that it desperately needs?

Jackie Doyle-Price: The hon. Lady will be aware of the proposals that we have in the children and young people's mental health Green Paper. We have very ambitious plans to roll out a whole new workforce to work in schools to support children at an earlier stage of mental ill health. Why we have these proposals is that we

readily admit that an insufficient number of children are able to access services at present, and that is why we are making this investment.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): My constituent, Aaron Winstanley, from Barton-upon-Humber is currently in Germany receiving immunotherapy treatment for a rare form of cancer. The local community has reacted magnificently, raising around half of the £300,000 that this treatment costs. Could the Minister outline what is being done to introduce this treatment into England?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I wish my hon. Friend's constituent well and pay tribute to the money that the local community has raised. I will connect my hon. Friend to the office of Cally Palmer, the national cancer director. As we write the new long-term plan for the NHS—to which the cancer stream is so central—we will ensure that innovative new technologies and treatments that were not thought of even a few years ago are also at its centre.

T6. [906638] **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Three times more people die by suicide each year than in road accidents. Today, Samaritans volunteers across the UK are taking part in its awareness campaign, "The Big Listen". What action is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that local agencies are encouraged and resourced to carry out awareness-raising work to get out the message that suicide is preventable, not inevitable, in line with NICE's draft guidelines?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I thank the hon. Lady for her dedicated work on this issue. She is right to pay tribute to the work of the Samaritans, and the Department is pleased to do everything that we can to support the Samaritans in this area. Our real tool for tackling suicide is to ensure that the local suicide prevention plans are up to spec to deliver a reduction in suicides. We will be taking steps properly to interrogate the quality of the plans so that we can deliver against the guidelines.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State to his position, especially given his background in data and digital. What is he going to do to improve NHS data management to enable its use to develop the next generation of drugs and medical technologies to deliver better health outcomes?

Matt Hancock: That is a great question. Not only can technology improve in health settings; there are even greater opportunities on the research side. Getting the data structures right is mission critical, but there is so much more that we can do.

T7. [906639] **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): To help to reduce childhood obesity, 76% of people support a ban on junk food adverts before 9 o'clock, but the consultation on this is going into the middle distance. Critics would say that the Government are dragging their feet. By when will we see this ban finally put into place?

Matt Hancock: We announced that we will be consulting less than a month ago. I have been closely involved in this in my previous role, as well as in this one. We will ensure that we take an evidence-based approach, but I am determined that we proceed.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Will the Secretary of State come down to East Sussex to view the Better Together partnership, which puts health and social care together?

Matt Hancock: How could I say no? The integration of health and social care is vital and long awaited, and there is so much to do.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): As someone who is about to have a knee operation, may I tell the Secretary of State that it is a painful thing to wait for and that people should not have to stay on waiting lists for long periods of time? My question is about hospital medical staff. *Western Mail* carried out a survey to look at the effect of EU nationals leaving the national health service because of Brexit. It found one health board saying that there were 1,200 more nurses than there were four years ago, and another saying that there were 1,400 fewer. No one seems to be able to tell us with absolute certainty the numbers of these staff in the health service.

Matt Hancock: I listened carefully to the right hon. Lady because she has long been a campaigner on health issues, and I very much take her point about knee operations. Of course, the number of EU nationals working in the NHS in England has risen by over 4,000 since the referendum. I know that there are concerns in specific areas, but I hope that we can all take reassurance

from the fact that that number has continued to rise. We are determined to ensure that the NHS has the workforce that it needs.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. I encourage him to visit the most rural part of England, up in Northumberland, to see for himself the challenges to healthcare provision due to the lack of a real rural financial formula. Will he update my constituents and the Save Rothbury Hospital campaign on how the review for that community hospital is going? That sort of low-level care is what makes the difference.

Stephen Barclay: I am happy to discuss with my hon. Friend how we provide support. Addressing the fact that 43% of patients in acutes do not actually clinically need to be in hospital is a key objective of the long-term plan to ensure that we get the right community services and relieve pressure from acutes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but as in the national health service—under Governments of whichever colour—demand massively outstrips supply. I have tried to extend the envelope, but we must now move on. [*Interruption.*] I heard the shadow Chancellor's observation from a sedentary position, which may well be recorded in the *Official Report*. We now move on to the urgent question.

Public Sector Pay

12.44 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chief Secretary to the Treasury if she will make a statement on the public sector pay announcement.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): I am delighted to have this opportunity to discuss today's announcements of public sector pay rises.

Last September, I informed the House that we would scrap the cap, and now we are delivering on that commitment. What we are announcing today amounts to the biggest pay rise in almost 10 years for about 1 million public workers across Britain, including teachers, armed forces personnel, prison officers, police, doctors and dentists. This comes on top of the positive news we were able to announce in March that 1 million nurses, midwives, porters and other NHS staff would receive a 6.5% pay rise over three years. That deal was a benchmark example of where high pay awards are agreed in return for modernisation of terms and conditions.

We were able to announce these pay rises thanks only to the hard work of the British people, which has brought down the deficit by over three quarters and allowed us to reach the point where the debt will begin to fall this year. We did not listen to the siren calls from the Opposition for damaging splurges, and that is why today we are able to scrap the cap and increase public sector pay. These new pay deals represent what this Government are about. They are affordable and responsible, while making sure that we continue to provide the public with world-class public services. They also reward our hard-working public servants.

It is great, on the final day of this Session of Parliament, that we are able to give every person who works in the public sector positive news on which to enjoy their summer.

Peter Dowd: These uninhabited proposals will do nothing to repair the damage done to our brilliant public sector workers by this Government's slash-and-burn policy in relation to public sector pay. Over the past seven years, our teachers have lost £2,500, our firefighters £3,000, our prison officers £4,000 and our paramedics £4,000 in real-terms pay cuts. Even the armed forces have been affected by this stingy Government.

Yet the Government think it is enough to announce to the press—to the press, Mr Speaker, yet again—an uncostered proposal that will, at best, leave workers just about breaking even on their austerity-slashed pay, while civil servants and others continue to see their pay cut. This is a mendacious PR exercise. Based on today's announcement, after eight years of real-terms pay cuts for employees in the public sector, our police officers, junior doctors, some specialist doctors, GPs and dentists are all being offered a further real-terms pay cut.

Will the Minister now confirm what the additional cost of each announcement is to Departments? Will she also confirm that this cost is being siphoned from existing departmental spend, with no new money made available? This will have a disastrous effect on Departments already close to ruin from austerity; they will be forced to cut staffing levels and services to cope. Can she guarantee that there will be no reductions in staffing levels across the public sector because of this unfunded increase in pay? Can she guarantee that public services

will not be adversely affected by her failure to provide proper funding? Will she explain why civil servants continue to see real-terms pay cuts? They are always at the back of the queue when it comes to pay. How much additional social security expenditure has resulted from seven years of cuts to public sector workers' pay? Does she agree that it has been this Conservative Government's policy for the past seven years to force thousands of public servants on to social security by cutting their income?

The Conservative party should be ashamed. The Government's announcements today leave public sector workers treading water. These proposals will force threadbare Departments to make further cuts to vital services and to reduce staffing levels, and what for? All so that the Prime Minister can get a cheap PR hit to try to cling on to power. We do not buy it. Labour demands that public sector workers get the pay that they deserve.

Elizabeth Truss: Yet again, we hear from a Labour Front Bencher not a positive welcome of the news today, which will mean hundreds of pounds more in the pay packets of public sector workers, but yet more complaints and no solutions.

We have scrapped the cap, and we are making sure that public sector workers get a decent pay rise. Let me tell the House what that will mean for workers in the public sector. For teachers earning under £35,000, it will mean a 3.5% pay rise, earning them an extra £800 a year. Police will see a 2% rise, with the average police constable on a £38,000 salary seeing a £760 pay rise. Prison officers will see a 2% rise and a 0.75% bonus, with extra for those who are new recruits. Junior doctors will get at least a 2% pay rise, and the hard-working people in our armed forces will receive a 2% pay rise and an additional 0.9% bonus, to reflect the brilliant work they do for our country.

The hon. Gentleman asks me how these pay rises are funded. Unlike the profligate Labour party, we have worked to support every Department to ensure that these pay rises are affordable within their budgets. In the case of the Department for Education—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman asked me the question. Does he want to hear the answer or not? [*Interruption.*] He obviously does not.

Mr Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) is the author of a newly published book entitled "Summer Rage", but if I may say so, the launch party can wait until after today.

Elizabeth Truss: I was diligently trying to answer the hon. Gentleman's question, and I hope that he will listen to the answer.

We will be allocating a further £500 million from central Department for Education budgets to schools, to make sure they are able to give these pay rises to our hard-working teachers. In every other case, Departments have been able to find savings in their central budgets to make sure those pay rises are affordable. It is a bit rich getting lectures from the Labour party about affordability when its purported policy, along with overthrowing capitalism and making business the enemy, is to create a run on the pound. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman can explain how his party could afford public sector pay rises with a run on the pound, but I would like to hear his answer.

The pay rises we are announcing today represent the highest pay rises for almost a decade for public sector workers. We have been able to achieve them because of our management of the economy, because we have seen employment reach a record level and because we are spending less in areas such as welfare, whereas people under the Labour Government were left on the scrapheap. Please can the Labour party welcome the fact that public sector workers are getting a pay rise and that we have scrapped the cap, rather than continuing with their usual Eeyorish nonsense?

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Like my right hon. Friend, I am rather surprised to hear the noise from the Opposition Benches. If we were to follow the policies of the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), we would see inflation of 1,000,000%, such as they have in Venezuela—a country that he suggests we all follow the example of. I welcome the pay rises that we will see for teachers in my schools in Redditch. Can my right hon. Friend tell me again how much teachers will receive, and can she emphasise the fact that those on the lowest incomes will receive the most?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right; teachers on the lowest incomes will receive the largest rises. All teachers earning less than £35,000 will receive a 3.5% pay rise, and the Secretary of State for Education is making sure that schools have the money to afford that. Teachers in the upper pay range will receive a 2% pay rise.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The key test of whether the public sector pay cap has been removed is how the Government treat their own civil servants. Can the Chief Secretary to the Treasury confirm that each UK Department was given funding for a 1% increase in civil service pay? Can she confirm that the pay remit guidance issued by the Cabinet Office for civil service pay allows pay rises of 1% to 1.5%? Can she tell us what pay rises civil servants who are not covered by a pay review body can expect this year? Finally, will the 220 Ministry of Defence staff in Scotland who are not being paid the living wage finally get £8.75 an hour?

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office has made the decision to award civil servants a 1.5% pay rise. That represents an increase on previous years, but we need to make sure that all public sector pay awards are affordable within Government budgets and that we are able to recruit and retain the highest possible quality civil servants.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate the interests of colleagues, but I remind the House that there is a further urgent question after this and then two ministerial statements and a debate on a motion appertaining to standards, before we get to the summer recess debate, in which no fewer than 30 colleagues wish to take part. I will try to accommodate people now if they pledge in advance to ask a single-sentence question, and preferably a short one, with a commensurately brief reply.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): The public sector workers in Morecambe and Lunesdale will welcome this announcement. Can my right hon.

Friend confirm that those in the public sector are now getting £30,630 on average compared with £27,977 in the private sector?

Elizabeth Truss: The figures that my hon. Friend quotes about public and private sector workers are right. My job as Chief Secretary is to make sure that we are properly rewarding public sector workers and that in areas where we are struggling to recruit and retain, pay rises are commensurate, to retain those people. We are also making sure that those pay rises are affordable within our Government budgets, which I think is what taxpayers expect.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Can the Chief Secretary tell me how much extra funding has been provided for schools, to pay for the increase in teachers' pay? Will that pay increase be fully funded?

Elizabeth Truss: As I mentioned already, £500 million is being provided over two years to put into schools' budgets. We have been working with the Department for Education. This is affordable for schools, but most importantly, it is fair for teachers, and those who are earning under £35,000 will get a 3.5% pay rise.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Thanks to the decisions that have been made in Essex, we will see 150 new police officers on our streets. Can the Chief Secretary confirm that those new police officers will benefit from today's announcement?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right. I am delighted to hear the news about the police force in Essex. Those police officers will receive a 2% rise and, in addition, they will get increments as they move up the pay scale, so many will see a rise in excess of that.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Cuts to school budgets have meant that some schools have had to make cuts to payments for support staff such as lunchtime assistants, for example, including by removing their holiday pay. How will today's announcement benefit those lowest paid workers who have already suffered?

Elizabeth Truss: Last year we announced that we were putting £1.3 billion more into schools' budgets to help them to cope with the issues they were facing. That represents a real-terms increase from 2015. Today we have announced an additional £500 million to support these pay rises for teachers. I say to the hon. Lady: let us look at the school results, such as the fact that our nine-year-olds are now among the best in Europe at reading. It is because of this Government's reforms that we are seeing better results.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome the extra money for lower-paid teachers. May I ask my right hon. Friend where the £500 million will come from within the Department? The Department has already had to make efficiency savings, given the extra £1.3 billion that has gone to schools.

Elizabeth Truss: It is important that schools receive the extra money so they are able to afford those pay rises. The money is coming from central DFE budgets—underspends in central DFE budgets—and it will be allocated to schools. My right hon. Friend the Education Secretary will talk about the allocation in due course.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): The Chief Secretary says that our armed forces will receive a 0.9% one-off payment, but there is no clear timeframe. Will she tell us exactly when armed forces personnel will receive that payment?

Elizabeth Truss: Personnel will receive that payment alongside their 2% pay rise this year. Many armed forces personnel will also receive pay increments—we saw an average of 1.3% last year—on top of the bonus and the pay rise.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the announcement's impact on the recruitment and retention of prison officers?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Prison officers will receive a 2% rise and a 0.75% bonus. Prison officers who were newly recruited on fair and sustainable terms will receive additional progression pay to make sure that we retain those really important workers.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Why have the Government announced that school leaders' pay will continue to be cut in real terms, given that the School Teachers Review Body said that a 3.5% increase was needed across all pay ranges to prevent "deteriorating" trends in teacher retention?

Elizabeth Truss: It is very important that we focus the pay rises on the lowest-earning teachers, which I think would be supported across the education system. Where there are specific shortages in education or in schools, there is of course the flexibility to increase pay, and I know that that happens for a number of headteachers.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the news of the 3.5% pay rise for lower-paid teachers in Torbay. Will the Chief Secretary commit to work with the DFE to publish how the funding will be broken down by local authority so that we can clearly see how this is being funded?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. How the additional funding will be allocated will certainly be announced in due course by my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary. I welcome my hon. Friend's welcoming of the good news, unlike Labour Members, who are still looking extremely gloomy.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I am delighted that the Chief Secretary and the Government have finally seen sense and dropped the cap. However, there is already a £20 billion black hole in the MOD budget. How exactly is it going to pay for this?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is the first Opposition Member to welcome the pay rise, so I thank her for her support for public sector workers and for the pay rise we are giving them. I am working very closely with the Justice Secretary to make sure the pay rise is affordable within the Ministry of Justice budget. [HON. MEMBERS: "Defence!"]

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The budgets of West Sussex schools are hugely under pressure and will be completely shot unless this pay award is completely funded centrally. Will the Chief

Secretary guarantee that it will be completely funded centrally? What assessment has she made of the impact on the DFE's budget for children's social care, which is already facing a predicted shortfall of £2 billion by 2020?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend mentions the funding for teachers' pay rises. Beyond the 1%, the pay rise will be fully funded centrally, as will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary.

I thought the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) referred to the MOJ, but apparently she was talking about the Ministry of Defence. The modernising defence review is going on at the moment, and I am working on that very closely with my Defence colleagues to make sure that this remains affordable.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The Chief Secretary talks about putting more money into people's pay packets, so will she tell us when under-25s will be paid the national living wage?

Elizabeth Truss: This Government have achieved some of the lowest levels of youth unemployment for years. Under the Labour party, people were left on the scrapheap and we had rising youth unemployment, with up to 20% of our young people unemployed in 2010. What is important is that while people are training and gaining skills, it remains affordable for companies to take them on.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I very much welcome these pay awards. Will the Chief Secretary say a little about the difference that taking millions of people out of income tax altogether will make in tandem with these pay awards?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We have seen disposable incomes—the money people have to spend—increasing under this Government because we have cut tax for basic rate taxpayers by £1,000 a year. We know that the Labour party wants to raise tax to the highest peacetime levels, and the reality of that would be less money for hard-working public and private sector workers.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Not one of the examples that the Chief Secretary announced is above the consumer prices index inflation rate of 2.4%. This is a real-terms cut for public sector workers. The secretary of the Unison branch at my town hall wants to know the Chief Secretary's message for his branch members. How are they meant to survive when they are facing yet again—as they have year on year, for the past eight years—a real-terms pay cut?

Elizabeth Truss: The vast majority of the numbers that I announced are above inflation, but the hon. Gentleman clearly did not hear that. I would point out that these pay awards are for the period 2018-19. We are seeing inflation fall, and many of the awards represent increases significantly above that.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I asked the Chief Secretary and the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that the well-deserved pay rises for teachers did not come from the existing budget increases, so may I thank them both for ensuring that? My teachers

deserve a pay rise, but they do not want school classrooms to suffer. May I also ask whether headteachers will be in receipt of the 2% increase mentioned for higher-rate teachers?

Elizabeth Truss: As we have said, pay rises above the 1% that was previously budgeted for will be funded from central DFE budgets. *[Interruption.]* To the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), who is shouting from a sedentary position, I say that the funding will be not from schools budgets, but from central DFE budgets. We are moving this money to the frontline to make sure that teachers are properly supported. The rate for headteachers is 1.5% but, as I have already said in answer to the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), there is flexibility where there are recruitment issues.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): If these pay rises are from departmental cuts, this will mean no new money, which will result in further public services being lost and redundancies to follow. Does the Chief Secretary agree?

Elizabeth Truss: I think that the fastest way to have redundancies is to create a run on the pound and overthrow capitalism.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): This pay award comes on the back of 10 years of pay freezes, which are fundamentally cuts. What can the Minister say to reassure people that, under this pay award, they will not actually see a pay decrease in the years to come?

Elizabeth Truss: We have gone through a tough period in the aftermath of the financial crash, and the public sector has made a contribution. We are now at a turning point, with debt falling as a proportion of GDP. It is because of the hard work that has been done that we are now able to afford these pay rises, which are well deserved.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): The Chief Secretary talks about this alleged increase, yet she fails to discuss where it is coming from. What guarantee can she give to my constituents, who expect two new schools to be built in Reading East, that those schools will not be raided to pay for the pay rise?

Elizabeth Truss: Our programme of spending £23 billion on schools capital will continue. This is about finding efficiencies in our central Government budgets. I know the Labour party does not understand value for money, but that is what we are doing, so that we can put more money into schools and teachers' pay.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Minister will be aware that an aspect of our confidence and supply discussions with the Government involved raising the pay cap; we welcome the statement that she has made. However, given the fact that there is no Assembly functioning in Northern Ireland, what discussions has she had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to

ensure that the money is made available from departmental budgets and, secondly, that the decision is made to award these payments to teachers and nurses?

Elizabeth Truss: As usual, the money for this pay will be allocated through the Barnett formula, but the money is coming from the central DFE budget.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): How exactly will further education colleges be able to give their staff an uplift?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady will understand that we are conducting a review of further and higher education, and that is among the issues that we will be looking at.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Teachers' pay is not devolved to Wales until September 2019, so can the Chief Secretary confirm that the British Government will make the appropriate transfers to Welsh local education authorities to pay for the increase?

Elizabeth Truss: I understand from my colleagues in the Department for Education that this will also apply to Wales.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Past announcements on school budgets have unravelled within days, so is the Chief Secretary guaranteeing that every single penny to fund the teachers' pay increase will come out of central budgets, with not one single penny falling on school budgets? Does the Chief Secretary accept that this does not change the grim reality of 351 out of 354 Birmingham schools facing real-terms pay cuts and budget cuts over the next two years?

Elizabeth Truss: I have been very clear that the additional £500 million over two years will be coming from central DFE budgets. It will be allocated to schools. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will be announcing exactly how that allocation will work in due course.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Last week I was speaking to headteachers in my constituency who were very frustrated that they were breaking up for the summer unable to finalise their budgets. Now that they are able to do so, can the Chief Secretary guarantee today—I think that she has dodged this question a little bit today—that they will not have to find a penny from their existing budgets to fund the pay award?

Elizabeth Truss: I think that many Opposition Members are missing the point that headteachers have significant flexibility in terms of paying their staff. Last year there was an average rise of 4.6%, including promotions. The point I am making is that above the 1% pay award that was already baked in, the DFE is providing extra funding to the tune of £500 million. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing the allocations in due course.

Syria

1.12 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Foreign Secretary what steps he is taking to save civilian life in the conflict in Syria.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East is travelling. I hope that the House will appreciate that Syria does not fall within my ministerial responsibilities, but I will of course endeavour to answer the urgent question and the questions that follow as best I can.

The situation in Syria is of course a humanitarian catastrophe. Over 400,000 people have been killed, and half of Syria's 11 million population have been displaced. In these appalling circumstances, the UK has been taking all steps possible to save civilian life, and as the second-largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response there since 2011, the UK is at the forefront of the response, by providing food, healthcare, water and other lifesaving relief. So far, we have committed £2.71 billion in response to the Syria conflict, which is our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. Through our £200 million Syria Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the UK has also provided a range of support to Syrian civilians and their communities to help save lives, bolster civil society and counter extremism. This includes our support to the White Helmets.

The White Helmet volunteers have played a particular role in saving over 115,000 lives during the conflict, at great risk to their own. They have faced particular protection risks as a result, with many killed while doing their work. It was for that reason that, as the Foreign and International Development Secretaries set out on Sunday 22 July, the UK has worked with our international partners to facilitate the rescue and relocation of a group of White Helmets volunteers and their families from southern Syria. We continue to call on all parties to protect civilians in the Syrian conflict. That includes using the multilateral organisations, including the United Nations Security Council, the UN Human Rights Council and the International Syria Support Group. The UK has also been at the forefront of efforts to strengthen global norms on chemical weapons and, of course, to deter their use.

Ultimately, there needs to be a political settlement to end the conflict. Syria's future must be for Syrians to decide. The UK will be pragmatic about the nature of that settlement, and we will continue to support the UN process to achieve it.

Alison McGovern: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary and the International Development Secretary announced that the Government will help to provide safe passage for the White Helmets, as the Minister has said. They will come to the UK and other safe countries via Israel and Jordan. This is the latest development in a conflict that has been going on for seven years. We have watched as Assad's barbaric regime bombards helpless civilians with barrel bombs and chemical weapons. The White Helmets are some of those who choose not to fight and it is correct, therefore,

that we give them sanctuary. But before I ask about that specific announcement yesterday, I want to ask the Minister what more we will do, because the situation is urgent. There are three major problems that the Government need to give attention to.

First, there are several million people in the northern city of Idlib today. Hundreds of thousands of people have been pushed there by the Syrian regime, following the siege of Aleppo and the bombardment of other towns. These internal refugees are all now waiting for what comes next, and if Idlib is a repeat of Aleppo, the consequences for life—of children particularly—will be utterly horrific. I would like the Minister to explain what discussions are going on inside Government to respond specifically to that threat. As a member of the UN Security Council and one of the biggest aid donors to civilian protection in Syria, what efforts will the Government make now to deter Aleppo-style attacks on hospitals and schools, and how will we prevent further use of chemical weapons?

Many expect the Syrian Government to repeat its previous barbaric use of its bombs and its chemical weapons on Syrian civilians over the summer. I am simply asking the Government to do something to try to protect people.

Secondly, the Minister mentions the aid we have given, but we need to make sure it is getting into Syria. Last week, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) and I visited southern Turkey, where we met 20 or so Syrian doctors who had escaped Syria for a short while to receive training from British trauma surgeon David Nott. These doctors have a target on their backs just for doing their job—which is an impossible job to do but made immeasurably harder simply because they lack the basic supplies that British taxpayers have paid for to get to them. We need to make sure that we carry out diplomatic efforts to get that aid across the border.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight and I brought back a letter from those doctors. They say in this letter that they are bracing themselves for a summer of death, so whether it is by doing all we can to deter the bombardment of Idlib, or simply using our influence, as I have said, to get supplies across the border to these doctors, we must help.

Finally, please can the Minister tell the House what support the White Helmets will now be offered? What will the scale of that help be? Will other vulnerable humanitarians in Syria be offered similar assistance? There are others from international NGOs trapped in Syria who require safe passage out. Can we guarantee resettlement for all of those who need it, and work with border countries to get them out and to the UK?

I know this is difficult. I know that there are many in this House who will simply say there is nothing we can do. But I think that with political will there is a way to help, and it will cost us very little to try. Surely, saving one life alone would be worth the attempt.

Sir Alan Duncan: I absolutely commend the hon. Lady, both for her question today and for the fact that she recently personally visited the region, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely). She has thus seen at first hand what is going on, and speaks with authority in asking this urgent question.

There is no difference, I think, across the House; we all share a deep, basic human concern for the horror of this conflict, which has gone on for seven years. I recall its start when I was a DFID Minister, and was in the forefront of many of the fundraising conferences we had to try to turn as much as £1 billion on a sixpence at the beginning of the 2010 to 2015 Government, in order to focus on this sudden, ghastly—and now long-standing—conflict. We completely share the hon. Lady's attitude and indeed much of her analysis.

First, on the White Helmets, this is a very important opportunity for us to issue our thanks and appreciation. They have been extremely brave. They are community-based civil society people, who put themselves at risk to do basic things, such as be first responders, clear the rubble and rescue the injured. They do so having been demonised in particular by the Russians, who have even accused them of carrying out chemical weapons attacks themselves.

It has been an absolutely remarkable feat of extraction to take the White Helmets out of southern Syria. We give enormous thanks to the Israelis for the efforts they made once requested by us, our international partners and the Americans. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who had only been in the job for two days, was absolutely significant in discussing this with President Trump, when he was with the Prime Minister at Chequers, to try to persuade him to put a request to the Israelis to do it. Clearly, that has worked, and as a result many of hundreds of White Helmets and their families have been extracted from southern Syria.

The broader issue the hon. Lady describes is of course much more challenging. I totally understand what she says about the need, as she would put it, “to do something”. We are all frustrated at the difficulty of getting access for humanitarian purposes in territory that is increasingly controlled by the Syrians, the Russians and the Iranians. The delivery of the humanitarian aid we have on offer is perhaps more difficult now than it was when the conflict was at its height, because there are fewer pockets through which we can actually and easily deliver the aid we want to deliver. We are, for instance, talking to the hon. Lady's former colleague David Miliband and the International Rescue Committee, which has its own people there, separate from the White Helmets. Wherever there are people delivering humanitarian aid, we want to give them maximum access and maximum protection.

On spending, we remain the second biggest donor in the conflict, and this is the largest budget we have ever given to a single cause of this sort. Our efforts will continue, and I am sure that the Minister for the Middle East will be making further statements in the House once we resume after the summer.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question, which the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) so eloquently set out.

It is clear that there is a further catastrophe looming for the millions of people who live in Idlib. As the Minister said, the UK Government have the outstanding record on supporting those caught up in this catastrophe through humanitarian relief. Will the Minister assure the House that, with others, he will continue to liaise and seek assistance not only for the hundreds of thousands of brave people caught up in this looming crisis, but in

particular for the many very brave humanitarian workers and actors who have often put their lives on the line to support those caught up in this situation? As with the work done with the Israeli Government, they urgently need to be able to rely on the international community to help them specifically in the coming days and weeks.

Sir Alan Duncan: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He of course was at the forefront of the initial aid effort in Syria, when he was Secretary of State for International Development and I was his hard-worked minion in that Department, at the beginning of the conflict. He is absolutely right that we have to maintain access for humanitarian efforts. We have so far committed £2.71 billion in response to this crisis. We have provided over 27 million food rations, 12 million medical consultations, 10 million relief packages and over 10 million vaccines. We are going to continue with our efforts. At the Brussels conference in April, we pledged to provide at least £450 million this year and a further £300 million next year to help to alleviate the extreme suffering in Syria and to provide vital support to neighbouring countries, which have taken up so much of the consequential effects of this horrid conflict.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I apologise for my lateness.

Before I say anything else, I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our thoughts to those affected by the fires in Greece and the floods in Laos. We send our best wishes to the authorities in those countries which are responding to those tragedies.

Mr Speaker, thank you for granting this urgent question. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) on securing it and on bringing to the House such important and impassioned insights from her recent visit to the Turkish border, along with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely). I can only endorse what she says in terms of the need to increase flows of medical supplies and equipment to those doctors and first responders working to save civilian lives in Syria. I thank the Minister for his response on that point, but I would like to reiterate one specific question asked by my hon. Friend, about the safety of the doctors. She talked about doctors feeling as though they had targets on their backs. I think that is something we need to respond to specifically.

As we all know, no amount of medical supplies and equipment will be sufficient if we reach the point in coming weeks where Assad and his foreign backers seek to capture not just Idlib but northern Latakia. If the assaults go ahead, the loss of life in those areas will be catastrophic, and the humanitarian crisis from civilians fleeing the violence will be just as devastating. The question is: what are we doing, in this country and as an international community, to prevent that from happening? I believe, as most Members do, that the only solution guaranteed to stop that loss of life and to end the suffering of the Syrian people is a peace deal brokered between all parties and predicated on the withdrawal of all foreign powers.

That, however, raises another grave question: who will broker such a deal? It simply cannot be left to the Russians, the Iranians and the Turks to stitch up an agreement between themselves, and it cannot be left to

[*Emily Thornberry*]

Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump to decide Syria's fate in a room by themselves. We need the resumption of the Geneva peace process. We need all parties around that table and we need to protect the interests of all communities, including our Kurdish allies, against Daesh; otherwise, they risk being sold down the river once again. I therefore ask the Minister what progress is being towards the urgent resumption of those talks?

Sir Alan Duncan: I echo the right hon. Lady's expressions of concern about the fires in Greece and the floods in Laos. She is of course absolutely right. We are all very saddened to learn that a country to which so many of our own citizens go at this time of year has already suffered 50 deaths as a result of raging fires in this period of very dry weather.

I omitted to respond to the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) on the question of the 21 doctors who had written to the Foreign Secretary. The letter has been received and has been passed to the Secretary of State for International Development, who will answer in due course in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

The right hon. Lady is right that there can only be a political settlement, but there is no magic wand that the UK can wave on its own to try to solve the problem. It has been one of the most protracted and insoluble conflicts I have ever seen, as someone who has watched the middle east and the near east for over 30 years. It is the one to which there is no obvious answer, compared with so many of the difficult protracted differences that exist in the region. More territory is controlled now by Mr Assad and his associates than before. The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that Idlib and the north-west is now particularly vulnerable. We are perhaps seeing movements towards the foot of the Golan Heights near Quneitra where, if there is a conflict with the Israelis, it would obviously be very serious indeed. Ultimately, the solution is a political one. That means the United Nations and engagement of a sort with Russia, which I am sorry that Russian actions have put into reverse over the past few months. But a political effort with all responsible and interested countries is the only way to overcome this conflict.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am saddened to hear the Minister say that this will take a political solution, because, sadly, the solution we are seeing is not a political one. The solution we are seeing is being bought by ammunition on the battlefield, by violence and by force. Sadly, we are seeing it spread not just from the population centres we have seen in the past, but to areas like Idlib and down to the border.

The truth is that, if we are not willing to engage in a balance, if we are not willing to stand up to Russian and Iranian violence and to close off the routes for weapons to the Syrian regime, the political solution of which we speak will be bought on the battlefield and not around the table. Will my right hon. Friend at least concede that we should now be doing an awful lot to help the Turkish Government, who will be taking on vast numbers of refugees from Idlib, and the Jordanian Government, who are already bearing far more than their share of the burden?

Sir Alan Duncan: First, I pay enormous tribute to Jordan not only for helping with the extraction of the White Helmets, but for being prepared to take some of them, along with many tens, even hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens, who, over the last few years, have gone to the likes of Jordan and Lebanon. Without the generosity of such neighbours, many, many people would be caught in the conflict by having to stay there. Those countries having admitted so many—actually, millions of—Syrian citizens is something that the world will be able to look back on over the years as a great humanitarian act. I totally agree with my hon. Friend about the necessity of trying to stop the flow of weapons, but in terms of doing anything on the ground or from the air, I hope that he will appreciate that it is not my role today to commit to any such action in the way he hints at in his question.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker, and I add my congratulations and thanks to the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) for the thoughtful, compassionate and very well-informed way in which she asked her questions. About 2.7 million refugees are in and around Idlib right now. They have all fled from other parts of Syria and have nowhere else to go. If Idlib turns into carnage, many of those 2.7 million people, including possibly 1 million children, will be left with no hope. As we have heard often enough, the situation is becoming desperate, and it is more desperate now than it has ever been.

I have often criticised Israel here and elsewhere in this building, so I have no hesitation on this occasion in commending and thanking Israel for the speedy and effective way in which they got so many of the White Helmets, and vitally, their loved ones, out of the danger zone. However, we should be under no illusions as to why the White Helmets and medics in Syria are in such danger: they will be the witnesses who bring Assad and his colleagues to account for crimes against humanity when, at some time in future, this horror on earth begins to settle down. It is so important to protect the witnesses who will hold the killers to account, so that those who commit mass murder will always know that they will be brought to justice sooner or later.

I have two questions for the Minister. First, a number of countries have established their own national mechanisms for the prediction and prevention of mass atrocities, either at home or elsewhere. The UK Government to date have not. Do they have any plans to join countries such as the USA in implementing such a strategy? Secondly, in December 2015, when the House was asked to agree military action in Syria, we were told that this would help to establish a provisional civilian Government in Syria, hopefully within six months. We are now two years past that expected date and a civilian Government of any kind is further away than ever. Have the Government done any assessment to establish why the predictions that they made in December 2015 were so catastrophically off-target, and what are they doing to make sure that similar predictions will be a bit more reliable?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Gentleman is slightly unreasonable in saying that our predictions have to be reliable, in the way that he describes, as if it were entirely in our gift. We are dealing with a horrid, ghastly international conflict in which we are a player, in some

ways, but we are not there on the ground in a way that can influence things as he wants. However, there is one area on which I strongly agree with him—that is, the question of accountability. We are absolutely committed to supporting efforts to pursue accountability for human rights abuses and war crimes in Syria, and there undoubtedly have been such.

We strongly support the work of the United Nations' IIIM—the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism—which investigates and collects evidence of the most serious crimes committed in Syria. We have contributed £200,000 to the start-up costs of that organisation, and we are funding non-governmental organisations that collect evidence for future prosecutions. We are also supporting the important work of the independent UN Commission of Inquiry, which is reporting on violations and abuses, and we have been in the lead on successful diplomatic efforts to strengthen the capability of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to prevent the further use of chemical weapons and to attribute responsibility to those who might use them.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The £2.71 billion contribution to the Syrian aid effort is the single biggest act of humanitarian assistance in our nation's history. Will my right hon. Friend continue to ensure that a suitable proportion of that support goes to countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, which are doing such important work on the ground to provide life-saving support?

Sir Alan Duncan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. From the very beginning of this conflict, when we were looking at so many displaced people, a significant fraction of the humanitarian aid—or at least, the DFID budget spending—went to surrounding countries that were so generously accommodating to those who had fled, so it is inevitable that a large part of that budget will continue to go to such countries. Of course, in an ideal world, we would like to see Syrians return to their homes, but those have been so devastated that people would be going back only to rubble in many cases. It is inevitable that a lot of displaced Syrians will remain outside their former country for a long time to come.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) on bringing this matter to us today. Is it not a fact that what the Russians and the Assad regime are doing is driving out moderate forces, forcing them away and, as a result, increasing the territory that is under the control of Daesh affiliate Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Waleed? Does that not indicate that this is not an agenda that we could in any way support in any negotiated process? Is it not time that the international community as a whole called the murderers and liars in the Russian regime and the Assad regime to account?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Gentleman is very well experienced in this area and speaks with authority in the House. A lot of what the Russians have done is absolutely contemptible. They have continued close military co-operation with the regime, in spite of the atrocities committed by it, including the use of chemical weapons. To go back to what we were discussing earlier, they have demonised the White Helmets as bad people and agents

of the west, and as people who have committed atrocities themselves, when in fact, they are the most generous-spirited, decent citizens that we could ever hope to find anywhere in the world, in many ways. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw the difference between what is right and what is wrong in this conflict.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The war in Syria has haunting similarities to past conflicts when the international rules-based order was unable to deal with the parties taking part in them—including, in particular, the Spanish civil war. What reassurances can my right hon. Friend give me that, as rebel forces and refugees are driven towards Idlib, work will be done to ensure that we do not see that city become another Srebrenica?

Sir Alan Duncan: My hon. Friend, like other right hon. and hon. Members, is absolutely right to point out the dangers that face Idlib if, as it were, the forces of evil drive towards it and we see renewed conflict there. The international community has to focus very heavily on Idlib and make sure that it is not subjected to the kind of military assault that we must at all costs work together to avoid.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I commend the Government for their part in evacuating many White Helmets from dangerous areas. Will the Minister tell the House what action he will be taking in the coming days, weeks and months to locate, communicate with and evacuate many of the humanitarian workers in Syria who are trapped and at very high risk? Will he also commit today in this House, before we break up for the summer recess, that the UK Government will look very seriously at providing resettlement places in the UK for those aid workers?

Sir Alan Duncan: We have already offered places to some of the White Helmets and, in the past, if I am right, we have offered 20,000 Syrians resettlement opportunities in the UK. We are working, and will continue to work, with non-governmental organisations that will, as the hon. Gentleman rightly points out, have vulnerable people delivering humanitarian aid in Syria. It is essential that we know where they are and what they are doing and that we do everything we can on the ground, however limited it might be, to work with others to make sure they and their lives are protected.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): This country's resettlement scheme is good and well respected, and last year 6,200 Syrian refugees were resettled here, but 50% of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' estimated 1.2 million refugees worldwide are Syrian, and we can do so much more. We are one of the states parties signatories to the New York declaration of 2016. Sections 77 to 79 state our intention to expand resettlement and encourage other countries to do the same, but last year only 35 countries accepted resettled refugees, so will the Minister please commit to doing all he can both to expand our very good resettlement programme and to encourage others to do likewise so that more refugees come through safe and legal routes?

Sir Alan Duncan: The House and our voters can be rightly proud of what we have done since the beginning of this conflict seven years ago. Up to the end of March

[*Sir Alan Duncan*]

this year, we had resettled more than 11,000 refugees through the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. We will also resettle up to 3,000 children and their families from the middle east under the vulnerable children resettlement scheme; up to the end of March, we had resettled more than 700 refugees through the scheme. This is the cause to which we have given the largest ever amount from our own budgets, and we are the second-largest multilateral donor. Our original intention was to help people in and around Syria, so that they did not need to come here, but that has turned out not to be the case, which is why the UK is doing both. We can be proud that we are doing both to a considerable degree.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): May I press the Minister about Idlib? What specific initiatives are the UK Government involved with now to try to ensure that, even if Idlib is not a safe zone, at least some protection is provided to civilians there, given we know they will soon be subject to a final assault that will involve barrel bombs or, worse, chemical weapons?

Sir Alan Duncan: We will work with our international partners to do whatever we can. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about barrel bombs and chemical weapons. We have condemned their use and, as I said, have been at the forefront of strengthening the authority, power and reach of the OPCW in attributing any use of chemical weapons. This is not an easy issue to address. We agree that Idlib is looking very vulnerable, but I will be discussing this with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East, who is primarily responsible for these issues, and I have no doubt that there will be suitable occasions, when the House resumes in September and then again after the party conference season, to explain our policy in detail, as the right hon. Gentleman requests.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I want to thank the Minister for the Middle East, whom I met last week, with Lord Glasman, to talk about northern Syria in particular. It was a very fruitful meeting. We talked about the importance of getting medical attention to Kurdish fighters, particularly here in the UK. Will the Minister follow up and make sure that the Kurds are involved in any deal made around Idlib and Syria generally? They have not been included in some of the talks so far.

Sir Alan Duncan: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the Kurds and I will convey his views straightaway to my right hon. Friend, who I am sure will be in touch with him, as he has been already in the past.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response this afternoon. Our Government have not been found wanting when it comes to aid, but can he outline the humanitarian aid currently going from the UK and who is monitoring how it is administered to ensure it gets to those who need it most?

Sir Alan Duncan: I have already explained to the House the quantum, if you like, which over the past few years has totalled £2.71 billion. It takes all sorts of forms—medical, vaccines, relief packages of food, water and so on to meet the basic needs of any human life or existence—but as always with humanitarian aid in a conflict, rather than a famine, the problem is access and humanitarian aid workers being attacked, blocked or prevented, or, even worse, accused of being parties to the conflict when quite clearly they are neutral humanitarian aid workers doing their best for human beings in difficulty. We will work with the UN and other countries and with the many brave organisations inside Syria that manage to get the necessary supplies to people who are desperately starving, thirsty and ill.

EU Withdrawal Agreement: Legislation

1.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Dominic Raab): With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the White Paper published today setting out the Government's plans for legislating for the withdrawal agreement and implementation period.

On Friday 29 March 2019, the UK will leave the European Union, giving effect to the historic decision taken by the British people in the 2016 referendum. The Government are committed to delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit. That is why we have already passed the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018—[*Laughter.*] The shadow Foreign Secretary is laughing. She and her party voted against the Bill, thereby undermining her commitment to give effect to the referendum. We are ensuring that the statute book functions after exit, whatever the outcome of the negotiations. I am grateful to this House and the other place for the many hours of scrutiny devoted to that vital piece of legislation. We are now embarking on the next step in the process of delivering that smooth Brexit for the people and businesses of this country.

Since last June, the UK has been negotiating with the EU to decide on the terms of our withdrawal. We have made substantial progress—on protecting the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU, deciding the terms of the financial settlement and agreeing a strictly time-limited implementation period. Most of the withdrawal agreement—about 80%, according to the EU—has now been agreed with our EU partners, and we have isolated outstanding issues for further focused negotiation. I will be meeting Michel Barnier again on Thursday to take forward the negotiations at this critical time.

We have already agreed a financial settlement, estimated at between £35 billion and £39 billion, which is well below the figures bandied around by some when we started this negotiation. The implementation period will be finite and will allow for the negotiation and conclusion of free trade deals. Many of these arrangements will of course require new domestic legislation to deliver them into UK law. That is why, last November, we announced our intention to bring forward a new piece of primary legislation to implement the withdrawal agreement in UK law.

Today, we are publishing a White Paper setting out our proposals for this important legislation, which will be introduced once the negotiations have concluded and Parliament has approved the final deal. Our expectation is to reach agreement in October.

Under the terms of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, Parliament will then have its say on the final deal. If it is approved, will we bring forward the legislation so that it can be in place for when we leave the EU on 29 March 2019. In setting out our proposals today, we are giving Parliament the opportunity to scrutinise our plans well ahead of the Bill's introduction, given the need to enact the legislation in the time available and mindful of the importance of maximum scrutiny in this House.

By publishing the White Paper today, the Government are providing further certainty to people and businesses here in the UK and across the EU. It also sends a clear signal to the European Union that the United Kingdom

is a reliable, dependable negotiating partner, delivering on the commitments it has made across the negotiating table. Of course, while we are making good progress, discussions are still ongoing in various areas, so some parts of the Bill will only become clearer as we settle the remaining parts of the withdrawal agreement. In the light of that, today's White Paper focuses on those parts of the withdrawal agreement where the text is already agreed. I will take them in turn.

The UK's first priority in negotiating its withdrawal from the EU was to reach agreement on the rights of citizens, including the 3.5 million EU citizens who live in the UK and who are valued members of their communities and play an integral part in the life of this country. Likewise, the approximately 1 million UK nationals who currently live in the EU are equally valued by their host countries and communities.

The agreement reached on citizens' rights will allow EU citizens in the UK, and UK nationals in the EU, to live their lives broadly as they do now and enable families who have built their lives in the EU and the UK to stay together. The most important next step will be to provide a continued right of residence for those citizens. EU citizens lawfully residing in the UK on 31 December 2020 will be able to stay.

This month, the Home Office published further details about how EU citizens and their families can obtain settled status in the UK. That statement confirms that the settlement scheme will make it simple and straightforward for citizens and their families to secure long-term status in this country. The Bill will ensure that EU citizens can rely on the rights set out in the withdrawal agreement and can enforce them in UK courts. It will also establish an independent monitoring authority to oversee the UK's implementation of the deal on citizens' rights, thus providing further reassurance for citizens.

All EU member states must implement the agreement in full and provide certainty for UK nationals on the continent. As the Home Secretary stated recently, we now need to know more of the details of how each member state will fulfil its obligations and implement its side of the agreement. We will be pressing further for those details over the summer.

The next chapter of the White Paper deals with the strictly time-limited implementation period that the UK agreed with the EU in March. The UK will leave the EU on 29 March 2019. After that, the implementation period on which we have agreed will ensure that people and businesses will have to plan for only one set of changes as we move towards our future relationship. From 30 March 2019 until 31 December 2020, common rules will remain in place, with EU law continuing to apply, and businesses will be able to trade on the same terms as they do now. During that period, we will not be a member state and will have the flexibility that we need to strike new trade deals around the world—something that many argued we would not be able to achieve in the negotiations.

To legislate for the implementation period, we must ensure that the UK statute book continues to reflect the relevant provisions of EU law, as it applies to the UK during this time-limited period. As the House will know, the current mechanism for bringing EU law into UK law is the European Communities Act 1972. Under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, the ECA will be repealed on 29 March 2019. As set out in the White Paper,

[Dominic Raab]

the EU withdrawal agreement Bill will contain a time-limited provision so that parts of the ECA are saved until 31 December 2020. Those changes will ensure that our statute book functions properly throughout the implementation period, in accordance with the agreement that we have made with the EU.

Let me now turn to the financial settlement, the structure of which was agreed in December on the basis that it would sit alongside our future partnership. As we have said from the start, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. That is in keeping with article 50, and in keeping with the guidelines that have been given to the EU for the negotiation. We will have a framework for our future relationship with the EU, alongside the withdrawal agreement, and our approach to that future partnership is set out in the White Paper that we published earlier this month. There must be a firm commitment in the withdrawal agreement requiring the framework for the future relationship to be translated into legal text as soon as possible. It is one part of the whole deal that we are doing with our EU partners. Of course, if one party fails to honour its side of that overall bargain, there will be consequences for the whole deal, and that includes the financial settlement.

In addition, we have agreed an obligation for both parties to act in good faith throughout the application of the withdrawal agreement. The White Paper published today explains that the EU withdrawal agreement Bill will include a standing service provision to allow the Government to meet the commitments of the financial settlement. In the interests of transparency and oversight, the White Paper also includes proposals to enhance the existing scrutiny arrangements for the payments made to the EU.

The White Paper sets out our approach to delivering the withdrawal agreement and the implementation period into law, and I look forward to discussing all its proposals with Members in all parts of the House. It is a necessary part of leaving the EU and ensuring a smooth and orderly departure. It gives EU citizens living here, and UK nationals abroad, clarity and certainty that their rights will be properly protected; it will enact the time-limited implementation period, giving businesses greater certainty and giving the public finality with respect to our relationship with the EU; and it provides for the appropriate means for paying the financial settlement. Above all, with 80% of the withdrawal agreement settled with our EU partners, the White Paper is another key milestone on the United Kingdom's path to leaving the EU. I commend this statement to the House.

1.54 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for providing advance copies of his statement and the White Paper. I am glad to say that that was two hours ago, and it is much appreciated.

We will of course scrutinise the White Paper closely, but a quick reading reveals a number of important points. First, the gimmick of fixing exit day as 29 March 2019 in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act has already come unstuck. We warned at the time that it would not work and would need to be rubbed out and that large parts of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act would need to be amended. Here is the proof.

Paragraph 56 of the White Paper states that “EU law will continue to have effect in the UK in the same way as now”

for the implementation period—that is, until December 2020—but section 1 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, which took 18 months to get through Parliament and received Royal Assent only 28 days ago, repeals the European Communities Act on exit day, 29 March 2019. The implementation Bill will amend section 1 of the withdrawal Act by saving the ECA, as the White Paper makes clear in paragraph 60. So the ECA is repealed, and before that comes into force, it is amended and saved. The Secretary of State says that just “parts of the ECA” are saved until 30 December 2020, but that is a huge understatement. Almost all of it is saved, with amendments not to the applicability of EU law, but to collateral issues.

However, not just section 1 of the withdrawal Act now needs major surgery. The other big ticket item in the Act was the much-vaunted “conversion of EU law” into our law—again, fixed by the gimmick of the date of 29 March 2019. We warned that that would not work, because the gimmick gets in the way, so it is going to be rubbed out. Paragraph 69 of the White Paper makes it clear that the conversion exercise is now not needed until December 2020.

Then, of course, there is the European Court. Just a few weeks ago, many Brexiteers cheered section 6(1) of the withdrawal Act, which would extinguish the role of the European Court on the fixed date of 29 March 2019. But not so fast: as we said at the time would happen, paragraph 80 of the White Paper preserves the full role of the European Court until December 2020. Again, the withdrawal Act will need major surgery.

I cannot remember legislation that has needed such great revision and amendment before the relevant parts have even come into force. Of course, the provisions of the withdrawal Act that have come into force relate to delegated powers. During the 18-month passage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill through the House of Commons, it was acknowledged that it contained sweeping provisions packed with Henry VIII powers. They were supposed to be strictly limited by a two-year sunset clause. The White Paper now proposes that those clauses should be extended: sunset is now December 2022. On the face of it, paragraph 75 of the White Paper suggests that if there is no deal, the huge exercise of amending what will be hundreds of legislative provisions will be carried out through delegated legislation. I hope that that is not true, and I look to the Secretary of State for reassurance that that is not the implication of paragraph 75.

Then there is the elephant in the room: if there is no deal, there is nothing to implement. Can the Secretary of State tell us what is the legislative plan, to be in place by March next year, if there is no agreement on citizens' rights—the Secretary of State said a lot about them—on the financial settlement, on Northern Ireland and on many other issues? If there are not to be sweeping delegated powers, what legislation will there be, and when, between now and March 2019?

There was no mention of Northern Ireland in the Secretary of State's statement, and there is just a brief reference to it in the White Paper. I appreciate that elements of the Northern Ireland agreement are still being discussed, but with nothing substantive on Northern Ireland, the White Paper contains a huge gaping hole.

There are proposals on the financial settlement. The Secretary of State now seems to be saying that the EU will have to fulfil its side of the bargain, or we will not pay up. We have been down this track before. The Chancellor has previously dismissed that approach by saying:

“That is not a credible scenario. That is not the kind of country we are. Frankly, it would not make us a credible partner for future international agreements.”

So which is it: has it been agreed, or are we back to conditionality?

I have heard what the Secretary of State says about the withdrawal agreement being reached by October this year, but he knows that he is in a minority here and in Brussels. If agreement is not reached until November or December, how will the Secretary of State ensure that there is proper scrutiny of the implementation Bill, and will he guarantee that it will not be packed with wide-ranging Henry VIII powers?

We have a White Paper and we have time to scrutinise it, but we also have serious questions that now fall to be answered.

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his welcome for the White Paper in general. He will appreciate that the decision to publish it now was a finely balanced one because the negotiations are ongoing, but ultimately it was deemed more important and more respectful to this House to provide the information and consult as early as possible.

On the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s point about the date of departure, I presume he welcomes and supports the implementation period. I have not heard any substantive suggestion how he might have done it differently; perhaps as he reflects he will have some, but otherwise calling the implementation period a gimmick when businesses have called for it and welcomed the certainty it provides is, I think, rather an indication that the Labour party is reverting to type.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman had nothing to say on citizens’ rights, nothing to say on welcoming the mechanism to secure the rights of EU nationals here and nothing to say on welcoming the mechanism to make sure UK nationals have their rights abroad protected. In relation to no deal, we will be prepared regardless of the outcome, as he knows. This is not the legislation being provided to that effect, as we are focused on getting the right deal for the UK and the EU.

In relation to Northern Ireland, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will have seen the White Paper on our future relationship with the EU and the arrangements for frictionless trade, which are not just important for businesses but will avoid any return to a hard border. Our position is that that provides a clear, workable model that maintains our commitments under the Belfast agreement and avoids any friction at the border, but also frees us up to strike free trade deals abroad.

On conditionality, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is a learned lawyer, but I have to say to him that as a matter of basic general international law, whether through the interpretation of treaties under the Vienna convention or customary international law, when countries sign up to a treaty, both sides must commit to the obligations on both sides; there is reciprocity. Of course, if one side fails to live up to its commitments, it is open to the other side to take proportionate measures, including in relation

to financial means, to make sure good effect is given to the whole deal. That is what it takes to stand up for the interests of the United Kingdom; if the right hon. and learned Gentleman would roll over, it is a good job Labour is not handling the negotiations with the EU.

This White Paper is about delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit and one that respects the referendum. I gently say to the Opposition that it is not entirely clear that it is Labour’s overriding objective to give effect to the referendum. Straight after the referendum, the leader of the Labour party demanded the immediate triggering of article 50; with a similar lack of strategic foresight, Labour Members repeatedly voted against the EU withdrawal Bill, whose sole purpose was to deliver a smooth and orderly Brexit, including on Second Reading; and now the Labour party will not rule out a second referendum. It is clear that Labour Members are taking the opportunistic political low-ground, rather than rallying together to try to secure the best deal for the UK with our EU partners. The withdrawal agreement Bill is essential, and I hope that all who wish to see a smooth and orderly Brexit will support it and engage seriously on the substance.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As expected, a very large number of Members are seeking to catch my eye. I would like to accommodate as many as I can, but I remind the House that there is a further ministerial statement to follow, another piece of business that may be short but is uncertain in length, and then a very heavily subscribed summer Adjournment debate. There is therefore a premium on brevity, now to be brilliantly exemplified by Mr Steve Baker.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): The least worst of the negotiable mechanisms to deliver the implementation period was the one in the White Paper of repealing the European Communities Act 1972 but saving its effect with modifications to the end of the implementation process. Will the Secretary of State confirm that he is going to ask this Parliament—this House—to agree to that mechanism in the same vote that we are asked to sign up to the future relationship through that political statement?

Dominic Raab: I can assure my hon. Friend that that will all be part of the same process, and I am happy to work with him on the detail and substance, as we move forward.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his statement, for advance sight of it and the White Paper, and for notice yesterday that the White Paper would be published today. It is nice when a White Paper is handed to Members in the Chamber in ways that do not involve the risk of decapitation, as was the case last week.

I am left wondering what would have happened if the Government had had their way and the House had risen five days ago. Would we have been left without a White Paper? Would the White Paper have been announced in a written statement to add to the 40 or so that have been sneaked out over the past few days without any attempt to allow for scrutiny by Members? The Minister says that publishing the White Paper now gives Parliament time to scrutinise it before the Bill is brought forward

[Peter Grant]

but, by my reckoning, there might be eight parliamentary sitting days before the intended date for publishing the Bill, and Parliament might well want to undertake other business in that time, too. Although there is a lot of time between now and the Bill's publication, the odd timetable that this place sets for itself means not a lot of time for parliamentary scrutiny is being allowed.

I look forward to questioning the Secretary of State on the White Paper in more detail when he attends the Select Committee later today. Paragraph 23 of the White Paper refers to discussions with existing EEA countries about the UK's future relationship with them. Do the Government hope to establish a unique and unprecedented relationship with those countries that is different from the unique and unprecedented relationship that we are going to have with the EU? If so, why should the EEA countries agree to that?

Paragraph 30 refers to the likely use of the immigration rules, rather than primary legislation, to ensure the ongoing rights of EU nationals living in the UK. Anything that gives legislative impact to the continuation of those rights sooner rather than later is to be welcomed, but does using that method mean that Parliament will not be able to amend the Government's proposals? If we think they do not give sufficient protections to citizens, and this is being done under immigration rules rather than through primary legislation, will Parliament have the opportunity to strengthen that protection if it sees fit?

The Secretary of State has acknowledged that primary legislation will be needed to give effect to the financial settlement, but one or two members of the European Research Group might not be too keen on that settlement. What are the Secretary of State's contingency plans if they rebel in the way they did last week? Will the Government just cave in? If not, what concessions do they expect to have to make to the hardliners to get this essential legislation passed?

I welcome the assurance in a number of passages of the White Paper that the usual conventions regarding the devolved Administrations will apply. Can we have an assurance from the Secretary of State now that this legislation will be normal, and that we will not need to appeal that it is abnormal, so that his Government do not ride roughshod over the rights of the devolved Parliaments simply because their assessment of what our people need is a bit different from that of those Parliaments? Or is this another situation in which if the devolved Administrations disagree with the UK Government, they will take us to court, rather than seeking a political agreement?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I think that the initial part of his statement was a backhanded way of welcoming the fact that we have got this out now so that Members of not just this House but all the devolved Administrations have a proper chance to scrutinise the terms of the withdrawal agreement Bill and the implementation period.

The hon. Gentleman asked about EEA nationals. We are engaged in diplomacy with our EEA partners and separate provision will be made for them. We hope to be able to conclude that reasonably soon.

I take on board the hon. Gentleman's points about consultation with the devolved Administrations. We have been working closely with the devolved Administrations at official and ministerial level to prepare this White Paper. Ministers discussed proposals for the Bill at the last meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on 5 July. Of course, we will respect the Sewel convention, although I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that there are different views about how that will apply, and that is difficult to judge until we have the entire withdrawal agreement.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the immigration rules. The changes will be made by statutory instrument—that is the swifter, more flexible way to proceed in accordance with the White Paper—but the process will allow for the scrutiny of those rules in the normal way.

I hope that I have given the hon. Gentleman some reassurance. I look forward to engaging with him, and all the devolved Administrations and those representing them, as we go through this process.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is becoming increasingly fashionable to criticise the Northern Irish backstop as either a tactical blunder that we have made, or some kind of dastardly trick that the EU is playing on us, so will my right hon. Friend confirm that the backstop remains important precisely because we are a Government who take our obligations towards Northern Ireland seriously, who value Northern Ireland, and who will do nothing to undermine peace there or the integrity of the whole United Kingdom?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are two distinct issues at play here. We are absolutely committed to the Belfast agreement and to peace and stability in Northern Ireland. At the same time, it is unacceptable for a customs border to be drawn along the Irish sea, as that would be a direct threat to the territorial integrity of this country. I am sure that that is not what our European partners intend—there may be similar pressures in countries within the EU—but we are absolutely clear about our position on this.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Paragraph 24 states that

“all EU citizens lawfully residing in the UK”

by 31 December will be able to stay. Can the Secretary of State give the House and those 3.5 million European citizens an assurance that that commitment from the Government will still hold in the event of us leaving without a deal? Yes or no?

Dominic Raab: I apologise for the disruption that this is causing to the right hon. Gentleman's evidence session, which I look forward to joining later.

We are very clear that, in the event of no deal, there would be no wholesale removal of rights of EU nationals in this country. We are absolutely committed to providing the reassurance and security that they need. That is the point of agreeing these aspects of the withdrawal agreement up front and publishing this White Paper—so that EU nationals here and UK expats abroad can see precisely not only the substance of their rights, but how they will properly be protected.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): May I commend my right hon. Friend for restating so robustly that the payment of any financial settlement will be conditional on an agreement on the future relationship with the EU? Will he confirm that the necessary flexibility to accommodate that conditionality will be built into the Bill?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend heard what I said in my statement. The most important thing is that we are clear that there is no deal until the whole deal is done, and it will be important to establish that linkage in the withdrawal agreement directly.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I am still unclear about the Secretary of State's plans for the Northern Ireland backstop. If that is part of the withdrawal agreement, will it be legislated for in the legislation referred to in this White Paper—yes or no?

Dominic Raab: Yes.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): The Government are still maintaining that no deal is preferable to a bad deal. Over the summer, the Secretary of State will be going round the European Union selling the Government's White Paper policy document, and in that he has my full support. However, if he were to fail, for whatever reason, would he accept the clear evidence that a customs union-based approach is still preferable to no deal?

Dominic Raab: I appreciate the way in which my hon. Friend tries to tempt me down that particular path, but I think that it is only right to prepare for all eventualities in relation to the money, to the operational contingency planning that we are doing, and to the legislative steps. Obviously our overriding focus is on getting the best deal, and I shall be spending the weeks and months ahead in Brussels, talking to Michel Barnier and his team, and focusing on that. I shall be out there again on Thursday, looking to achieve the best deal.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State said that the withdrawal agreement was 80% agreed, but he did not mention the biggest and toughest outstanding issue, which is that of the Northern Ireland border and customs arrangements. Will he tell us whether, in his discussions last week, Mr Barnier agreed to new clause 36 to the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill, which was passed by this House last week and requires reciprocal differential collection of tariffs before the agreement can be put in place?

Dominic Raab: I have already mentioned our approach to the Northern Ireland issue. We believe that the proposals in the "Future Relationship" White Paper provide a sustainable, deliverable approach, and we want to make sure that we are aiming to achieve that. In relation to Michel Barnier, the negotiations are of course ongoing, and I will protect the integrity of the negotiating room, if the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me. Of course, there is nothing in the legislation that was passed previously—last week or otherwise—to prevent us from achieving the goals in this White Paper or, indeed, the previous one.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State is doing to get the UK ready for Brexit. Will he confirm that as he travels around the

EU this summer, he will be pressing EU member states to ensure that they are also ready so that we can leave the EU without disruption to those relationships?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, particularly in relation to the protection of UK nationals abroad in the same way as we are protecting EU nationals under UK law. We are setting up a monitoring authority, and the Commission will perform that function in relation to UK expats abroad. None the less, we want to ensure that the legislation and mechanisms are in place to give that security to UK expats.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State has said that the Government are committed to delivering a "smooth and orderly Brexit". To that end, are they going to issue a White Paper and Bill to cover a no deal scenario, given that he and his colleagues say that that is a real and increasing possibility? Presumably such a Bill will be needed to cover all eventualities, from compulsory purchase orders to the creation of lorry parks and to establishing emergency warehouses for medicines and food.

Dominic Raab: I do not think that I have ever said that this is an increasing risk, but it is certainly a real risk. As the time for the deal approaches, the only responsible thing for us to do is to ensure that we are ready for all eventualities. Without going into some of the more hair-raising examples that the right hon. Gentleman has highlighted, I think it is right to ensure that we are ready for all eventualities by having the logistical infrastructure and legislation in place. I hope that we will have his support.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House at the earliest opportunity to give us the chance to scrutinise the White Paper. I have not had a chance to read it myself, so will he confirm that the Prime Minister's principles of ending the free movement of people, of not giving billions of pounds each and every year to the EU, and of making our own laws in our own country, judged by our own judges, are not broken by the White Paper?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to get back to the key overarching objectives. I believe that, with this White Paper and the previous one, the full strategy can be seen in the round. Yes, we have had to take a pragmatic as well as a principled approach, but it is faithful to the referendum in the three key areas that he describes.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Government have promised that the House will have all the information and data that it needs to make an informed choice when we take the critical vote in the autumn. Will they therefore produce an impact assessment on the political declaration on the future relationship between the UK and the EU well in advance of our taking that critical vote?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question; he has raised this matter a few times. We will ensure that the appropriate analysis is done on all aspects of all elements on both sides of the deal.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I wish the Secretary of State a productive summer—it could be a very interesting one. The EU has a poor track record when it comes to trade deals generally, which is why we trade with the majority of the rest of the world on World Trade Organisation terms. What assurances can he give us that, in the run-up to the publication of the White Paper, we will be meaningfully preparing to leave on no trade terms and that the White Paper's proposals will have the dexterity to ensure that the preparation is in place in time?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is right to raise that aspect of the arrangements. We are working closely with all the other arms of Whitehall, including the Department for International Trade, and we are ensuring that we have the right flexibility. The advantage of the implementation period in the White Paper is that it is finite, so that those who want to see an end to the eternal haggling with the EU and want some clarity about the end-state relationship will have that provided. During the implementation period, we will be free to negotiate and to conclude free trade deals with other countries beyond the continent.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Is the Secretary of State aware that he has just set alarm bells clanging in the homes of around 3 million EU citizens living in this country? When he answered the question about what would happen in the event of no deal by saying that there would be no wholesale removal of rights of EU nationals in this country, what did he actually mean? Will he put in writing what he means in the next 24 hours so that those people do not have a horrendous summer thinking the worst about what could happen in the event of no deal, with their rights not being protected?

Dominic Raab: I do not share the hon. Lady's gloomy assessment. When the detail of the White Paper is made clear to EU nationals here, the focus will be on their substantive rights and the mechanism by which they will be able to rely directly on them in UK courts. There will be an independent monitoring authority not just to take up complaints, but to take legal action. If the negotiations do not reach fruition, separate legislative provision will be made in the normal way through the Home Office. However, we will move quickly to secure the position of EU nationals.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): We swallowed the fairly hideous implementation period compromise on the promise of a smooth transition to a good end state. Now that the opening offer on the end state does not pass the public's sniff test, why should we approve both when we are asked to in the autumn?

Dominic Raab: I share my hon. Friend's passion and respect his views. If he looks at the package in the round—at the finality that the implementation period provides; at the ability to give effect faithfully to the referendum and to take back control of our borders, law and money; at our ability to trade more liberally and energetically with the growth markets of the future; at the wider political context, both in this House and beyond; and at the nature of the support we need to carry the country with us—I hope that he will appreciate

that we are taking a principled, pragmatic approach to leaving the EU, and that he will be able to get behind it.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State said that UK nationals in the EU will be able to “live their lives broadly as they do now”.

Will he confirm that the existing rights to move freely between EU countries and to work and study in other EU countries will apply to all UK citizens currently living in France, Germany, Estonia, Poland and elsewhere?

Dominic Raab: I share the hon. Gentleman's desire to nail down those reassurances for onward movement. That is our objective in the negotiations, but we have not yet finalised that aspect.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): When the Secretary of State meets the remaining 27 EU Governments over the summer, will he be highlighting the fact that they have a significant trade surplus with the UK and that it is therefore in everyone's best interests that a comprehensive trade deal is accomplished?

Dominic Raab: I think that many European businesses are well aware of that. On Friday, we had a meeting at Chevening with a whole range of leaders of businesses small and large, and there was widespread positive feeling about our negotiating position and many offers to help. It will not be just me going around the capitals of Europe; there will be a lot of support from businesses trying to ensure that we get this deal in the principled, pragmatic way that has been set out in the White Paper.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): In the Secretary of State's previous incarnation, he campaigned for the repeal of the Human Rights Act and its replacement with a Bill of Rights. Despite campaigning vigorously since 2009, he failed to secure his objective, and the Government have now ditched the policy. What makes him think that he can finalise the remaining 20% of the withdrawal agreement and solve the difficult question of the Irish border in a matter of months?

Dominic Raab: I always argued that we should stay within the European convention on human rights, but that we should look at how it is implemented in UK law. However, the Government's position is clear on that. More broadly, the hon. and learned Lady is quite right to point out the time pressure that we are under, but we have set out a principled but pragmatic approach. We are bringing extra energy to the negotiations. I am going out to see Michel Barnier again on Thursday and will be offering to see him regularly throughout the summer. If that good will, pragmatism and energy are reciprocated, we will get a deal in October.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I am expecting there to be a lot of celebrating on 29 March 2019 in Willenhall and Bloxwich. Will the Secretary of State confirm that one of the things that the people will be celebrating will be the opportunity to make free, independent trade deals for the first time in decades?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The point is that the growth markets of the future will be areas such as Latin America or Asia, and that has

also been confirmed by the European Commission's analysis. This is not just a UK position; it is widely shared.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State and other Conservative Members have said many times that no deal is better than a bad deal, but the Foreign Secretary said yesterday that no deal would be economically challenging. However, with still no evidence of what the Government have put in place for a no deal Brexit, will the Secretary of State please take this opportunity to give manufacturers in Batley and Spen advice on how to prepare for a potentially chaotic economic crisis?

Dominic Raab: We are broadly aligned in trying to strive to get the very best deal with the EU—that is where my overriding focus is—but I say gently to the hon. Lady and other Opposition Members that it would be deeply irresponsible to fail to prepare and plan for all eventualities when we are in a negotiation and when things depend on the good will and the ambition on the other side.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Further to paragraph 104 on page 28 of the White Paper, will my right hon. Friend confirm that payment of the £35 billion to £39 billion that he cited is conditional on the final deal? After all, as he has said, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Dominic Raab: If my hon. Friend looks at the White Paper, he will see that the principle of conditionality is written into it and is mentioned in several different paragraphs. It is a common principle of international agreements and international diplomacy when a deal is struck that both sides commit to adhering to and fulfilling their side of the bargain. If they do not, there are consequences for the rest of the deal.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the White Paper, especially the commitment that the EU will not be getting a penny of our money if it refuses to come up with a fair trade arrangement that suits both sides. On that issue, is the Secretary of State aware that the Taoiseach said this week that he had been assured by the EU that there will be no need for any physical infrastructure along the Irish border even in the event of no deal? If that is the case, is that not proof that the issue is overhyped and that there is no need for a backstop arrangement that breaks the Union? Will he assure us that he will not accede to such an arrangement?

Dominic Raab: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that if both sides go into this with sensitivity, understanding and the commitment to avoid any return to any infrastructure at the Irish border, we will be in a much better place. The most important thing is that the proposals in our White Paper on the future relationship provide a sensible model that guides us towards the end state during the implementation period.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I appreciate that the Secretary of State is trying to make the Government's position clear and simple for people to understand, but there is still a lot of confusion out there. One area that confuses my constituents is

whether we will be able to conduct independent trade deals under the Government's proposals, so will he clarify that?

Dominic Raab: I can tell my hon. Friend that not only will we be able to negotiate, but we will be able to conclude deals. The Department for International Trade is now embarking on a series of consultations about the substance of those free trade agreements so that the public and his constituents will understand the value and importance that the agreements will bring to the country.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Will the Secretary of State please commit to meeting the Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries, the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James), who in a recent meeting with me and the Musicians' Union agreed about the need for there to be some form of visa so that musicians and others in the creative and other industries, including sportspeople, can continue to tour the EU? Paragraph 26 on frontier workers does not deal with self-employed people who need to tour the EU.

Dominic Raab: That is one of the issues that needs to be discussed in the context of the future relationship, but the hon. Lady raises the importance of our getting the best deal on that relationship in tandem and in parallel with the withdrawal and exit terms.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his statement. Several constituents who are EU nationals have raised concerns with me about their rights after we leave the EU. Will he therefore tell the House what he intends to do to spread the message that is in the White Paper so that EU nationals are aware of the steps that the Government are taking?

Dominic Raab: There is the substance of the rights, which we have set out and made clear in the White Paper, and a mechanism and procedures will also be available to EU nationals. We will ensure that that information is widely disseminated both through materials and through the work that the Home Office will be doing in the coming weeks and months.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Secretary of State knows that parliamentary arithmetic seems to be against the British Government. If they fail to get approval for their withdrawal agreement, they will face four options: they could extend article 50 in order to renegotiate; they could move a motion of no confidence to allow the formation of an alternative Government or another general election; they could call a second referendum; or they could crash out without a deal. Which option would he prefer?

Dominic Raab: It will be incumbent on hon. Members on both sides of the House to think very carefully about how they vote when it comes to the meaningful vote. Unless it is approved and we have a deal, we will not be able to give effect to it. Not only would that be a serious position, but hon. Members on both sides of the House would be held to account for how they voted.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): What safeguards can be put in place to make sure that the provisions to save parts of the European Communities Act cannot be extended beyond the agreed implementation period?

Dominic Raab: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, and I hope he will be reassured that the implementation period will be finite and much shorter than some had been arguing for. We think that strikes the right balance between allowing businesses to make one change to the rulebook and making sure it is a reasonably finite, limited period, for the very reasons he has expressed.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State tell us what the terms of any meaningful vote will look like? What are the Government's plans should this Parliament not agree to the deal on the table?

Dominic Raab: The terms of the meaningful vote have already been set out in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, and the vote will be to approve or reject the full deal, including both the withdrawal agreement and the future framework.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con) *rose—*

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Devon versus Gloucestershire. I call Mr Kevin Foster.

Kevin Foster: Thank you, Mr Speaker. You are a star, and I am sure you know how to do your scone correctly, too.

The Secretary of State will be aware of the importance of the fishing industry to Torbay and across the south-west. Can he therefore confirm that, by 2020, the UK will be negotiating its own fishing policies as an independent coastal state?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In 2020 we will be negotiating fishing opportunities as an independent coastal state, deciding who can access our waters and, more importantly, on what terms.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am pleased that the new Secretary of State is planning to meet Michel Barnier much more frequently than his predecessor did, and I welcome this new sense of urgency. On the conditionality of the financial settlement, when the withdrawal agreement is ratified in October, or whenever it is, the UK's payment will be obligatory. Will he confirm that the future relationship, at that stage, will be covered only by a declaration, which will not be obligatory on either party?

Dominic Raab: We set out a lot of the detail on how we will handle the financial payment in the White Paper, and I urge the right hon. Gentleman to reflect on the detail. We cover the substance, the sequence and the mechanism for paying it and for making sure that, at all moments, this House has proper scrutiny. If he has any particular suggestions in relation to that, I would be interested to hear them.

Alex Chalk: I welcome this White Paper and, in particular, the announcement of robust legal mechanisms to secure the rights of EU citizens who have done such an enormous job in the local economy and in the wider community of Cheltenham and elsewhere, but there are a million British citizens living overseas in the European Union. Will the Secretary of State provide a little more information on the steps he will be taking this summer to ensure that British citizens enjoy reciprocal and equivalent rights?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want a very clear message for EU nationals in this country: we value them, we welcome them, and not only do we want them to stay but we are making provision to ensure they are secure in their rights. In relation to UK expats abroad, the withdrawal agreement will, in the same way as it does for EU nationals here, provide substantive rights. The Commission will perform the role of the monitoring authority, as set out in the White Paper, and of course it will be incumbent on each individual EU member state to make sure it provides direct access and redress in its courts, in the same way as we are doing in our courts for EU nationals.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): One GP has been working in Grimsby since 2004 through the EU diploma equivalence scheme. Is that scheme covered by chapter 2C of the White Paper, and will that GP need to take any action between now and March 2019 to enable her to continue to work freely in our NHS?

Dominic Raab: If the hon. Lady wants to write to me about an individual case, I would be happy to take a look.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Given the White Paper's underwhelming commitment to EU citizens' rights in the UK, and given the Secretary of State's most unconvincing reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), can the Secretary of State give the sort of assurance on EU citizens' rights being maintained in this country that they and, above all, British businesses need?

Dominic Raab: I am not sure which bit of the reassurance provided in the White Paper the hon. Gentleman finds underwhelming. He did not mention any in his question, but if he would like to write to me, I look forward to addressing it. I gently suggest that he reads the White Paper first because, actually, the substantive rights and the procedural mechanism for securing them are set out very clearly.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Given the problems the Government confronted in section 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, does the Secretary of State agree it is a little disappointing that the negotiations with the devolved parties are not encompassed and enshrined in this White Paper?

Dominic Raab: We have worked very closely with the devolved Administrations at official and ministerial levels. Ministers discussed proposals for this Bill at the JMC on 5 July. The Sewel convention will apply in the ordinary way. I appreciate there will be different views on its application, and we do not know quite how it will

look until we have the whole deal agreed. I look forward to working very constructively and sensitively with all the devolved Administrations.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): A very happy recess to you, Mr Speaker. It is quite embarrassing for the Government that they are already having to amend their European Union (Withdrawal) Act, which is only a month old and was passed without legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament. Does he believe that the customs Bill and the Trade Bill will also have to be amended by the withdrawal agreement Bill?

Dominic Raab: I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that we made it very clear when we passed the European Union (Withdrawal) Act that we would have to consider the subsequent terms in the light of the negotiations. I would have thought he would welcome the implementation period, welcome the certainty it gives to Scottish businesses and to businesses across the UK, and welcome it as a finite bridge towards our end state of leaving the EU and taking back control of our laws, our borders and our money.

Immigration Detention: Shaw Review

2.37 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on immigration detention. As the House knows, our immigration system is made up of many different and interconnected parts. Immigration detention is an important part of that system, and it encourages compliance with our immigration rules, protects the public from the consequences of illegal migration and ensures that people who are here illegally, or who are foreign criminals, can be removed from this country when all else fails.

Detention is not a decision that is taken lightly. When we make the decision to detain someone, their welfare is an absolute priority. The Windrush revelations have shown that our immigration system, as a whole, is not perfect, that there are some elements that need much closer attention and that there are lessons we must learn.

That is why I welcome Stephen Shaw's second independent review of immigration detention, commissioned by this Government and which I am laying before the House today. Copies are available from the Vote Office and on gov.uk. I am grateful to Mr Shaw for his comprehensive and thoughtful report, which recognises the progress this Government have made in reforming immigration detention since his last report in 2016 but challenges us to go even further.

As the review notes, we have made significant changes to detention in the UK in recent years. Over the past three years, we have reduced the number of places in removal centres by a quarter. We detained 8% fewer people last year than the year before. Last year, 64% of those detained left detention within a month, and 91% left within four months. And 95% of people liable for removal at any one time are not in detention at all but are carefully risk assessed and managed in the community instead.

In his report, Stephen Shaw commends the "energetic way" in which his 2016 recommendations have been taken forward. He notes that conditions across immigration removal centres have "improved" since his last review three years ago. We now have in place the adults at risk in immigration detention policy to identify vulnerable adults more effectively and make better balanced decisions about the appropriateness of their detention. We have also strengthened the checks and balances in the system, setting up a team of special detention gatekeepers to ensure decisions to detain are reviewed. We have also created panels to challenge the progress on detainees' cases and their continuing detention. We have taken steps to improve mental health care in immigration removal centres, and we have also changed the rules on bail hearings. Anyone can apply for bail at any time during detention. In January, we further changed the rules, so that detainees are also automatically referred for a bail hearing once they have been detained for four months. All of that is good work. However, I agree with Stephen Shaw that these reforms are still bedding in, and that there have been cases and processes we have not always got right. Now I want to pick up the pace of reform and commit today to four priorities going forward.

[Sajid Javid]

First, let me be absolutely clear that the Government's starting point, as always, is that immigration detention is only for those for whom we are confident that no other approaches will work. Encouraging and supporting people to leave voluntarily is of course preferable. I have asked the Home Office to do more to explore alternatives to detention with faith groups, with non-governmental organisations and within communities. As a first step, I can announce today that we intend to pilot a scheme to manage vulnerable women in the community who would otherwise be detained at Yarl's Wood. My officials have been working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to develop this pilot, which will mean that, rather than receiving support and care in an immigration removal centre, the women will get a programme of support and care in the community instead.

Secondly, the Shaw review recommends how this Government can improve the support available for vulnerable detainees. Mr Shaw describes the adults-at-risk policy as "a work in progress". We will continue that progress, ensuring that the most vulnerable and complex cases get the attention they need. We will look again at how we can improve the consideration of rule 35 reports on possible cases of torture, while avoiding abuse of these processes. We will also pilot an additional bail referral at the two-month point, halving the time in detention before a first bail referral. We will also look at staff training and support to make sure that the people working in our immigration system are well equipped to work with vulnerable detainees, and we will increase the number of Home Office staff in immigration removal centres.

Thirdly, in his report, Stephen Shaw also rightly focuses on the need for greater transparency around immigration detention. I will publish more data on immigration detention, and I am commissioning the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to report each year on whether and how the adults-at-risk policy is making a difference.

Fourthly, and finally, I also want to see a new drive on dignity in detention. I want to see an improvement to the basic provision available to detainees. The practice in some immigration removal centres of having three detainees in rooms designed for two will stop immediately. I have also commissioned an urgent action plan for modernising toilet facilities. We will also pilot the use of Skype so that detainees can contact their families overseas more easily.

I am aware of the arguments that are made on time limits for immigration detention. However, as Mr Shaw's review finds, the debate on this issue currently rests more on slogans than on evidence. That is why I have asked my officials to review how time limits work in other countries and how they relate to any other protections within their detention systems, so we can all have a better-informed debate and ensure our detention policy is based on not only what works to tackle illegal migration, but what is humane for those who are detained. Once this review is complete, I will further consider the issue of time limits on immigration detention.

The Shaw review confirms that we are on the right track with our reforms of immigration detention and that we should maintain a steady course, but Stephen Shaw also identifies areas where we could and should

do better. So my goal is to ensure that our immigration system, including our approach to immigration detention, is fair and humane. This is what the public rightly expect from us. They want rules that are firmly enforced, but in a way that treats people with the dignity they deserve. The changes I have announced today will help to make sure that that is the case, and I commend this statement to the House.

2.45 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving me prior sight of his statement. In a way, it is telling that we are having this statement as the last one of this parliamentary Session. Some may be concerned it will not get the attention it deserves, but, in a way, that is symptomatic. Immigration detention and the conditions in immigration detention have always existed in the shadows, without sufficient scrutiny, but that lack of scrutiny has been partly addressed by the Shaw review.

I have the slight advantage over Home Office Ministers on the question of immigration detention because I was an MP in the 1990s, when immigration detention, as we know it, was introduced. One thing Ministers insisted was that immigration detention was always meant to be for short periods prior to removal, but the system Stephen Shaw had to look at in 2016 had morphed into something much more disturbing and inappropriate.

The Home Secretary will be aware that the first Shaw review said:

"Immigration detention has increased, is increasing, and—whether by better screening, more effective reviews, or formal time limit—it ought to be reduced."

Is the Home Secretary aware that some people will believe that the fact we have managed to reduce the number of people in immigration detention by only 8% since the first Shaw review is not satisfactory? We need to move to a position where people are assured that only the minimum number of persons are detained in this way and only for the minimum time. This Home Secretary needs to be aware that that is what MPs were promised in the 1990s and that is what the Government should be moving towards.

However, I welcome the look at alternatives to detention for vulnerable women who might otherwise be held in Yarl's Wood. Is the Home Secretary aware of how desperate these women are? I visited Yarl's Wood earlier this year—it took a year for me to be allowed in—and I was shocked at how desperate and unhappy these women were. Some of them were victims of trafficking and of sexual abuse, and should never have been in Yarl's Wood in the first place. So I welcome our looking at alternatives, working with faith groups and the community, through care in the community. Is the Home Secretary aware that Yarl's Wood currently costs £10 million a year? That money would be better spent on giving support to our anti-trafficking strategy and on action to help these vulnerable women. Is he aware of the concern about vulnerable detainees? In particular, Stephen Shaw said in his first review that detention is linked to poor mental health outcomes. So this is not just a question of humanity in the way we treat detainees; we need care for their mental health.

I welcome what the Home Secretary said about more data. As I said at the beginning, I deprecate the extent to which immigration detention and its conditions have

lain in the shadows. I welcome what he said about dignity in detention. I found the women in Yarl's Wood living in very sad and very undignified conditions; their rooms had been searched by men in the middle of the night, and there was inadequate healthcare. We also need to address this question of the feeling that they were detained indefinitely. Whenever it is put to Ministers that this system constitutes indefinite detention, they say, "No, of course not." But someone in prison has a date for release, whereas these people in detention centres do not know when they are going to be released. I am glad that there will be some examination of the question of time limits, because the notion of indefinite detention is one of the things about our current immigration detention system that is the hardest to defend.

The Opposition understand that some type of immigration detention must form part of our immigration system, but we believe that the sooner immigration detention moves back to the system that Members of Parliament were promised in the 1990s, the sooner we are talking about short-term detention, the sooner there is more care for people's mental health, the sooner there is more care for people's dignity and, above all, the sooner women are taken out of Yarl's Wood, it will be a better day—not just for the detainees but for this Government and for the British people and our reputation for fairness and humanity.

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her remarks. She has been very thoughtful and constructive and has welcomed some of the initiatives that I announced today, which I hope to build on further. As always, I would be happy to sit down with her to discuss further some of the announcements that I made today, because she can add to what we plan to do. I assure her that, although we are about to start the summer recess, the work of the Home Office and all the work that I talked about in my statement continues. I want to make sure that, when we are all back in Parliament, we can properly probe further the report and some of the announcements I made today, whether that is through Select Committees or otherwise.

The right hon. Lady was right to talk about the problems with immigration detention over a number of years. I think she would be the first to agree that there have been problems for many years under successive Governments. In preparation for delivering this statement, I looked back at a 2009 Home Affairs Committee report, which talked about many similar problems. More than 1,000 children were in detention that year. The right hon. Lady referred to Yarl's Wood; that report said that

"Yarl's Wood remains essentially a prison."

That was in 2009. I hope that she agrees that, with the work that has been done, particularly Stephen Shaw's two independent reviews, changes are beginning to be made. I am the first to accept, though, that more needs to be done. That is the purpose of the most recent report and the action that I have announced today.

That action includes making improvements across the board, including in the number of people detained, which I would like to see fall further. The right hon. Lady rightly pointed out that the number has fallen by 8% year to year. The number of places available for detention has been cut by a quarter. Whether they are women or not, we should be working to get even more

people looked after in the community. At the moment, around 95% of people who could have been detained are not, but I would like to see that percentage go up even more, because 5% being detained is too high.

On Yarl's Wood, we will be piloting the alternative to detention. It is worth pointing out that women make up a much smaller proportion of the total number of people in detention. That proportion is currently around 9%, which is around 260 women, but I would like to see that come down much more. As I mentioned in my statement, we will focus on the vulnerable cases. Despite the actions that have already been taken, I welcome Mr Shaw's scrutiny, and we should do more there, too.

On the whole issue of dignity—everything from contact with families to toilet facilities—there are so many ways in which we can make improvements. I recently visited a detention centre and heard that there are still some cases—very limited cases—in which the detention room was designed for two but three people were being kept in it. I thought that that should end immediately, and that is what I announced today. We can continue to build on things such as that.

Finally, the right hon. Lady referred to detention time limits. It is worth pointing out that 95% are not detained and, of the 5% who are detained, 64% are detained for only two months. Otherwise, 91% have left the detention centre within four months. That said, there has been a debate and there are clearly limits on detention in many other countries, including many European countries. Those countries have different checks and balances from the ones we have, but it is worth giving the matter a closer look. I am sure that the right hon. Lady would agree that we should all focus on the evidence available to see what changes can be made. The review that I have commissioned my Department to do will help to bring about more evidence. As I said, I very much welcome her comments.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his predecessors on their leadership on the difficult issue of getting progress in a humane and decent direction, which has undoubtedly happened. There can be no more eloquent testimony than the fact that the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who has worked assiduously in this policy area for all her time in Parliament and can be seen as something of an authority on it, has in effect welcomed the direction of travel and much of my right hon. Friend's statement. This is a good day for an improved detention system in the United Kingdom.

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with my hon. Friend and thank him for the attention that he has given to this issue over several years. I join him in commending the work of the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and the focus that she has provided on this very important issue.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for advance sight of his statement. However, I think you would agree, Mr Speaker, that it is totally unacceptable, even if entirely predictable, that the Government waited until the final few hours of the parliamentary term to release the new Shaw report and their response to it. I want to welcome some of what the

[David Linden]

Secretary of State has laid out in the report and in his statement, but I think we would all agree that immigration detention is a fundamental question of human rights, liberty and the rule of law, and it is outrageous that the Government are running away from scrutiny on this issue. Will the Secretary of State ensure that a full debate on the issue is scheduled for the first week back after recess?

As Scottish National party MPs have said in this Chamber time and again, the large-scale and routine detention of tens of thousands of people in large-scale private prisons, simply for the Home Office's administrative convenience, is an affront to the rule of law and a stain on this democracy. In the light of the second Shaw report, will the Secretary of State accept that the time for tinkering is over and that we need radical reform of detention policy? Will he commit to a programme of closure of large-scale detention facilities and to ensuring that detention is a matter of last resort, rather than routine, with a goal of drastically cutting the numbers held in such facilities? I hear what he has said today, but I urge him to implement a time limit on detention similar to what we see in other EU countries. If he will not, will he allow the House to vote on the issue?

Sajid Javid: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but say gently that he was a little ungenerous to start by suggesting that the Government have waited until the last day before the recess. We have not been in possession of the report for long and it takes a few days for us to respond to it properly and to come forward with progress on it, so I ask him to reflect on that and approach this issue in a more constructive spirit if he really does want to help, rather than trying to score cheap political points.

The hon. Gentleman asked about an opportunity to debate the issue; I think that would be good and will raise it with the Leader of the House. The work of Select Committees and others will be very welcome scrutiny. He mentioned the size of the detention estate; I hope he welcomes the fact that the total number of available places, rather than of individual detention centres, is falling. As I said, the number of places has fallen by a quarter in the past year, which shows the direction of travel. I do want to see fewer people being detained. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that detention is a last resort. The default for immigration enforcement policy is not to detain. If someone is detained, it must be a last resort.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement, particularly the various pilot projects and especially the management of vulnerable women in the community rather than at Yarl's Wood. Will the Home Secretary explain how that will work in practice and how many women we are talking about?

Sajid Javid: The total number of women currently in detention in Yarl's Wood is roughly 260, which as I said earlier is around 9% of the total of number of people currently in detention. We will be working on the pilot project with the UNHCR and possibly with a non-governmental organisation. Those organisations will lead the design of the pilot, but its aim will be, in cases in which the individual may ordinarily have gone to

Yarl's Wood, to work with them on a plan instead, with a contract to which they agree, and for them to be settled in the community and therefore kept out of detention centres.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the measures that the Home Secretary has announced today and look forward to scrutinising them in our ongoing immigration detention inquiry. I should say to him that we have heard some quite shocking evidence in that inquiry, including recognised torture victims still being locked up for many months. There is repeated evidence that the indefinite nature of detention is not only traumatising for those who are being held, but means that there is no pressure on the Home Office and immigration system to make the swift decisions that we need, so I join the shadow Home Secretary in urging him, as speedily as possible, to bring an end to indefinite detention.

Sajid Javid: I look forward to the Select Committee's scrutiny. The right hon. Lady is right to point out that, sadly, some vulnerable people will have been victims of torture. Where those claims are made, they should all be properly looked at, which is why I said in my statement that I want to look again at how rule 35 works, so that when people make those claims, they are properly and thoroughly assessed and taken seriously. On time limits and detention, I hope that she welcomes what I have said about doing more work and about having a proper review. I also want to reassure her that challenges have been built into the system. For example, independent panels will challenge whether someone still needs to be detained, and there are gatekeepers when someone arrives at the detention centre. We have learned from the Windrush cases that those systems have not always worked, so there will be more lessons to learn, and I look forward to working with her on those issues.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I am a former member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and we were given access to two of the case files of the Windrush generation who appear to have been illegally detained. I very much welcome the Home Secretary's response to the Shaw report today. Will he confirm that he is putting in place systems to ensure that no one is detained against the evidence?

Sajid Javid: I know very well the two cases to which my hon. Friend refers. As we are still working on Windrush cases, there may well be further cases, sadly, from which we will need to learn lessons as well. I can give my hon. Friend confidence that we are doing everything we can to make changes to ensure that the evidence is followed. For example, I have announced a change today to pilot an automatic bail process of two months, rather than waiting for four months. We need to learn more from the Windrush cases, which is why the lessons learned review will be important, and I am sure that it will show us what more we can do to improve detention.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for his statement. He mentioned the role of detention gatekeepers, but will he look at how screening can be made more proactive and less dependent simply on information that the Home Office

already holds so that those detention decisions are made with the fullest possible information and at the very earliest stage of the process?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. Following the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), I referred to two reasonably well known cases from Windrush of two individuals who were unlawfully detained. Those cases showed that a number of lessons needed to be learned. One was that the gatekeeper process was not working well enough. Part of that was to do with a lack of information. Had information been accessed from other sources—perhaps public sources where information was held—we might have had a different outcome. She makes a very important point and it will be looked at.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Can the Home Secretary offer further detail on the support that the Government intend to provide for vulnerable detainees, particularly in terms of training and support for staff working in the immigration system?

Sajid Javid: One of my announcements today was about more support for vulnerable detainees. They included a number of things such as looking again at how rule 35 works, the bail referral process and, as my hon. Friend mentioned, staff training. We are looking at exactly how that can work within the Department, but we want to make sure that not just the gatekeeper staff and those who are at the entry point when someone comes into detention but all staff have some level of training to help spot vulnerable people. The reality is that if someone is vulnerable, they may not always come forward; in many cases, they do not. There are things that one can look for to help to spot people in that situation and try to help.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Shaw's foreword says:

"The time that many people spend in detention remains deeply troubling...over half of those detained are...released back into the community."

It also says that the number of vulnerable detainees has actually increased. Is that not a record of the Home Office failing to act swiftly on Shaw's first report, and is not the most damning part of Shaw's report his criticism of the total failure of the Home Office in the past two years to examine properly alternatives to detention? Is the Secretary of State today accepting Shaw's recommendations 43 and 44 on alternatives to detention—yes or no?

Sajid Javid: That is a very partial reading of Mr Shaw's report by the right hon. Gentleman. I appreciate that he has not yet had much time to read the whole report, but I do encourage him to do so. I think that he will find that, as well as rightly finding issues and challenging us to do more, which I am and which we will continue to do, Mr Shaw talked about the progress that we have made, including on alternatives to detention. One example of how we intend to take that recommendation forward is the one I gave earlier about piloting a new programme to do with women in detention.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I welcome the report as a step in the right direction, but as with

all reports, it is the implementation that matters. Has the Secretary of State set a timescale for its implementation, and does he have the resources?

Sajid Javid: On the timescale, I have announced four broad measures today. Internally, we are working on what can be implemented. Some of them are much more immediate. Some of the policies need amending. Others will take time to put in place, such as starting some of the new pilot projects about alternatives to detention in the community. On resources, I am sure that I have the resources from now until the end of this spending round. I will then need to have further discussions with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): There is so much to welcome in the Home Secretary's announcement today. I am particularly pleased to hear about the pilot and evaluation of the new system for vulnerable women. I urge him to take that evaluation very carefully and make sure that we get it right. He mentioned a lack of evidence on the question of a time limit. Will he look, or look again, at the report on detention written by my predecessor as chair of the all-party group on refugees, the previous hon. Member for Brent Central? The co-chair is my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). That report was carried out in 2014 and published in 2015. I think that the Home Secretary will find that there is a great deal there to recommend it. Will he meet me and my hon. Friend to discuss the findings of that report?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and for her welcoming of the pilot regarding vulnerable women. I will happily take a proper look at that report. I have seen a summary of it, but as I am looking for some more summer reading to do, that is a very good suggestion. When Parliament is back after the summer, I would be very happy to meet her and her colleague.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I visited Yarl's Wood a few weeks ago. The overwhelming sense that I got was that the indefinite nature of detention is what makes it such a mental torture. People literally do not know how long they will be there or why they are there. It is a Kafkaesque nightmare. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge in particular that the adults at risk policy is fundamentally flawed because detention itself makes people more vulnerable? May I echo those others who have called on him to make it a priority to end administrative detention for immigration purposes, perhaps starting with a 28-day limit, but, ultimately moving to end it, because it makes vulnerable people more vulnerable and it does not work.

Sajid Javid: It is good that the hon. Lady has visited Yarl's Wood, because that is the kind of scrutiny that we need. *[Interruption.]* I have just heard her say that it took time to get permission. I am sorry to hear that. However, it is good that she has visited and seen the centre at first hand. That does not necessarily mean that I agree with her entire assessment following her visit, but I am very happy to listen to her experience and her thoughts. Although I said at the start of my statement that administrative detention plays an important role when done properly in our immigration system, I do think—this is where we could agree—that there should

[Sajid Javid]

be more alternatives to detention so that people can be held in the community, rather than in a detention centre, while their cases are being looked at. I hope that she welcomes some of the announcements that I have made today, but I am looking to do more and would be happy to hear her ideas about alternatives.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I welcome this Home Office-commissioned review. I also welcome the Secretary of State's words on the women in Yarl's Wood, who often do not know what they have been detained for. I have a letter from the Home Secretary in which he rightly condemns harassment and intimidating behaviour towards women, but regarding a Home Office review into women seeking abortion healthcare he also says:

"I will...make an announcement before the summer recess" and that he will do so
"with a view to making recommendations".

That review was announced by the Secretary of State's predecessor in November, and it closed in February. It took 160 Members from both sides of the House, including the Father of the House and the Chairs of the Select Committees on Home Affairs, on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs and on Health and Social Care, to get the undertaking in this letter. There are four hours left until the recess. Will the Secretary of State be able to deliver on his word for vulnerable women everywhere?

Sajid Javid: I am happy to write the hon. Lady about the issue that she raises, but I am afraid that it has nothing to do with the statement that I made today.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. He refers to Stephen Shaw's focus on the need for greater transparency

and promises to publish more data. I was surprised to discover in an answer to a parliamentary question in May this year that the Department does not collect data on people who are re-detained, so we have no information at all about how many people may be re-detained within one month or six months of their initial period of detention. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be really useful to have that information so that we have a much clearer picture of what is happening?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, following on from my point about transparency and Mr Shaw's point in his report. I hope that he welcomes some of the measures that I announced today. I will take a closer look at his point regarding data on re-detention.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Last but certainly not least, I call Mr Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The good book says that the first shall be last and the last shall be first, so I am pleased to be called at any time. I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He has given a commitment to review the imposition of a limit on the amount of time for which an asylum seeker can be detained. I welcome that, but what specifically can be done for pregnant women—not in a long-term review, but now?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Just to be clear, I talked about a review of time limits, but this is not just for asylum seekers; we do not detain asylum seekers as a matter of policy at all. The intention is always to deal with cases in the community. I just want to clarify that I am talking about looking at the time limit for detentions full stop, regardless of who is in detention. I will look into the hon. Gentleman's further question and write to him.

Points of Order

3.13 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I believe that yesterday Mr Speaker received an email from a law firm, Trowers & Hamblins, which represents Octagon Overseas Ltd and Mr John Christodoulou in enforcement action against leaseholders at Canary Riverside in my constituency. The law firm asked for my Adjournment debate scheduled for later today—"First tier tribunals, section 24 powers and enforcement on freeholders"—not to take place, claiming that the debate will be subject to sub judice rules. I have no intention of raising any sub judice matter. My debate is about the weaknesses in the rules concerning both first-tier tribunals and the section 24 powers of the court in general.

Mr Deputy Speaker, can you first confirm that my debate will go ahead, despite the attempted gagging email? Secondly, will you agree such efforts to direct you and Mr Speaker to stifle debates and to prevent MPs from raising matters of concern for their constituents are heavy-handed and wholly inappropriate?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he wished to raise this matter. It may be helpful if I first make it clear that the House's sub judice resolution is not an externally-imposed rule, but a self-denying ordinance by which the House has agreed to limit its freedom of speech by avoiding references in debate to cases that are active before the UK courts. Certain exemptions apply and the resolution is subject always to the discretion of the Chair. It is not always practicable for the Chair or those who advise us to identify all cases that might come up in debate, or to ascertain in a timely way what the current status of those cases is. It can be quite helpful to be alerted to such cases, and there is nothing wrong with outside parties writing to draw our attention to potential sub judice concerns.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's questions, I can confirm that his Adjournment debate will go ahead today. I am grateful for his assurance that he has no intention of raising any matter that is sub judice. I would not characterise the letter that Mr Speaker received yesterday as "wholly inappropriate", though I agree that the final paragraph was ill conceived in arguing that it was imperative that the debate should not go ahead. I hope that this response is satisfactory to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for your response to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick).

If I speak in the Adjournment debate, I shall be referring to something with discretion, which I hope will not invite the Chair to intervene.

Can we ask for the Procedure Committee to decide whether any letter of that kind should always be sent to the Member of Parliament involved, as well as to the Speaker, so that the Member of Parliament knows what is going on behind the scenes? Can it also be clarified that this applies to courts of first instance, and does not normally apply to appeal courts, which are thought not to be influenced by what happens in Parliament?

Mr Deputy Speaker: First, I know that the hon. Gentleman always uses discretion—I would expect nothing else from such a senior Member. Regarding the second part of the hon. Gentleman's point of order, I would like to refer to colleagues and come back to him.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have reason to believe that the Government are intending to make a very substantial announcement about changing their policy on privatised probation services soon after the House rises for summer recess. This announcement is expected to involve handing over tens of millions of pounds more in yet another bail-out for these private probation companies, in response to a damning Justice Committee report that described the privatised probation system as "a mess". I seek your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker, about what may be done to ensure that when the Government are responding to a damning Select Committee report with a controversial change in policy involving perhaps tens of millions of pounds of additional public money being spent, they make their announcement in a timely manner and in this Parliament, with all the scrutiny that that entails, rather than in the pages of the newspapers when the House is not sitting.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I can understand the concerns of the shadow Secretary of State for Justice about this happening at the last minute. As we know, court closures have been announced today, including the court in my constituency. This announcement has also come on the last day before the summer recess, so I do understand the hon. Gentleman's point and have some sympathy with him.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he wished to raise this matter. I agree that it is unsatisfactory if the Government make major policy announcements when the House is in recess, since those announcements cannot be subject to immediate parliamentary scrutiny. Departments should not plan to do this, but I appreciate that it is sometimes inevitable and that it may, on occasions, be necessary for the Government to announce matters when the House is not sitting.

I note from the number of written statements listed on today's Order Paper—21 in total—that Departments do attempt to avoid this, but making a host of last-minute announcements on the day before the recess is, of course, quite unhelpful to all Members affected on both sides of the House and the people they represent.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have given advance notice of this both to Mr Speaker and the Secretary of State for Defence.

When I arrived home last Thursday evening, I saw on the television screen that the Secretary of State for Defence had been filmed in the Govan shipyards in my constituency. I have not yet received notification from the Secretary of State that he was planning to visit the Glasgow South West constituency. Surely a member of the Cabinet should adhere to the parliamentary protocols of this House. Is there a way that the Executive could be notified of the parliamentary protocols when they, in their positions as Ministers, are visiting the constituencies of other hon. Members?

Mr Deputy Speaker: You are absolutely right—it is a well-established convention that we do tell each other when we are visiting Members' constituencies. I think that the Secretary of State for Defence is a very courteous gentleman, and I would like to think that this is an oversight. The matter is certainly on the record. I am sure that the Secretary of State will reflect on this when it is mentioned to him and drop the hon. Gentleman a note. I would say to all Members that it is discourteous not to let others know about visits. I do not care which side of the House it comes from; we should do the right things by this House and the right things by each other.

Civil Aviation (Accessibility)

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

3.20 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the accessibility of air travel for people with disabilities; to establish requirements about parking at airports for people with disabilities; to require airports and airlines to report steps taken to improve accessibility; to require a named person to be responsible for air passengers with disabilities; to make provision about the design and adaptation of aircraft to meet the needs of passengers with disabilities; and for connected purposes.

Uncomfortable, unsafe and undignified: those words sum up the experience of air travel for many disabled people. Imagine being strapped into a chair and hoisted up on to a plane in front of dozens of other waiting and watching passengers. One wheelchair user told me that that made him feel like a circus act. Then there is the waiting, with disabled passengers sitting in the plane while their friends, family or colleagues are already well through arrivals. That hit the headlines earlier this year when Frank Gardner, the BBC security correspondent, was left on an empty plane at Heathrow for an hour and a half while staff scrabbled about looking for his wheelchair. His angry tweet was liked over 10,000 times and retweeted nearly 5,000 times.

Some of us are looking forward to foreign holidays over the recess, but flying is not a luxury and it is not just for leisure. In a world that is becoming ever more connected, many jobs demand frequent air travel, as my colleagues from Scotland and Northern Ireland will know. It is unacceptable for those jobs to be unavailable to disabled people: that is discrimination. I first became aware of this problem when my constituent Dustine West, who has a spinal injury, came to my surgery and told me that he had driven to Gatwick last year only to find that all the disabled parking bays were full, despite having pre-booked one.

If that is how difficult it is just to arrive at the airport, imagine what the rest of the journey is like. Once the person gets to the airport, staff at the check-in desk may not be trained to recognise their disability and might not know how to help them, especially if it is a hidden disability such as autism or dementia. If the person is deaf, they will not hear an announcement of a last-minute change of gate and might end up missing their flight as a result. As a wheelchair user, they may be the last person to board, manhandled into their seat in front of a packed cabin—a mortifying experience. Once they are in their seat, they cannot get out, even to go to the toilet. I have heard that people avoid drinking water for hours before a flight so that they are not caught short, and also use incontinence pads. I was told about a disabled teenage boy being ordered to evacuate his bowels before boarding the plane—ordered to do so.

During the flight, the wheelchair may be stored in the hold and could be lost. It is annoying when the airline loses your suitcase, but if you lose your wheelchair, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is like you or me losing our legs. If it is not lost, it may be damaged. Airlines pay about £1,500 in compensation for damaged equipment, but that is only a fraction of the cost of a wheelchair, especially a modern power wheelchair. For instance, a

young woman told me about her first business trip at a new company. It was a day trip to Frankfurt with the team manager, with a packed schedule of meetings but no leeway allowed for all the extra time that would be required because she was in a wheelchair. They were late to arrive and had to leave early. The culmination was several hours waiting at the end of the day at Heathrow because the airline broke her wheelchair. There was no insurance that would cover it, so she had to pay the bill herself, although fortunately she was able pass it on to her employer, but that is another unhelpful disincentive to employing people with disabilities.

These stories are common, but thankfully not every journey is like this. I have heard some good stories. One disabled traveller spoke highly of Virgin and how well prepared it was to support her. I am told that Spain has an excellent system at its airports called “sin barreras”, or “without barriers”, which means that people get a consistently good, standardised experience across airports. However, experiences vary between airports, between airlines, and between routes. That lack of consistency means that disabled people never know what to expect when booking a flight.

The Government have recognised this and have been working closely with the airlines and airports to make improvements. The Government’s latest document on their aviation strategy refers to the importance of training for airline and airport staff in helping people with disabilities, and the need to look at future aircraft design, including how to make sure that planes have disabled toilets. We are already seeing improvements. The Civil Aviation Authority’s report on accessibility, which was published two weeks ago, classified 16 airports as “very good”—that is up from six in the previous year—but there is more that can and should be done to make travelling by air with a disability easier every step of the way.

This Bill will help to make flying more accessible for all—it will make flying fairer. First, it will mandate a minimum proportion of disabled parking bays in airports and make the industry look at how to make dropping off disabled passengers easier. If a carer is needed in order to travel, let us see the cost of the carer’s ticket covered by the airline, because it should not cost a disabled person double to travel. Staff at airports and on planes must be better trained so that the whole journey—from car park, to check-in, to getting off the

plane—can be painless and dignified. Wheelchairs should be kept safe during the flight, with as many as possible stored in the cabin rather than in the hold. If wheelchairs have to go in the hold and are damaged, there needs to be compensation that reflects the actual cost of the damage. There should be no more passing the buck; there should be a named person responsible for a disabled passenger for their whole journey. In the longer term, planes should be designed with disabled passengers in mind—for instance, with disabled toilets and enough space for all wheelchairs to be stored in the cabin.

The CAA has a powerful role to play in making sure that the airline industry steps up and takes this seriously, so this Bill will place a legal requirement on airlines and airports to send reports about accessibility to the CAA, which can then name and shame the worst, not only giving disabled passengers more information when booking flights, but incentivising improvement in its own right. We have already seen how powerful this can be. Heathrow, for example, has made huge improvements since the CAA called out areas where it was letting passengers down. I would also urge the Government to consider how they can empower the CAA to enforce regulations.

But this is not just about regulating the airline industry; it is about equality for the 3 million disabled passengers who fly to and from the UK every year. This week, disability campaigners from around the world have travelled to London for the Global Disability Summit, but their journeys may well have been a nightmare. Disabled people should have the same opportunities and freedoms as able-bodied people. While most of the population have benefited from air travel becoming easier, cheaper and part of everyday life, the thought of getting on a plane fills many disabled people with dread. Let us end this discrimination and make flying fairer—that is the intention of this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Helen Whately, Heidi Allen, Dr Lisa Cameron, Alex Chalk, John Mc Nally, Alex Cunningham, Michael Fabricant, Kate Green, Lady Hermon, Jeremy Lefroy, Mrs Maria Miller and Dr Sarah Wollaston present the Bill.

Helen Whately accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November and to be printed (Bill 257).

Standards

3.29 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):
I beg to move,

That this House—

(1) approves the Third Report of the Committee on Standards HC 1397;

(2) endorses the recommendations in paragraphs 34 and 35;

(3) accordingly suspends Ian Paisley from the service of the House for a period of 30 sitting days, beginning on Tuesday 4 September; and

(4) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 45A, directs that Mr Paisley's salary shall be withdrawn for 30 days, from Tuesday 4 September till Wednesday 3 October.

It is always regrettable when the House has to debate a motion of this kind, and we do so following a full process of investigation and consideration by a recognised due process. This motion follows the publication of the Committee on Standards' third report of the Session, on the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). The report was published on Wednesday 18 July, and the Government sought to schedule a debate as quickly as possible, in line with usual practice.

The matters before the House have been investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and reported on by the Committee on Standards. I thank the former commissioner, Kathryn Hudson, and the current commissioner, Kathryn Stone, for their work. I also thank the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron), the Chair of the Committee on Standards, and other members of the Committee for their work in producing last week's report. The Committee has concluded that there has been a failure to meet the standards expected by the House, and the Committee considers that hon. Member for North Antrim has "committed serious misconduct".

Members may have noticed that the motion originally tabled under remaining orders last week has been slightly altered. This follows correspondence between me and the Chair of the Committee on Standards in which he clarified the Committee's recommendations. The letter from the right hon. Member for Rother Valley reads:

"The Committee's recommendation was that Mr Paisley should be suspended from the service of the House for a period of 30 sitting days beginning on 4 September. The intention of the Committee was that Mr Paisley should forfeit his parliamentary salary for an equivalent period, i.e. 30 days. However, I understand that the effect of simply suspending him for a period of 30 sitting days, without making separate provision for his salary, is likely to be that he will automatically forfeit that salary for a longer period than 30 days, because of the inclusion of non-sitting days in the overall period of suspension. That was not the Committee's intention."

I have therefore tabled today's motion, which reflects the Committee's intended recommendations.

The motion before the House therefore approves the report of the Committee on Standards, endorses the Committee's recommendations and proposes suspension for 30 sitting days and withdrawal of the salary of the hon. Member for North Antrim for 30 days. I commend the motion to the House.

3.32 pm

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): I shall not detain the House long, because all the relevant arguments and background material are set out in the Committee on Standards' report and in the memorandum from the independent Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards that accompanied it.

The investigation started under Kathryn Hudson, as the Leader of the House said, and both commissioners did a meticulous job of investigating this matter over many months. They point out that the process could have been considerably shorter if Mr Paisley had been more co-operative initially, though the current commissioner is careful to point out that in the later stages of her inquiry, Mr Paisley showed a greater sense of urgency and was proactive in putting together costings for his visits to Sri Lanka.

It is those visits that were at the heart of our inquiry. Mr Paisley made three visits to that country in 2013, all of them paid for by the Sri Lankan Government. The first two visits, in March/April and July 2013, also involved members of Mr Paisley's family—five family members on the first visit, and three on the second visit. At that time, the threshold above which a visit had to be registered in the Register of Members' Financial Interests was £660. It is still not firmly established how much the two earlier visits in 2013 cost, but Mr Paisley, who initially argued for a cost in the area of £20,000, now accepts a figure of £50,000. In our view and that of the commissioner, it may have been much higher. The point is that the cost massively exceeded the threshold for registration, but Mr Paisley did not register either visit.

Mr Paisley travelled again to Sri Lanka in November 2013, again at the expense of the Government there, to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Colombo. On that occasion, he travelled without his family, and he did punctually declare the financial benefits he received.

In March 2014, Mr Paisley, along with other MPs, wrote to the Prime Minister to urge the British Government to change their foreign policy towards Sri Lanka by withdrawing their stated support for a UN resolution setting up an international investigation into human rights abuses. In this letter, he did not declare any of the financial benefits he and his family had received from the Sri Lankan Government in the previous 12 months.

The commissioner found that Mr Paisley was in breach of the rules relating to registration in respect of the two earlier visits in 2013. He accepts this. She also found that he breached the rules by not making a declaration in his letter to the Prime Minister and, most seriously of all, that he breached the rule against paid advocacy in that letter by lobbying the British Government to confer an exclusive benefit on a foreign Government from which he and his family had accepted financial benefits within 12 months of having received them. Mr Paisley disputed these findings of the commissioner. On his failure to declare, the commissioner points out that his arguments are based on a misunderstanding of the rules. We share the commissioner's view, and we concluded that Mr Paisley was in breach of the rules of declaration.

On paid advocacy, the situation is slightly more complicated, but we and the commissioner both came to a clear decision. Mr Paisley argues that he did not breach the paid advocacy rule on two grounds. The first

is that the rule, as it stood in 2014, prohibits advocacy that seeks to confer benefit exclusively on a body outside Parliament from which Members have received a financial benefit. Mr Paisley claims that his letter to the Prime Minister was not seeking to confer a benefit exclusively upon Sri Lanka in that the British Government stood to benefit too because they

“would not have had to pay for the internationalisation of the internal political affairs of another country through the auspices of the UN.”

We were not persuaded by this argument. We point out that, in diplomatic terms, the UK would arguably have suffered at least as much as it gained by withdrawing its publicly announced support from an initiative aimed at promoting international human rights observance. In financial terms, Mr Paisley supplied no evidence to support his view that this shift in policy would have saved money for the UK Government. We think that it is entirely reasonable to interpret his letter to the Prime Minister as seeking to confer a benefit exclusively on the Sri Lankan Government.

Mr Paisley’s other argument arises from an apparent inconsistency in the guidance provided in 2014 on the paid advocacy rule. The Registrar of Members’ Financial Interests drew our attention to this matter, which had not been raised in the commissioner’s original memorandum. We thought it only fair to share the information with Mr Paisley, and offer him the opportunity to submit further evidence addressing this point. He has done so, and we have carefully considered it.

I should mention that we and the commissioner have been careful throughout this investigation to assess Mr Paisley’s conduct against the rules and the guidance that actually applied back in 2013 and 2014, taking no account of any subsequent modifications that are not relevant to the case. Although we acknowledge that there was indeed inconsistent guidance in 2014—the House has subsequently put that right—we are clear that this does not exonerate Mr Paisley from breaching the paid advocacy rule. We set out our reasons in paragraph 27 of the report, but I will mention just the first reason because it is decisive in itself. Even if one accepts Mr Paisley’s interpretation of the rule, rather than that of successive commissioners, it would only exempt Mr Paisley’s own visit to Sri Lanka from the application of the rule; it would not exempt those of his family, which represent a significant financial benefit received by Mr Paisley.

We were therefore in no doubt that the commissioner was right to find that Mr Paisley breached the rules in respect of registration, declaration and paid advocacy. In assessing a suitable sanction, we considered what might be taken to be mitigating and aggravating factors. Mitigating factors are Mr Paisley’s apology for failing to register, his recent activity in analysing the likely costs of the visit, and his acceptance that he needed a “far greater understanding” of the rules. Aggravating factors are the scale of the unregistered, undeclared hospitality received by him and his family, grounds for thinking that the failures to register were, to use the commissioner’s words, “not inadvertent”, and his delays in dealing with the commissioner in the early stages of her inquiry.

Taking these factors into account, we concluded that Mr Paisley had committed serious misconduct, and that his actions

“were of a nature to bring the House of Commons into disrepute”,

which is a further breach of the code of conduct. Because we regard this as an especially serious case, we have recommended that Mr Paisley be suspended from the service of the House for a period of 30 sitting days, starting on 4 September 2018.

The motion before the House today makes separate provision for the withdrawal of Mr Paisley’s salary, and I should say a word or two by way of explanation about that. The intention of the Committee was that Mr Paisley should be suspended from the service of the House for 30 days, and that he should forfeit his parliamentary salary for an equivalent period—that is, also 30 days. However, I have been advised that the effect of simply suspending him for 30 sitting days without making separate provision for his salary is likely to be that he will automatically forfeit that salary for a period longer than 30 days, because of the inclusion of non-sitting days in the overall period of suspension. That was not the Committee’s intention. In retrospect, we could have been clearer about that in the wording of our report. I am therefore grateful to the Leader of the House for having acceded to my request to table today’s motion in a form that makes clear the Committee’s intention and avoids any ambiguity over the period of time for which Mr Paisley’s salary will be withdrawn.

We also recommend that Mr Paisley should register the benefits he received from the Sri Lankan government, which will be italicised in the Register to indicate that they are a late entry.

Finally, I should mention that the lay members of the Committee played a full and active part in the drawing up of the Committee’s report, which they are in full agreement with.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House has agreed to the motion in the name of the Leader of the House to suspend the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) for 30 sitting days. Under the terms of section 5 of the Recall of MPs Act 2015, I am now required to write to the relevant electoral officer, informing him or her that a Member has met one of the conditions that make the Member subject to a recall petition under that Act, namely that, following a report from the Committee on Standards in relation to the MP, the House of Commons has ordered the suspension of the Member from the service of the House for a period of 10 sitting days or more.

Any recall petition will be administered in accordance with the provisions of the Act by that electoral officer. For those who take a keen interest in these matters—I am partly taking the time to state all this because it is the first occasion upon which I have been required so to act—I would add that the electoral officer has 10 working days to set up and open the petition for signature, or longer if it is not practicable to do it within that time. If the petition achieves the necessary number of signatures—at least 10% of the number of eligible registered electors in that constituency—in the specified period of six weeks, the electoral officer notifies me and the seat is made vacant from the date of that notification.

I hope that explanation is helpful to the House. This is a regrettable state of affairs, but I thank the Leader of the House for what she said in moving the motion and I would like to thank the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron), the Chair of the Standards Committee, for briefing the House in the way that he has done.

Summer Adjournment

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.—(*Mims Davies.*)

3.45 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I am grateful for the chance to speak. If my leg stops me being here at the end, it is not that I want to miss the reply from the Minister, but I want what I say to be shared with the Metropolitan police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Secretary of State for Justice and the Home Secretary. I will send it to the Prime Minister as well, who, in answer to my question at Prime Minister's questions some months ago, remembered the meeting I had with her when she was Home Secretary. It goes back to the disgraceful case of the prosecution of former Sergeant Gurpal Virdi, one of the finest Metropolitan police officers I have known. I could go through a great deal of detail, but I will respect my colleagues who also want to speak.

Perhaps I can start by saying that, when speaking about the police, what comes to mind are stories of reliability, calm bravery and dedicated individuals. I hold Gurpal Virdi in the highest regard, both as an officer and as a friend. I have known him and admired him for nearly 20 years. It was an honour to be with his family at New Scotland Yard when senior officer Bernard Hogan-Howe—before he became Commissioner—apologised on behalf of the then Commissioner for the treatment Gurpal had been subjected to by the Metropolitan police. Hogan-Howe awarded him with a delayed special commendation for exemplary conduct in the case of a near fatal attack on a foreign student. How is it possible that such an impressive officer could be persecuted and prosecuted in both service and in retirement?

Stephen Lawrence lived and was murdered in my former south-east London constituency. I was aware of many of the deficiencies in the police investigation of that attack. Gurpal set a higher standard for policing. There were consequences to his commitment to combating racism and his initiatives following a west London case, where he found the weapon, arrested two suspects and visited the visitor's home. The trouble for him started when he asked whether it had been recorded as a potentially racist attack. Until cleared, Gurpal faced grim and persistent discriminatory action by his employer. I was one of those who stood up for him and advocated his innocence.

I do not have the words to properly describe the horror I felt when the CPS and the Metropolitan Police Service mismanaged the case that turned up 27 years after alleged events, and after Gurpal Virdi had retired, decided to go into local political service and was adopted to stand as a Labour councillor in Hounslow. His case was heard in 2015 in Southwark Crown Court. It lasted a week and ended with Gurpal's inevitable acquittal. In the public gallery, I watched and listened as prosecution witnesses, whose evidence was highly dubious or vague beyond belief, took to the stand. It was clear that he was not guilty of misconduct in public office. Charges were thrown in so that, if he were found guilty of an indecent assault on a young person, term could be added to the sentence. He had not assaulted a youth in a police van. The accusations were absurd and unjustified.

As Judge Goymer said in his summing up, which was admirably balanced, the chief prosecution witness, a former officer called Tom Makins, denied there had been an assault, denied it had been sexual, and in particular denied that Gurpal Virdi or any other officer he had known had had a collapsible police truncheon, which the complainant claimed had been put up his bottom. There was no criminal evidence that a crime had been committed and there was nothing to indicate that Gurpal Virdi had even been present. There are two bits of evidence that the police eventually disclosed, one of which they were aware of within days of the complaint first being received. It was that an officer arrested the complainant in the autumn of 1986—I am being slightly vague, because the person claimed to have been under 16 at the time, or actually, he had not claimed it, but the police thought he had claimed it—and the only surviving record from that arrest showed that it was by a PC Markwick, who was not interviewed by the police officers in the department of professional standards in the 15 months that it took to investigate.

The second bit of evidence that survived was the court record showing that Gurpal Virdi and an officer called Mady had arrested the complainant in the spring of 1987 and that, because the person was young, he was held in cells overnight and appeared in court the next day. When the person made the complaint, he did not mention the second arrest at all. He claimed that someone called George had arrested him the first time but, with the second arrest, he did not mention it in any of his interviews to the police, so the one thing that could be confirmed was left out of his memory, and the one thing that could not be confirmed was what the case was built on.

I could go on at length because I know the case backwards, but before it came to trial I wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the head of the Metropolitan police and the Home Secretary, spelling out that the statements from the so-called police witness—Mr Tom Makins, who I do not believe was there either—contradicted six of the major statements of fact made by the complainant: where the person was arrested, why he was arrested, what kind of police van it was, what happened in the police van, whether there was an indecent assault at any time and what was said to have happened in the police station afterwards. Tom Makins contradicted in terms every single one of those significant statements.

Let me go through the trial—I will abbreviate this, because I know that 29 other people want to speak. Before the trial, I had asked the Crown Prosecution Service and the police to note the names of everybody who made a significant decision in this case. After the case, Gurpal Virdi complained to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, as it was in those days, and what did it do? It referred the case to the head of the department of professional standards in the Metropolitan police—the people who cooked up the case against him in the first place.

I know my colleagues think that this is unbelievable, and so would I, if I had not been involved in it step by step and had not been in court. I say to people on the Front Bench: please make sure that the Minister for Justice and the Minister for the Home Office get together with the police and the CPS and ask what kind of inquiry they are going to have to review the decisions

that were taken all the way through. Sir Richard Henriques looked into some of these issues over the accusations of indecent assault by people such as Leon Brittan, Ted Heath and others. I demand the same kind of inquiry for Gurpal Viridi—not a well-known person, but one of the best police officers we have got—because if this injustice is allowed to continue unnoticed, without investigation, I think this House does not have the power that it ought to have to try to bring justice to ordinary people.

I say more gently through my hon. Friend the Minister to Cressida Dick, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, and to whoever succeeds Alison Saunders as the Director of Public Prosecutions at the Crown Prosecution Service: please get together and say what you two believe is the right way to have an experienced person review the evidence that I have put forward in part today—and is put forward in rather larger part in Gurpal Viridi's book, "Behind the Blue Line"—and take evidence from Matt Foot of Birnberg Peirce, Gurpal's solicitor, and Henry Blaxland QC, of Garden Court Chambers, who represented him in court. Until that happens, I cannot have the confidence I want to have. I would much prefer to go back to praising the police for the good things they do and the bravery they show in answering every blue-light call, every incident of domestic violence, terrorism issues, keeping order on the streets, preventing crime and helping young people to grow up well. Until this happens, my confidence is shaken, and I hope that those who have heard me join me in asking for the kind of inquiry that the police and CPS should voluntarily commit themselves to.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We will start with a time limit of seven minutes, but of course we have two maiden speeches to come, so that might have to be adjusted accordingly.

3.54 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley)

Some Members will have heard me speak before in the Chamber about the closure of the Britvic and Unilever factories in Norwich, corporate acts that will see hundreds of job losses and millions of pounds stripped and lost from the wider economy. If hon. Members are interested—and they obviously are because they are here—Colman's was started in the early 1800s by Jeremiah Colman, and the mustard brand, as many will know, has become a household name across the country. When I was a young lad, we did not ask that someone pass the mustard; we asked that they pass the Colman's. Some may still do.

In that time, Colman's has also become an integral part of the very fabric of the city of Norwich. I remember being taken to the top of Norwich city castle and being shown by an historian and archaeologist the physical structure of the city. It expands in concentric circles: the closer to the castle, the older the buildings, and one can see, moving outwards, a whole swathe of housing built by the Colman family to house the Colman workers. This institution—it is an institution in Norwich—is not just part of the physical structure of Norwich; it is part

of the very fabric of our city. The loss of money and jobs is part of the story, but the closure will have a real effect on the people of my city. Psychologically, it is a blow to the identity of Norwich, our history and our heritage. I am confident that we will recover—it is a resilient city—but none the less it is a blow.

As if that were not enough, I must now tell the House of the disgraceful way in which the workers and their trade union representatives have been disregarded by Unilever and especially Britvic. Some of these staff are third generation workers from families who have committed their entire working lives to a company that has now decided to leave the city, completely forgetting that they were the very people who helped to make the brand. When Britvic made the announcement about the Norwich closure, it stated that it was simply a proposal and that the final decision had not been made. It promised to run meaningful consultations and to listen to the issues raised, yet, just two days after the announcement, it started offering voluntary redundancies to members of staff. That is not the action of a company committed to meaningful consultation, and the consultation that followed was a total sham, with Britvic providing no real evidence for the closure and refusing to listen to alternatives put forward by workers that could have resulted in huge savings, kept the plant open and kept the workers in their jobs.

It was hardly a surprise when in December Britvic announced it would be moving its operations elsewhere. This was announced alongside a promise that it would treat the workers fairly and minimise the impact on the local community, which it did by offering workers the statutory minimum redundancy package. Seven months down the line and Britvic has shown absolute disdain for the community of workers that has united against this injustice, refusing to meet with union representatives and workers or to improve the redundancy package. As a result, the GMB trade union has been forced into an unprecedented situation where its only option is to strike. I stand in complete solidarity with these workers, who have planned 18 days of strikes over the next six weeks, and I think it a total disgrace that Britvic has shown no concern for the wellbeing of its employees.

Some people will shrug and say, "That is the way of the world." Others will say that there are plenty of other jobs for the sacked workers to go to, but the reality is that hundreds of workers in Norwich have been cast adrift by a Government and an economic system that has let all of us down again, a system that ignores the negative impact of de-industrialisation in cities outside London, a system where all that matters is how much and how quickly profits can be maximised, a system that legitimises Britvic in saying these closures are being made in the best interests of the business. Let us be clear: this decision was made in the best interests of the shareholders and executives who will receive huge profits when they sell off the Carrow Road site.

I applaud the valiant efforts of the unions, Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council and the local enterprise partnership to find a viable solution and keep those jobs in Norwich, but I cannot say the same for the Government. When the issue came to a head at the end of last year, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) promised that they would do all that they could to save the jobs of those workers. Where

[Clive Lewis]

is the evidence to show that they did anything of the sort? In fact, they have simply become part of a Government who have failed to understand the lessons of the past 35 years, which show that Government cannot be a spectator when it comes to industry.

The Government like to portray themselves as the party of business, but this is a prime example of how they have encouraged a system that works for the shareholders, not the workers. They have created a system whereby companies can pick and choose the members of a so-called “independent” consultation group, and a system whereby workers are only allowed reactive rights to challenge the authenticity of a consultation process after they have already lost their jobs. That is a disgrace.

I am devastated by the way in which the closures have been handled, and the disregard that the companies have shown for their workers and communities. I believe that we must review and overhaul the process by which we deal with site closures, closing the loopholes that help companies to flout the rules with little or no consequences once the gates are closed and production halted. When will the Government step up and create a safe and secure economic system that takes seriously the issues of de-industrialisation and unemployment in the most economically vulnerable towns and cities in the UK? It is not too late to intervene and ensure that these workers are listened to and treated with the respect that they deserve. The Government owe that to the workers at Britvic and Unilever, and they owe it to the city of Norwich.

4.1 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye in this important debate. I wish to raise four matters: the negative revenue support grant for Stroud District Council, the missing link on the A417, M4 and M5, the reasons for making the Cotswolds into a national park, and—this is the most important issue—the delays in the completion of a £400 million contract awarded to the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh in my constituency.

Stroud District Council sent a petition to the former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid). It explained that when it accepted the four-year revenue support grant settlement, it did so on the basis that business rates would remain the same, with 100% retention, and that the new homes bonus would also remain the same. It has subsequently been reduced. I suppose that the most worrying aspect of the negative revenue support grant is the fact that it affects 147 out of 200 district councils in England. Not only will councils not receive any of the grant next year, but some councils, such as Stroud, will have to pay money back to the Treasury.

The petition sent to my right hon. Friend reads as follows:

“Stroud District Council strongly objects to Central Government introducing a new stealth tax on local households by demanding the payment of £549,000 from Stroud District to the Treasury in 2019/20... It is a complete reversal of financial support and is a worrying precedent which seriously threatens the Council’s ability to continue providing essential local and facilities; especially if this payment turns out to be the thin end of a stealth tax wedge

which will see ever larger...payments of money siphoned off from local households to Central Government... Council therefore determines to lobby Central Government, through the District’s two Members of Parliament...for removal of the so-called Negative Revenue Support Grant of £549,000”.

There will be a review later in the summer, and I strongly urge my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to conduct that review in a way that is more favourable to one of the two district councils that I represent.

The second subject that I wish to raise is the missing link on the A419-A417, about which I have campaigned for some 15 years. It is a highly dangerous stretch of road on which, sadly, there have been far too many accidents and far too many fatalities in recent years. It is a very busy road that links the M4 to the M5. Finally, after a lot of campaigning, we had a public consultation earlier this year in which two routes were published. Option 30 was chosen, and it is very important that the Secretary of State lives up to his promise of announcing a preferred route at the beginning of next year, so that we can get on to the development consent order process and get diggers into the ground and start work on this important road in the very early 2020s.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for raising such an important point about the A417. Does he agree that the death of a young soldier in May on this treacherous piece of road underscores the importance of delivering that vital project, which is crucial for safety, air quality and the economy of Gloucestershire?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: The death of that young man was tragic, and I feel very sorry for his parents and his family. Unfortunately, this is just one of a number of fatalities, as my hon. Friend, who has worked with me very hard on this project, knows only too well. That is why it is imperative that this road scheme goes ahead, and he and I will shortly hold a meeting with the Treasury to make sure we get enough money for it.

The third subject I wish to raise is why the Cotswolds should be designated as a national park. Already 80% of my constituency is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. It is, as many Members will know, an important natural landscape and built environment, and I want to make sure that it continues to be protected so that our children and grandchildren can continue to enjoy this very special place. To that end, the chairman and chief executive and I visited the chief planner of the South Downs national park to see how well it operated, and we were impressed. We were also impressed by the number of similarities between our area and the SDNP—it covers 15 local authorities, and a national trail goes right through the middle—and that it seems to work very well in planning terms. There is a high standard of planning in the SDNP; it has very few call-ins, and when it does have appeals, it seems to win most of them because of the professionalism of its planning team. We could learn a lot from that, and the Cotswolds will get increased resources to pay for a lot of that if we are designated as a national park.

The defence fire and rescue contract was recently awarded, and announced publicly, to the Fire Service College in Moreton-in-Marsh. This contract is worth about £400 million over 12 years to the college. It will secure vital jobs in a part of my constituency where jobs

are desperately needed—the north of my constituency, which is a very rural part—and my constituents and the FSC employees were looking forward to running this contract, but it seems to have run into some delay. That is most regrettable, and I call on the Ministry of Defence to resolve whatever difficulties there are—I am not entirely sure what they are—as quickly as possible, because that would provide certainty for the workforce. This contract is much needed in my constituency.

I have had discussions with my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay), whose constituency contains Manston airfield where this activity is currently based, and he is very happy and wants to see this contract resolved as quickly as possible, because Manston airfield can then be used for an aviation freight hub opportunity and for further houses, which are desperately needed in his constituency.

I therefore call on the MOD to resolve the problems and to keep me, as the constituency Member of Parliament, informed. I should add that I have received superb help from the all-party group on fire safety and rescue. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) is present, and I thank him for his support over many years and months. The group's members have visited the college in Moreton-in-Marsh and seen for themselves the world-renowned excellence of this institution, and it will be made even better and the entire country will benefit if we can get this contract there and it can start selling its services to the rest of the world by proving, through this defence fire and rescue contract, that it is superb at what it does.

4.9 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It is good news that I have been called to speak so early, and I want to start with some good news relating to the last time that I was in this slot. I like to use this debate for unfinished business, and last time I mentioned a business in Park Royal called Sweetland, a baklava manufacturer of distinction. It is a patisserie that makes middle eastern food that goes to restaurants all over the west end, and it was having problems with HS2 over late payments relating to its relocation. The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) was the Rail Minister at the time, and he beavered away on this. As a result of his efforts and those of the Deputy Leader of the House, the company got its payments. In more good news, I am pleased to say that I was able to cut the ribbon the other day at the shiny new Sweetland factory in the East Acton ward. The company is very pleased.

I hope that the same magic can be worked again with a couple of other businesses whose cases I want to raise this afternoon. Next door to Sweetland is Med Food, which supplies olives. I emerged from there recently laden with jars of olives in different suspensions and flavours. It has not had a great time from HS2. Its relocation is being queried at every turn, and a receipt for bubble wrap that came in at under £200 was queried as unreasonable. Bubble wrap is the kind of thing that people need if they are relocating many hundreds of cubic metres of stock, and I wonder whether the Minister will look into Med Food's case.

Altenergy of Chiswick, London, W4, is a solar PV panel manufacturer. Its business was booming as recently as 2011, when it was among the top 100 companies in that

field. However, the industry has collapsed over the past couple of years, and the company's turnover has gone down by 80% since the end of the feed-in tariff scheme was announced in 2011. This is part of a pattern from this Government. They used to want us to hug a husky, but now we see their love of nuclear power at Hinkley Point, which is actually two nuclear power stations, and their Heathrow expansion, which they pushed through the other day, is completely at odds with what they used to believe in, as is all the rest of the un-green stuff that they are doing now.

Will the Minister tell us what will happen to Altenergy of Chiswick, London, W4? The company wants policy clarity and fair treatment for rooftop solar, which is a popular type of renewable energy. It is cheap and obviously green; it is the most popular thing in the global renewables market. It dominates the market globally, but in this country, our Government seem to be dangerously in hock to the nuclear industry, which is getting all the subsidy. Altenergy is very worried. It used to have large offices, but it has now relocated to a shed belonging to the chief executive officer, Rajiv Bhatia. It has massively downsized. It used to employ 50 people, but it now employs just a handful. Can the Minister give me any assurances about what will happen when the feed-in tariff goes next year? The company wants to know about net metering, which would provide some certainty. There is no indication that the export tariff will be maintained after 1 April. May we have some assurances on that? Quinn McGovern from Elan Global Renewables of Acton, W3, is in a similar predicament. Several of these companies are wondering whether they might be about to go to the wall.

The issues being experienced by those businesses are not Brexit-related, but I shall now come to the Brexit-related ones. Hamish Orr Ewing of Ealing, W5, is a wine merchant who runs Wine Source Group, an importer of fine wines. He is concerned that the Government's plan to ensure that importers pay VAT up front would "be terminal for many merchants".

He says that the UK wine industry contributes £9.1 billion to the public purse. He believes this plan to be an act of economic self-harm, and he would like some assurances.

We have heard a lot about the Windrush generation recently, and there are several Home Office-related business issues hitting Ealing and Acton. Manic Textiles wants to hire someone from Ukraine. He is skilled, but the company cannot pay him enough. When is this going to stop? We have ridiculous Government targets for the sake of targets that do not consider the skills gaps in our labour force. People may have seen on BBC News the case of a much-loved teacher at the Christ the Saviour Church of England Primary School who went back to Canada and now cannot come back because he does not earn enough. The situation is just nuts. In every case, the Home Office reply just seems to say, "Tough," which is a bit embarrassing to pass on to the constituent, so I wonder whether the Department will consider the quality of its responses.

The last case that I want to raise is a really sad one. I was contacted on 12 July by Karl and Abbie Pokorny, who wrote to me to say:

"Our family has had a hard few weeks. Our previously happy and healthy three-and-a-half-year-old daughter has ended up in a drug-induced coma on a heart and lung machine and is on the transplant list, waiting for a new heart."

[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

I think that a new heart would have come for this little girl in March 2019, and their question was about EU organ donation. We have heard about Galileo and the European Medicines Agency—luckily, a new clause was passed last week with the aim of keeping us in the EMA—but they were wondering about our access to organ treatment networks. I contacted them this morning to ask whether it is okay to raise Sophie’s case this afternoon, and I am sorry to say that she passed at the weekend, on Sunday. Perhaps that particular case—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry for making the tone a little dramatic—I did not wish to do that—but let us hope that Sophie’s death was not in vain. Such things should be uppermost in the negotiations. The answers to my written questions about such things are vague in the extreme and always say “in due course” or whatever.

Anyway, I will end my speech there, because I know that loads of people want to speak. Happy holidays to one and all!

4.16 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I wish to raise several points before the House adjourns for the summer recess, and I am delighted that so many colleagues have stayed to contribute to this debate. We really need a week to do justice to all the subjects that we cover.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) on his speech. We absolutely support everything he said about the college.

I was going to mention teachers’ pay, so I am delighted about today’s announcement of the 3.5% increase. I hope that that will do something to address the shortage of teachers.

I am delighted to tell the House that the parliamentary photographic competition, started by Austin Mitchell, restarted this year after a three-year gap. I am bragging when I say that I was in the top five, but I hope that colleagues will enter next year. There are wonderful prizes to be won.

I was proud to learn that Southend’s adoption service has outperformed other local authorities for the second year running. I congratulate everyone concerned.

I recently met some wonderful police cadets. I thank the volunteers who run the scheme at Southend police station—they do a fantastic job—for giving those youngsters such an excellent opportunity.

I went to the Hampton Court flower show, where Southend’s youth offending service gained its 10th medal in 11 years. The team was just one mark off the gold with its wonderful show called “A Place to Think”—I congratulate its members on their work.

I have always supported the Girlguiding movement. I was delighted to visit the 8th Leigh-on-Sea Girl Guides recently to see the wonderful work that they are doing.

Last week I attended a play at Westcliff High School for Boys by N-Act Theatre in Schools. The company was presenting an interactive play called “Friend” that aimed to teach children about the perils of gang culture and how to deal with peer pressure to join a gang. As a Londoner born and bred, I despair at what is happening in our capital city, and we must get everyone together to try to stop the epidemic. I pay tribute to the retiring Chief Constable Stephen Kavanagh of Essex police for doing a wonderful job.

The Colourthon is local charity started by the Southend Round Table in 2007, since when it has raised £1.6 million for more than 700 charities. The wife of Southend United football club’s chairman, with 58 volunteers, has raised money for her niece, Amy May.

Several constituents have raised loan charges with me, and it is deeply unfair that individuals are being pursued by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs for using entirely legal remuneration schemes involving loans. I urge the Government to initiate an open and truthful discussion on the matter.

I recently met Tamils in my constituency—in fact, I attended their games at the weekend—who are seeking to refer the Sri Lankan Government to the International Criminal Court for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide committed during the war and after its end in 2009. I support them in getting justice for all those who have been lost.

I was recently taken around the wonderful South Essex College by the deputy principal, Anthony McGarel. I also visited Edwards Hall Primary School and witnessed its scholars club, which gives young children the opportunity of a head start in working towards university education—a very big jump.

I also visited a food bank in my constituency that is run by Wesley Methodist Church, which does a fantastic job in helping the most vulnerable people in society.

I have raised the issue of the National Fund on a number of occasions. There is a big pot of money sitting there doing absolutely nothing. I met the chief executive of the Growth Partnership, and we need to do something about it. I want to have a meeting with the new Attorney General.

On restoration and renewal, my argument was lost by 17 votes. I am very concerned about the journey we are on. There are all sorts of issues, and I am not sure everyone realises the seriousness of the situation. We only have to see all the scaffolding going up to see how quickly things are moving.

On 14 June, I attended a rally in Parliament Square in support of banning live animal exports. My feelings about the horrific treatment that animals endure are amplified by my frustration that, despite the UK’s good record on animal welfare, we are powerless to ensure the equivalent treatment of British animals while in transit. I hope our animal welfare standards will spread throughout the world when we leave the European Union next year.

My constituent Elizabeth Smith is raising money for a disabled swing, and I hope someone will come up with some money to help her.

The removal of the local 25A bus service has caused great concern, and local councillor Meg Davidson is lobbying First Bus.

Mr Samit Biswas has a taxi company that provides transport for disabled people who are medically stable. There seems to be some sort of argument about the licence.

It is crazy that people can post disgusting comments on social media without having the guts to leave their name and address. They are absolute cowards.

America has presidential libraries, and it is about time we had something similar in this country. Perhaps we could call them prime ministerial houses. We have something for Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher, but all Prime Ministers need to be remembered.

I have a constituent who is upset about the Party Wall etc. Act 1996, which needs to be looked at.

Southend airport is wonderful, but I am getting more and more complaints about noise.

I am most angry on behalf of Mr Gregory Docherty. Four weeks ago his much-loved wife, Debbie, died of a brain tumour. Within four weeks, South Essex Homes sent him an eviction notice, despite his having lived in his property for 25 years. That is an absolute disgrace.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council is fantastic, and tourism is booming as a result of the wonderful weather. I could go on and on about Southend. It is about time that it became a city.

And Gareth Southgate—what a wonderful job he and his underrated footballers did in nearly bringing football home to this country. Some of us met the Emir of Qatar yesterday, and I suggested that it might be a wonderful World cup final if we saw England play Qatar.

I wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, Mr Speaker, all his deputies and all those who work in this place a very happy summer.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have been informed via a written ministerial statement that the Government have today published the revised national planning policy framework. It has not yet been laid before the House, and copies are therefore not available for Members in the Vote Office. This seems extraordinary, given the importance of the document to Members on both sides of the House. Is there anything that you can do to ensure that the document is available to Members before the House rises today?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order. As she says, there is a written ministerial statement today announcing the publication of the national planning policy framework. There is no legal requirement to lay this paper. As she says, it has been published online, although it is not available in the Vote Office. She has put on record her point about the inconvenience that this has caused to her and, I suspect, to other Members, and I think it would be good practice if such documents were available in the Vote Office. I am sure that her comments will have been noted by those on the Treasury Bench and that perhaps arrangements could be made for this document to be in the Vote Office before we rise.

4.25 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I want to take advantage of the debate to raise a few issues of concern to my constituents on which the Government could offer some assistance. On smart meters, the Government persist with the fiction that all is well, but we know that that simply is not true. There are problems with smart meters working in the north of the country, and installation figures are well behind schedule. There is no evidence to suggest that smart meters for gas supply are working on a commercial basis, and the Data Communications Company cannot or will not supply any evidence to show that its plan is on track. The promised dividend for consumers is plummeting, and the supply companies are blaming Government plans for increases in customers' bills.

When will the Minister responsible wake up to the fact that she needs to call a halt and conduct a serious review of this programme before she lands us all with a technological white elephant?

Tomorrow marks Louise Brown's 40th birthday. That should certainly be a cause for celebration, but although we have heard some encouraging words from Health Ministers, we are yet to see any action on fair access to IVF. The plight of one in six couples with a recognised medical condition continues to be ignored by many of the faceless bureaucrats running our health service. The provision of IVF is patchy and reducing across the country. Clinical commissioning groups are allowed to introduce arbitrary criteria to ration the service. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines are simply ignored, and the two-year-old exercise in price standardisation shows no signs of progress. We are supposed to be celebrating 70 years of the national health service, as well as the 40th birthday of Louise Brown, so when will Ministers take the health of those with fertility problems seriously and offer a national level of service to treat their illness?

Once again, my constituency is suffering from the cat-and-mouse game of illegal Traveller encampments. We have been promised a consultation, but what we need is action. We need action to ensure that all local authorities provide some sites for legitimate, law-abiding Travellers; and action to make it easier to remove and ban those who persistently break the law and treat local communities with contempt. This issue affects constituencies up and down the land, so why do the Government persist in ignoring it?

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): We have similar problems in Coventry to those that my hon. Friend mentions, and what he says is right. Many years ago, we used to have proper sites where Travellers could go. They could arrange for their children to go to school and, more importantly, there were facilities on those sites to provide cleanliness. Does he agree that we should do something similar?

Steve McCabe: I agree, and I think that the Government could help by offering some action. The process requires local authorities to work, and the Government need to give a lead.

Last Friday, I saw two women in succession at my advice centre who were living in a local Travelodge with their children. They are homeless, and both the victims of domestic violence. What is happening in the 21st century in this country that means our response to women and children fleeing domestic violence is to condemn them to a life of hostels and Travelodges? These establishments have no cooking or laundry facilities; children are forced to live on McDonald's and other takeaway meals.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly important speech. Does he agree that the situation is made even worse in the summer holidays, when children do not have access even to free school meals?

Steve McCabe: Yes, that is a real consideration. The situation is bad enough at any time, but it is much worse in this period. The reality is that these poor women are forced to spend their meagre incomes on takeaway

[*Steve McCabe*]

meals and at laundrettes. Surely a civilised society ought to be able to do better, and surely these women and their children deserve better.

Finally, I learned this week that phone giants Vodafone and O2 plan to ride roughshod over my constituents' views and erect a 17.5 metre phone mast in the heart of George Cadbury's garden village of Bournville. They have not consulted local residents because they are not interested in their views, and they have not obtained proper planning permission. Apparently, officers at the planning authority, in their wisdom, missed the deadline for registering the application, which had previously been refused, by one day. Vodafone and O2 pounced on that error to claim planning permission by default.

These are the people who stand accused of ripping off the British taxpayer through £6 billion in tax avoidance. Their profits are all that matters. Their chairmen do not have the courtesy to reply to letters from the local MP and even refuse to meet local residents. I wonder how Mark Evans or Gerard Kleisterlee would like having a 17.5 metre mast in their gardens. These companies are little more than tax-avoiding parasites, and it is time that we took some action to curb their arrogant, bullying activities. We ought to think seriously about measures to exert far more control over these people, who do not care about our country, our people or our environment.

4.31 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe); I agree with his remarks on all the issues he raised.

Let me start by saying that it is welcome news that we are going to see increased pay for public sector workers. That is particularly true for health workers, who do such a brilliant job for us. However, I have been contacted by staff from St Luke's Hospice, and by people from the hospice movement in general, who say that they are concerned that they are charities that raise more than two thirds of their money from charitable giving, but they have to pay their staff in accordance with health service rates. That means that they will have to raise more money through charitable donations to pay the increased rates. I want to see Government action to ensure that the hospice movement has additional funding so that the money from charitable donations does not just go to pay the staff who do such a brilliant job.

My Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force on 3 April, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak spoke about the problem of homelessness. The reality is that from 3 April, no one—but no one—should have been forced to sleep on our streets because there is nowhere for them to go. Up to 56 days before someone becomes homeless, the local authority should intervene to prevent that from happening and make an offer of housing.

There is still unfinished business, though. I note that at Question Time on Monday the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government seemed to have adopted my Act as its own. I am delighted that it has done so, but it took me a year of effort to get it on the statute book. I am glad that Ministers endorse it, but there is still unfinished business, because regulations are

due in October to ensure that other Government services, such as the health and prison services, as well as numerous others, refer people at risk of homelessness to local authorities to ensure that they do not become homeless. That includes people who have served in our armed forces and many others, including children leaving social care. We have yet to see the regulations; it is time that the Government laid them before the House so that we are in a position to scrutinise them when we return in September.

Along with several other Members from different parties, I attended the peace rally in Paris to celebrate the National Council of Resistance of Iran. We met Madam Rajavi and many others who are aiming for freedom and democracy in Iran. Little did we know that a terror plot had been launched by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to try to disrupt that proceeding and threaten our lives and the lives of the 100,000 people who had come to call for freedom and democracy in Iran. I hope that we will take action against Iran and make sure that the IRGC is proscribed as an organisation.

I always take Mr Speaker's sage advice to persist. I am delighted that I have persisted at Women and Equalities questions for nearly a year. In a written ministerial statement yesterday, finally we got the commitment from the Government to remove caste as a protected characteristic from the Equality Act 2010. Now we need to draw up the legislation and push it through Parliament. Those who put it there in the first place have to consider whether they will accept the challenge from the Government to remove it from the Act because it is unwanted, ill-thought out, unnecessary and extremely divisive for the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities across this country.

In some unfinished business, I take the view that our Jain community, of which there are some 50,000 in this country, should have the opportunity to declare on the census the religion of their celebration. At the moment, they have to fill in "other" on the census. I trust that when we come to the census 2021, they will have the opportunity to declare their religion quite openly and satisfactorily. It is very important in many parts of our country.

Equally, on unfinished business, justice for Equitable Life policyholders is still owed by the Government. Some £2.6 billion should go to those people who saved for their pensions but became victims of a scam. Unfortunately, previous City Ministers have decided that they will not meet the all-party parliamentary group, which I have the privilege of co-chairing. I am delighted to say that the current City Minister, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), has agreed to meet us at quarter to six on the first day back after the summer recess. I trust that the 230 members of the all-party group will be present in their droves to hold him to account.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Like me, does my hon. Friend feel very strongly that the Government still have a duty to Equitable Life policyholders, and that they should pay what they owe?

Bob Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Clearly, this is a debt of honour that we have agreed to pay. The debt is still outstanding, and

until it is paid, we will keep going. I say forcefully to those on the Front Bench that we will keep going with this until the Government pay up.

I have a number of other issues that I briefly want to mention before I sit down. We are rising for the summer recess, but we should remember that the majority of survivors of Grenfell Tower have yet to move into their permanent homes. I trust that, when we return, every single one of them will be moved into a permanent home that is suitable for their needs.

I also wish to raise the plight of Pinner Wood School in Harrow, which was found to be sited on an old mine and was in danger of collapsing. Very rarely do I congratulate Harrow Council, but in this case it took the very sensible decision to knock down the school and make it safe. However, the Government have refused to fund that decision, and are suggesting that the council and the council tax payers should pay for the cost of that safety measure. That is a shame. I do not believe that that is the right decision by the Government, and I trust that I and other hon. Members in Harrow will carry on applying pressure to make sure that the Government cover that cost.

Let me turn now to a couple of local issues. I must take this opportunity to raise the need for disabled access at Stanmore, Canons Park, Harrow and Wealdstone and Queensbury stations. They are all either in my constituency or border my constituency. I have been campaigning on these issues for 14 years. We still carry on the work. The fight will go on until we get proper access at those stations.

Equally, we need to face the challenge of the tri-borough arrangements for policing. This is a retrograde step for policing in London. I believe that there will be a further problem over the summer and I have been making representations on this issues for quite some time. I am concerned that we are not getting the police service that we need on the streets.

My office is experiencing a dramatic increase in the amount of immigration casework right across the piece. This is a concern because action by the Home Office is clearly causing this increase, and I trust that this will desist.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I end by wishing you, Mr Speaker and the whole House a very happy recess, when we will not be on holiday; we will be working.

4.40 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I wish to speak briefly on a matter that is of great concern to some of my constituents and that, unfortunately, I could not raise at MoHoCoLoGo questions yesterday. That matter is the way in which big housing developers across the UK are failing in their responsibilities to homeowners and residents. This country has a housing crisis; that much is clear. We desperately need more homes, affordable homes and a greater variety of housing stock in order to meet our needs both now and going forward. As a proud representative of the Potteries and chair of the all-party parliamentary group for ceramics, I would add that we should be making sure that we are using British ceramics in every home that we build—what could possibly be better than Staffordshire bricks and tiles? However, as great as our ceramics are, I am here today to discuss the quality of the finish of some of our new homes. This is a very real problem in my constituency.

For months, my constituents on the Bluebell Croft estate and elsewhere in Kidsgrove have been forced to live among unfinished roads and shoddy workmanship because the housing developer, Taylor Wimpey, has simply not bothered to finish the job.

I can testify to the appalling state that the estate has been left in. Roads have not been tarmacked and have been left with raised metalwork, which poses a hazard to drivers. Kerbs and pavements have been left damaged or unfinished. A playground built within the estate has a range of safety issues that have not been addressed, and we are now in the school holidays. It has taken one resident nearly a year to get the streetlights outside her house switched on.

Throughout all this, Taylor Wimpey has refused to engage with its customers. One resident, who has been complaining to the company since she moved in last December, told me that she has been fobbed off every single time. The company has ignored communication from the local councillors for the area and has now ceased to respond to correspondence from me. When invited to attend a public meeting, its representatives declined. This is simply unacceptable. On its website, Taylor Wimpey describe itself as a “community developer” that is

“committed to working with local people, community groups...and local authorities”.

This is an audacious description, including almost every group that has been systematically ignored by Taylor Wimpey in my constituency.

My constituents are not the only people to have suffered in this manner, and Taylor Wimpey is not the only big housing developer to believe that it can ride roughshod over local communities. All too often it seems that it is those homes at the affordable end of the market that are most likely to be left incomplete as developers cut costs wherever they can, bulking up their profit margin at the expense of their customers. When it comes to good quality house building, it appears to be one rule for the rich and another for the rest of us.

What is happening in Kidsgrove is not an isolated incident. It is a snapshot of an issue that is recurring up and down our country. Last year, a YouGov survey for the housing charity Shelter found that 51% of homeowners in recent new builds in England had experienced major problems with their properties. These included unfinished fittings, problems with construction and faults with their utilities. More than half of people purchasing these new homes are unsatisfied with their purchase. In what other industry would these statistics be considered acceptable?

If a car manufacturer sold half its vehicles with faulty steering or a water company only managed to get water to half our taps, there would rightly be a national uproar. Yet in our desperation to tackle a very real housing crisis, we have allowed developers to build properties quick and cheap without fear of the consequences. All too often, the behaviour of these big developers goes unchallenged. They have money, expensive law firms and huge PR budgets to make sure it stays that way. But it is my role, and the role of each and every one of us in this place, to ensure that our constituents' voices are heard. Money may be a great amplifier, but so is democracy.

It is about time that housing developers who act in this way have their mistakes brought to light and are made to answer for them. Taylor Wimpey proudly

[*Ruth Smeeth*]

declares that its company's history can be traced back more than 100 years. I need it to understand that my constituents cannot wait 100 years for it to find a conscience.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. After the next speaker, I am going to have to take the limit down to six minutes.

4.45 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I would like to raise the issue of Gibraltar. I declare a personal interest. I speak as secretary of the all-party parliamentary group on Gibraltar, and also for the chairman of the group, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who would be here today but is preparing for his wedding on Friday. Personally, I am interested because I have been going to Gibraltar for the past 50 years. I first went there as a 19-year-old officer cadet to dive in the waters off the Moles. Gibraltar is a British overseas territory that is self-governing in everything except defence and foreign affairs. Thirty thousand British citizens live at the foot of that great Rock, and they want to remain British.

The issue that I really want to concentrate on is how Brexit affects Gibraltarians. This whole matter requires a bipartisan approach, with Gibraltar and the United Kingdom working hand in glove together. Although Gibraltar's superb Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, leads a territory that voted 96% to remain in the European Union, he has pragmatically accepted the result of the referendum. In truth, Gibraltar has taken Brexit on the chin, and now it is working closely with London to ensure a smooth withdrawal from the European Union.

This process must take account of the fact that every morning 14,000 European Union workers cross from Spain—they are mostly Spanish—to Gibraltar. Twenty-five per cent. of the GDP of the 300,000-strong hinterland, the Campo de Gibraltar in Spain, is generated from income in Gibraltar, so Gibraltar has a direct effect on the people who live around it. The chambers of commerce and trade unions in both Gibraltar and the areas close to Gibraltar are united in wanting to have a smooth Brexit. This implies the need for easy border controls to ensure that workers, visitors and residents on both sides have fluid access to and from the Rock.

London is absolutely right to stand firm with Gibraltar and reject any notion or proposal, such as that in clause 24 of the European Commission's guidelines, that Spain could have any veto over what happens in Gibraltar. That would be monstrous and wrong. Of course, we have a duty to the people of Gibraltar to ensure that they do not suffer because of Brexit. Their oft-stated and restated wish to remain British must be honoured, and there should be no talks with Spain about Gibraltar unless Gibraltar agrees. That must also include talks about talks, if hon. Members understand what I mean.

The people of Gibraltar have the right to self-determination, and they have made clear their will to remain British and prosper under the Union Jack. Gibraltar is family. No other British subjects understand the phrase "Rule Britannia" more than Gibraltarians.

Thank you for allowing me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I wish all colleagues a great working vacation? May I wish you, the other Deputy Speakers, Mr Speaker, the Clerks of the House, the policemen and the people who serve me in the cafeteria but do not serve me in the bars because I do not drink very much a very good summer? God bless everyone, and let us hope that we get things better than we seem to have got them in the last year.

4.50 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and all other contributors to the debate.

The main issue I would like to raise is the massive issue of support for older people. I very much hope that, as the years progress, we begin to talk about this issue more in the House. I would like to share some examples from our Welsh Labour Government and local examples from my constituency.

The sharp-eyed will remember that, in Wales, older people's care is devolved to the National Assembly for Wales, but I raise this subject here today not just because of its relevance in terms of funding settlements, but because I believe that, when it comes to social and economic issues, the nations and regions of the United Kingdom should be keen to learn from one another. I am very much of the view that learning and sharing also means being prepared to tackle head-on the difficult questions that we all face.

Jonathan Baxter and Stephen Boyce reminded us in their research document for the National Assembly for Wales entitled "The ageing population in Wales" that, in 2008, the over-65s made up 18% of Wales's population and, by 2033, that is expected to rise to almost 26%. That could be euphemistically referred to as a bit of a challenge, but before we descend into doom and gloom, I would like us to consider a little Welsh proverb that translates as, "The old know, and the young think they know." There is a little caveat in all this. That proverb was not concocted to describe policy making and initiatives, but it makes an important point. Our policies and thinking as they relate to older people need to reflect what older people think and be designed in an appropriate way.

Let me give one example. At the end of May, Welsh Government Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans announced nearly £6 million of Welsh Government funding to support the work of Care and Repair agencies with vulnerable older people. Across Wales, there are 13 such agencies, which together enable many older and disabled people to live as independently as possible in their own homes, providing support and repairing work, helping more than 22,000 people through safety and falls prevention work and carrying out some 17,000 small adaptations.

A fine project supporting older people's care in much of my constituency and in parts of the town of Wrexham is the community agents project, which helps and supports people who are over 50. As someone who became 50 this year, I have a particular fondness for this project. I pay tribute to everyone at county borough council level who has supported the programme and to the

town and community councils; without their funding in those areas, the programme simply would not have been possible. I also pay tribute to our local voluntary sector organisations and to the community agents themselves.

Another example of impeccable care for older people that I am delighted to talk about is the Penley Rainbow Centre. That is situated in a rural part of my constituency, very close to the English border. I have had the privilege of visiting it on many occasions and I am deeply glad to support its work. Operating since 1994, the centre is a registered charity that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of our local community. Services include day opportunities, day care, befriending, peer support groups, volunteering and a range of learning and exercise classes, as well as a new community wellbeing service that provides outreach support to the local community.

People at the centre work with many different groups of people five days a week—including those with dementia, frailty, learning difficulties or physical disability—and they also support families and carers. There are not just outstanding day opportunities. Other services include community wellbeing, peer support, lunch and learns, exercise classes, an excellent community garden—with an active gardening group—as well as a choir, art and craft classes, and beauty treatments. Active local fundraising has led to the provision of a new minibus, which means that the centre will serve even more people. “Caring”, “welcoming”, “a lifeline”, “fantastic meals and company” and

“A place that makes me feel much happier”—

these quotes prove that the Penley Rainbow Centre is not just a credit to the area I am privileged to represent in Parliament, but a project worthy of replication in communities across Wales and the UK, and indeed more widely across the world.

I believe the three projects about which I have spoken today are as fine initiatives in older people’s care as any that can be found anywhere in our land. As the Member of Parliament for Clwyd South, I am delighted to highlight them and to raise in this Parliament and nationwide the need for more serious discussion of older people’s care.

4.56 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones).

I wish to speak about a subject that is very personal to me, as it is to millions of other women, and that is the menopause. I speak about this topic from my own personal experience. I started to suffer from horrible migraines that prevented me from actually doing my job properly. I did not know why I was suffering from them. I thought it might be because I had taken up a stressful job and had a change in my personal circumstances. It was only when I started to do some research and look into the menopause itself that I discovered that migraines could be a symptom. Like many other people, I had heard in the popular press and in the media about hot flushes, but I was completely lacking in any knowledge about the menopause.

On my personal journey into this topic, I have discovered that there is a shocking lack of awareness and treatment for women who are going through the menopause. The menopause affects every woman in this country and it

of course also affects every man who works with, lives with or is related to a woman, so it is fair to say that it actually affects every single person in this country. Yet, in my research, I found that it has been mentioned only 27 times in *Hansard* in the last three years, and I really wonder why.

I will focus on three key areas. The first is the workplace. I want to point out that some fantastic organisations already acknowledge and recognise the effects of the menopause on women in the workplace. The West Midlands police are one. There is tailored support there for women, which helps them to build their confidence, to stay in the workplace and to get access to the support they need. However, it is clear that many other organisations need to take a cue from that. After all, we are all expected to work for longer and to contribute, so it will obviously have an effect on the economic growth and productivity of other organisations if they can also adopt those practices.

The second point is about medical treatment. I am absolutely delighted that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced £20 billion of funding for the NHS. Please can we have some more support for menopause from those funds? Approximately 13 million women in the UK are peri-menopausal or post-menopausal. The symptoms can last up to 15 years, but too many women are suffering in silence. They are left frustrated and disappointed when they go to their GP. Their symptoms are not recognised and they do not get the hormone replacement treatment that they really need. They are misdiagnosed and told to get on with it, and their symptoms are often belittled or not understood. We see that in the popular debate, in which women are talked about as being “crazy” or as “losing it”, and this is just not a good state of affairs. It is a taboo. It is not understood and we need to do better as a Government.

The third point is very much around education. At the start of their life, we educate girls about periods. Why cannot we also explain to them what will happen at the end of their life? It is not just the fact that menstruation ends; it is a whole process. It is a natural process that we go through. It can be a liberating process, which frees people to contribute to society. That is how it should be—a positive experience. It should not be denigrated. Women should not feel that their purpose is used up, and that now they are left to wither and die.

In the course of my research I looked at Instagram—one place where I find that social media is quite positive. There is a lot of support around menopause on Instagram. We are told that it is the club that no one wants to join, and it sometimes feels like that, because if a woman speaks up about the fact that she is suffering from menopause—maybe in the workplace, perhaps in an organisation that is not particularly sympathetic—she may be belittled. But I think it is time that we take back control of our bodies. We should not be joked about. We should not be written off. It is a time for us to be loud and proud about our achievements.

Society’s attitudes to women are changing, and I welcome that. We talk about mental health and a range of issues; that is absolutely fantastic. Menopause should not be a negative time. I pay tribute to some of the fantastic women I have worked with, who have helped me, and whose work I hope to take forward: women such as the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff),

[Rachel Maclean]

the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on women's health—I do not think she is present, but we shall be meeting and working on this issue—Louise Newson, the menopause doctor; Diane Danzebrink; and Liz Earle.

I finish with a really sad quote. A woman asked:

“Does anyone else find that their confidence, their motivation and enthusiasm have disappeared during the menopause?”

I make a plea for us to really look at this issue and give it the attention it deserves. If women are freed up and allowed to live their lives to the fullest at this time of their life, they can contribute to society and give so much back.

I wish everybody a very happy recess.

Mr Speaker: Maiden speech: Janet Daby.

5.1 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the chance to speak in this debate. I am both humbled and very proud to be here. I thank my constituents in Lewisham East for giving me this opportunity, as well as my family and my wonderful husband for their patience and understanding over the past few months—and continuing patience, probably. [Laughter.]

I will respect tradition by thanking two of my predecessors, Bridget Prentice and Heidi Alexander. The unwavering support and encouragement that I have had from these phenomenal women exemplifies the adage, “Lift as you climb.” Bridget was MP for Lewisham East for 18 years, from 1992 to 2010. She is still a resident, well respected and well known for her community spirit, straight talking and humour. I thank Bridget for her belief in me.

Of course, I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Heidi Alexander. As hon. Members know, she was an incredibly hard-working, approachable and dedicated advocate in this place. She was key to the community campaign that saved Lewisham Hospital A&E services, and as shadow Secretary of State for Health, she was vocal in the junior doctors' dispute. She was passionate and outspoken about the need for us to stay in the single market—a view shared by many people in Lewisham, where 70% of us voted to remain. We in Lewisham East will not tolerate a hard Brexit. I thank Heidi for her dedication as a public servant, and I am sure hon. Members will join me in wishing her well in her new role as London's Deputy Mayor for Transport. No doubt, I will soon be in contact with her about improvements to the Lewisham transport system.

As for me, when I was a child and even a young adult, I never imagined that I would become a local councillor, and certainly not an MP; it was quite possibly the furthest thing from my mind. Having grown up with my mum and her endless capacity for compassion and kindness—she gave us children a strong sense of social justice—I was keenly aware from an early age of the impact of prejudice and discrimination on people around me. I was aware that while many resilient Black, Asian and minority ethnic people did challenge those who sought to oppress them, there were others who learned how to cope with discrimination rather than to complain; they learned to suffer rather than to speak out. The Windrush scandal is the latest and most shocking cruelty

inflicted upon us. I am proud, as a daughter of the Windrush generation and as a Labour MP, that one of the voices raised against that legislation was that of my party leader.

Although I grew up in a single parent family, my father was never far away, and I clearly remember my Uncle Clifton, my late Uncle Lass and my Uncle Sam excitedly discussing politics during family visits. As a child, it was a world I knew little about, but it intrigued me and I did my best to engage with their conversations. I intend to ensure my contributions here are as enthusiastic and as fearless—and rather better informed than I was as a child.

I am so honoured to represent Lewisham East, my home of 22 years, because it is the friendliest, most energetic and multicultural community anyone could hope for. We have it all: from grand mansions to compact urban flats, from leafy expanses to concrete labyrinths. We have the best street parties in London and, indeed, perhaps the country—hon. Members can prove me wrong on that if they wish to! We have a strong community spirit, and our valued civic organisations, such as Eco Communities, Pre-school Learning Alliance, Ubuntu and Youth First, demonstrate this. We are also fortunate to have the Inter-Faith Walk for Peace and the Peace of Cake movement, which work to make Lewisham East safer and to enhance cohesion.

That said, years of austerity have meant that many people live hand to mouth, and having set up a food project in 2013 as a local councillor, with the local community, I know this only too well. I know someone who has three part-time jobs. He works himself to the bone, but still he has to visit the foodbank so he can feed himself and his family. What he and all our constituents are owed, at the very least, is the real living wage as defined by the Living Wage Foundation. Instead, our constituents got the much lower national living wage, based on political calculations.

The quality of jobs available is a serious issue. As a Union trade unionist and former public-sector worker, I believe in fair pay and in proper terms and conditions. I understand that decisions are being made on whether to abolish the widely used and highly exploitative employment contracts that allow for agency workers to be underpaid for their labour. We need to do the right thing and abolish them, and I applaud the Communication Workers Union's campaign on this issue. Low pay and insecure jobs mean that many of my constituents are spiralling into debt, and they cannot hope to pay their rocketing private rents. The people of Lewisham East are crying out for social housing, and they need it now if we are to stop the number of families being forced out of the area by the housing crisis.

As for our young people, I am deeply troubled by the multiple stops and stop-and-searches that innocent young men, especially black men, are subjected to. This can have a brutal impact on their mental health and wellbeing, often something that is not considered. Our young people do not just need hope for the future; they need tangible change. I will do what I can to address the stop-and-search issue.

I am saddened and outraged that in 2018 some young women in Lewisham East, but not just in Lewisham East, will skip school because their families cannot afford sanitary products. Across the UK, it is estimated that 137,000 girls missed school last year because of this type of poverty. I absolutely support moves for free universal access to sanitary products.

I want to use the privilege of having a voice in this Chamber to help to reduce poverty, improve health, raise educational outcomes and clean up the toxic air that blights parts of Lewisham East. Some people might see this as optimistic for one MP and her constituents, but as the anthropologist Margaret Mead said:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

On this, I believe that when we come up against a mountain to overcome, we need others to help us make the climb, as we cannot do this alone.

Mr Speaker, at times it has felt overwhelming to come into this great establishment, but I have been met with such hospitality by you, parliamentarians on both sides and the superb staff in both Houses—it is greatly appreciated.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

5.10 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) what an amazing privilege it is to follow a speech of that quality—not only that, but what shone through was her absolute dignity. She will be an absolutely amazing addition to our Parliament and to the government of this country. Through what she said, it is clear that she will be an advocate for her local people on poverty, inequality and tackling health issues; but above all, she will be a national advocate for the things that we in the Labour party stand for—we stand up against prejudice and discrimination and show what determination can achieve. It is an amazing privilege and honour to follow my hon. Friend, and I wish her all the luck in the future.

I was moved to speak on two issues in respect of the amazing constituency of Gedling in Nottinghamshire that I represent. I am sick and tired of people coming to see me at my surgeries who have mental health problems but are being refused personal independence payments. I say to the Minister, who will answer a plethora of different things that people raise, that the Government need to get a grip. This is not a party political issue. I talk to Government Members, who have the same problems, and even Ministers say, “This is astonishing. We have to get it sorted out.” Well, the Minister should tell the Department for Work and Pensions to sort it out, because numerous people who have serious difficulties cannot access a benefit on which they depend. It is not good enough, and the Government need to take issue with it. I told numerous people that I would raise that, and I have done so.

I want to use this debate to highlight something that was said by a senior Conservative councillor in Nottinghamshire, and I think that it will shock all Members across the House. Councillor Phillip Owen, chair of the children and young people’s committee of Nottinghamshire County Council, said that the police priorities of modern slavery, domestic violence and hate crime were only priorities because they are “politically correct” and “fashionable”. We think battles have been won—on sexism, discrimination, prejudice and intolerance—and then we hear such statements from a senior councillor about things that have a massive impact.

We heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe). The police recorded 1.1 million crimes in 2016 that related to

domestic abuse, and 1.9 million people aged between 19 and 65 were the victims of domestic abuse. If that should not be a police priority, I do not know what should be. The fact is that large numbers of people are still not reporting these crimes. The majority of victims are women, and large numbers of people are still not prosecuted for these crimes, because the victims will not give evidence to ensure that the perpetrator is prosecuted. That should be our priority, not some prejudiced statement about these matters that deserves to come from the ark. Of course it should be a police priority; of course it should be looked into. This country has suffered down the centuries because such crimes have been dismissed and kept behind closed doors.

What of modern slavery? This House, this country and, to be fair, this Prime Minister—I have said it to her—led the way with the Modern Slavery Act 2015. It needs to be better implemented, but we led the way, and the Prime Minister was key to it, yet we are told by this senior Conservative councillor that it should not be a police priority. The Gangmasters Licensing Authority has pointed to a 47% increase between 2016 and 2017 in the number of potential victims of forced labour, while the Global Slavery Index announced just a couple of days ago that 136,000 people in this country were potentially victims of modern slavery on any one day, yet we are told it is not a police priority. I say to Councillor Owen and anybody else who has doubts that tackling modern slavery and forced labour must be a priority for the police of our country, and I am proud that it is. We thought these two issues had ended—we thought we had won these battles—but as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East said in her brilliant maiden speech, prejudice and discrimination are still there to be tackled. Likewise, the police still need to tackle the scourges of modern slavery and domestic violence, and I am proud that they do.

Mr Speaker: Maiden speech: Jared O’Mara.

5.16 pm

Jared O’Mara (Sheffield, Hallam) (Ind): Mr Speaker, thank you. In fact, everybody, thank you—you have all been terribly patient.

I am delighted today to finally be able to make my maiden speech as the MP for the constituency where I grew up, Sheffield, Hallam. I was elected a year ago as Hallam’s first Labour MP, but due to mistakes I made when I was young, and for which I am truly sorry as they hurt a lot of people, I have been unable to speak in the House with confidence until now. I currently speak in the capacity of an independent Member. I am also Parliament’s very first autistic MP, as well as having cerebral palsy and other disabilities. This fills me with immense pride. It is an honour for me to have the chance to represent our country’s disabled people in addition to serving my constituents.

I would like to give praise to my predecessor for his admirable and steadfast belief in the value of our membership of the European Union and for his commitment to multiculturalism, both of which I share. He shall be remembered fondly as a hard-working and capable constituency MP, and for that he has my respect.

I may, of course, be biased, but Sheffield, Hallam is quite possibly one of the most beautiful and greenest constituencies in the country. On the cusp of the Peak

[Jared O'Mara]

District national park, it contains districts including Fulwood, Lodge Moor, Ecclesall, Stannington, Wadsley Park Village—where I lived for a number of years—Loxley, Crosspool, Dore, Bradway and Totley. It is home to too many great schools to mention, including the two I went to, Bradfield and Tapton, and we have the world's second-oldest football club, Hallam FC, who play their home matches at Sandygate Road.

On the subject of sport, our schools and villages have given rise to some of the nation's greatest sports people, including Joe Root, Michael Vaughan, Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill, the best right back in world football Kyle Walker—even though I am an Owl and he is a Blade—and gold medal-winning Special Olympian Nathan Hill.

My constituency gets unfairly typecast as one of the least diverse and most wealthy in the north, yet I have had the privilege of meeting and speaking to people from all walks of life in Hallam in this past year, be it our sizeable student community, people from humble beginnings and blue-collar professions—much the same as my own background—successful white-collar workers, academics and business people, inspiring and compassionate representatives of our 300-strong Jewish community, the many graceful and civic-minded British Muslims, or the plethora of bright young people from our local schools, who have impressed me no end. Hallam is in fact the epitome of multiculturalism, as is my city of Sheffield as a whole, and I am very proud to call it home.

In my constituency and my city, I have also met many wonderful Christian people. Indeed my parents, who have been at my side through thick and thin, are Christians themselves. While I consider myself a man of science and more aligned with atheism and humanism, I have the utmost respect for all religious people, and I feel specifically that we can all learn from the teachings of Jesus. He was a man who forgave those who truly repented, and he shared my belief that our utmost human priority should be helping those who are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable amongst us—chiefly, our poor and underprivileged, our senior citizens, our children, people with disabilities and illnesses, and people who want to find the right path again after making mistakes.

I ask my constituents, all parties in the House, and everyone in the country at large to join me now in prioritising those principles, and I thank Members very much for listening to my speech. I promise that I will do my utmost to help all those who are in need of help in my constituency, and to champion the cause of equality. When I return to Parliament in September, I shall do so with renewed vigour and an unwavering commitment to social justice. I look forward to being the best MP that I can possibly be.

Mr Speaker: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his commendably succinct speech, and I wish him well.

5.20 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a great honour to follow two such passionate maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara) talked powerfully about the importance of inclusion and equality—I am sure that we all agree with

him on that—and the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) talked passionately about her constituency. An aspect of her speech that particularly resonated with me was her opposition to the extreme Brexit towards which the Government are leading us.

I originally intended to spend my brief minutes talking about the immorality of indefinite detention. I will still talk about that, but I feel that before I do so, I must take the opportunity to say a few words about yet another decision that has been smuggled out on this last day before the recess, and about which many Members may not even know. The Government have just given the green light to more fracking at Preston New Road.

This is an absolute kick in the teeth for the local community, who almost unanimously oppose fracking in their back yard, and who have been fighting an incredibly strong campaign against it. However, it is not just a kick in the teeth for localism; it is an extraordinarily perverse decision, given the reality of accelerating climate change. The Government are locking us into a whole new fossil fuel industry at exactly the time when the experts are telling us that we must leave the majority of known fossil fuels in the ground.

We are currently in the middle of a heatwave, and more and more scientists are linking the freakish weather that we are currently experiencing with the likelihood of its happening more often as a result of climate change. The idea that now is a good time to give the green light to fracking, while making it more difficult, for example, to pursue renewable energy—as the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) was saying a few moments earlier—seems to be taking stupidity to new heights. I shall not spend any more time talking about fracking, because I want to talk about my recent visit to Yarl's Wood, but I think it incredibly cowardly of the Government to smuggle this decision out when they know that people's attention will be elsewhere, and when we cannot have a serious debate about it.

I recently visited Yarl's Wood detention centre, having finally been granted permission following 18 months of trying to gain access. The visit was publicised to detainees, and it is difficult to communicate the desperation and heartbreak that I sensed in the 100 or so women who came to meet me. Each wanted her story to be heard. They wanted someone to know where they were, and they wanted to know that they would not be forgotten. They wanted something to be done about the mental torture that they were enduring day in, day out.

I use the term “mental torture” very deliberately. Imagine, Mr Speaker, living in the community where you have made your life and being required to report to the Home Office every week. Imagine that you do that religiously and never fail, and then one week, when you turn up to report as usual, you find yourself being randomly sent, with no notice, to a detention centre. You are given no time even to pack your clothes, and no time to tell anyone—your kids, perhaps. You are given no warning and no explanation. Imagine arriving at Yarl's Wood and being given no information about the reason for your detention; about what, if anything, you have done wrong; or about how long you will be there. Months or perhaps even more than a year later, you may be released—again, with no warning or explanation. You are still required to make weekly reports to the Home Office. You are none the wiser about the reason for that arbitrary use of power against you, and you have no idea whether it will happen again.

This is intolerable, Mr Speaker, and it is happening on a daily basis in our country. Can you imagine how frightening it must be? It is cruel, it is inhumane, and it must stop. Many of the people to whom it is happening are vulnerable women. A recent research report published by Women for Refugee Women found that survivors of rape, trafficking and torture are still routinely being locked up in Yarl's Wood. When Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons inspected Yarl's Wood in 2017, it found exactly the same.

The Government's adults at risk policy is supposed to reduce the number of vulnerable and at-risk people in detention, which the Shaw review identified as needing urgent action. The policy is not working. What I observed is consistent with the findings of HMIP, which is that "the effectiveness of the adults at risk policy, which is intended to reduce the detention of vulnerable people, was questionable". That is, I think, a use of understatement.

The Home Office claims that progress on detaining fewer vulnerable people is difficult to measure because there is no way of assessing how many vulnerable people are detained. Many of the women I spoke to seemed incredibly distressed, and some had obviously been self-harming. Figures from the independent monitoring board at Yarl's Wood show that levels of self-harm there more than tripled in 2017 alone. Yet I was told by Serco, which runs Yarl's Wood, that out of 183 individuals detained when I visited, 29 adult women were defined as at risk level 1, and 43 at risk level 2, with none defined at risk level 3. For those who do not know what these risk levels mean, in a nutshell they identify survivors of torture, individuals with suicidal intentions, or those whose health is likely to be

"injuriously affected by continued detention."

The claim of an absence of any category 3 people was, I think, disproved by the kinds of people we were speaking to, so I am not sure that even the way in which data is compiled is accurate. But even if it is accurate, this demonstrates the level of desperation of women who are being routinely locked up.

We heard a statement today from the Home Secretary, who said that he would look again at the whole issue of indefinite detention. May I use my last five seconds to urge him to do so with the strongest amount of urgency because people's lives are at risk and what is going on is intolerable?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. The next speaker will be the last to do so on the six-minute limit. Thereafter, in an attempt to accommodate all would-be contributors, the limit will have to be reduced to five minutes per speech.

5.26 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), and also my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) and other hon. Members.

I want to raise an important issue for my constituents and to ask Ministers to consider it carefully. Reading is an historic town which dates back to the middle ages. It has a number of well-known buildings and more than a dozen conservation areas. Arguably our best-known building is Reading Gaol, which was written about by

Oscar Wilde, who was incarcerated there. The prison was designed by the famous Victorian architect Gilbert Scott, whose work also included the Albert memorial, St Pancras station and many other notable Victorian buildings. The building is no longer used as a prison and has been empty for five years following a reorganisation of the prison estate. I argue that because of its cultural and artistic significance, the prison should be preserved and enhanced through being turned into a hub for the arts. I would like to set out the advantages of this approach, both locally and for enhancing our nation's heritage, to suggest a way forward, and to encourage Ministers to work with me and Reading Borough Council on this project

There are significant benefits to the project. First and foremost, Reading would benefit from a major new theatre and hub for the arts. Our town is growing rapidly, and cultural and artistic activity is growing commensurately. There is a vibrant arts community, but a lack of large and nationally recognised venues. Secondly, the prison is an ideal location, both because of its history and association with Oscar Wilde, and because of its setting next to the nationally important ruins of Reading abbey, the burial place of Henry I. These grounds were recently restored and now form a venue for open-air theatre in the summer. The location offers the possibility for the town to develop an entire cultural quarter close to the town centre and the station, making it accessible to visitors from the Thames valley, London and Oxford.

Thirdly, using the prison as an arts hub has been tried before temporarily, with huge success. It was opened to the public, and the installations and performance art that were staged attracted thousands of visitors from across the country. Despite the undoubted potential of the prison and its success as a temporary venue for the arts, the regeneration of this historic building is being held up by the need to survey the site and to understand its archaeology. While I fully understand the need for and support the careful assessment of the site, I hope this can be finished soon to allow Ministers to consider a way forward.

I thank the prisons Minister, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), for his interest in the site and the time he has spent talking to me about its future. I encourage the Justice Secretary to approach the matter with urgency. He can rely on me, and on Reading Borough Council and other local groups, to pursue the project with commitment and an ambition to make it work.

I should also like to inform the Minister that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is involved in this project with Reading Borough Council. It may also support it, and a bid for funding might be under way. This is an important cultural project for Reading and the surrounding area, and I urge all parties to work together to help to deliver the proposal. Reading is a growing town, and it deserves an arts venue that celebrates both its ancient history and its potential for the future. Finally, Mr Speaker, I wish you and other colleagues here today a very happy and relaxing summer break.

5.30 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this debate. The Government have moved positively on a

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

number of issues recently. Last Thursday, for example, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government made not one but two announcements that were very welcome—albeit late, but not on his watch. First, he announced a full-scale review of approved document B, which contains statutory guidance on building regulations relevant to fire, following Dame Judith Hackitt's well-received review. Secondly, the Secretary of State announced the decision to introduce mandatory requirements of landlords in the private rented sector to ensure five-yearly inspections of electrical installations in their properties. This has been a long-standing request by various organisations, including the Electrical Safety Council, so I would like to commend the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for this.

Antisocial behaviour seems to be flourishing, especially in my constituency, with issues as trivial as ignoring personal space all the way through to life-threatening violence. I, like other colleagues, receive many emails about antisocial behaviour, including boy racers in cars, noisy and threatening mopeds, late night and early morning loud gatherings, block invasions, verbal and physical abuse of women and members of the LGBT community, open drug dealing, damage to property, and the rest. It is just not acceptable.

Moving to leasehold, there is a lack of protection for leaseholders on so many issues, including: service charges; refurbishment costs; recognition of residents associations; inflated insurance costs; forfeiture; outrageous event fees; lease extensions; cladding reform and replacement; interim fire costs; commonhold; the ground rent scandal; and dispute resolution at first-tier tribunals, which will be the subject of my Adjournment debate later. That dreadful list of problems is faced by 5 million leaseholders every day. The Government are moving encouragingly on many of these issues, but Administrations have failed in this regard a number of times over the past 30 years. I hope that this Government will get it right this time. It would be helpful to have a timetable for how they intend to make progress.

On deafness, the Government have signalled a change of position on the possibility of a GCSE in British sign language, and I welcome the recent comments from the Minister for School Standards, the right hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb).

I welcome the Department for International Development's review of grants and the establishment of the small charities challenge fund. I am sure that this will help a number of organisations doing great work. I also welcome the opportunity to meet the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who is also a Minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to discuss assistance for a charity called Fire Aid, which I chair.

One question for the Government on animal welfare that keeps being asked is when we might see the law changed. The Government promised this in relation to a five-year sentence for animal cruelty. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), stated on 13 June that a Bill would come forward in this Session. Organisations such as Battersea Dogs and Cats Home would be reassured to have more clarity about when this will take place.

I want to refer to an individual constituent's immigration case that has troubled members of my staff to the extent that they have personally been raising funds for his distraught family. Mr Golam Rabbani is dying; of that there is no doubt. He has no recourse to funds or benefits. He has a wife and two children, and he has been in the UK for 14 years. We have tried to get an early decision on the family's application to remain before their father and husband dies. Given their length of stay in the UK, they have a very strong case. It is heartbreaking to witness a system with such limited capacity for discretion and understanding. It is my belief that Mr Rabbani would no longer be with us were it not for his will to keep going in the hope of seeing his family's rights guaranteed. When might we see some compassion in this area?

My final two issues are universal credit and housing. I commend the campaign of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and his team, who are putting pressure on the Government to do more on housing, and affordable housing in particular. On universal credit, there is general agreement that the principle has support across the House, but the problems besetting the introduction are causing many claimants great hardship. I do not object to a sanctions regime, because no one should be able to rip off the taxpayer and claim that to which they are not entitled. However, things seem to have gone too far, and the Government just do not seem to get that.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you, Mr Speaker, staff and colleagues a decent break during the recess, and I wish the Government success in their Brexit negotiations, which I am sure will not cease simply because the Commons is in recess.

5.35 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I apologise for only recently coming into the Chamber, but I was at extremely extended Select Committee sitting about our exiting the European Union—the very issue that the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) just mentioned. I congratulate him on his speech. I also congratulate the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara) and for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) on their maiden speeches, which I shall take great pleasure in reading in *Hansard*.

I will concentrate on one important domestic issue and then refer to one or two international matters. The domestic issue is local government finance, and my comments will be based on my experience in Staffordshire. Staffordshire County Council and the various second-tier authorities, including South Staffordshire Council and Stafford Borough Council, have done tremendous work over the past eight years. They have reduced costs and increased efficiency while maintaining as many services as possible for local people, but they are reaching a crunch point over the coming year as they face substantial deficits. The deficits are not due to inefficiency or incompetence, but to the increasing demands being placed upon local government, particularly when it comes to adult and children social care. Those costs are vital to our constituents' wellbeing, but it is unfair to place such burdens so heavily on local government while depriving it of the necessary funds.

I therefore ask the Government to consider the matter closely. This is an issue not just in Staffordshire but in many other authorities, counties in particular, around

the country, and we must ensure that we do not do down local democracy, because that is what will happen if we do not take such matters into consideration. If people see local authorities having to close services that they value and depend on, such as libraries—Staffordshire has not closed libraries because it has found other ways to proceed—the people will blame local government. In fact, the pressure is effectively coming from national services, and we either need to fund those more or less nationally or give local government the ability to raise appropriate resources.

I am asking the Government to examine three things. First, social care should be better funded through the better care fund nationally and should not have to rely increasingly on local resources. Secondly, if necessary, councils should be given more discretion to raise resources locally without having to resort to an expensive referendum that will often not produce a result. If people are asked, “Do you want taxes to be raised?” the answer will often be no, even if it is for a worthwhile cause, despite the council being elected and taking the needs of local people into account. That should be enough. Finally, the rate support grant should be reviewed, not rapidly cut, which is happening in so many councils. It is vital for local democracy that local councils, which have done so much over the past eight years, can raise the funds that they need to provide local services that are so greatly valued.

I shall make just a few comments on the international scene. It is extremely important that, as we go into recess, we do not forget the crises around the world, including in Yemen, Syria and elsewhere in the middle east. We should not take our eyes off the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where elections are due before the end of the year but we do not see great progress towards them.

Finally, let us take a moment to celebrate—I declare an interest as the Prime Minister’s trade envoy to Ethiopia—the growing peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea. After so many years, we saw Prime Minister Abiy go to Eritrea, and we saw a coming together of those brothers and sisters, as they effectively are.

On that happier note, I wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all colleagues in the Commons a very happy recess.

5.40 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy). I too congratulate colleagues who made such inspiring maiden speeches this afternoon.

I return to an issue that was raised a few moments ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth)—I also raised it at last week’s business questions—on the poor quality building and dire customer service experienced by buyers of new homes, such as those buying from Persimmon in my constituency. Since I raised the issue in the Chamber last week, I have been inundated with emails, tweets and Facebook posts from across the country reporting similar experiences not just with Persimmon but, as my hon. Friend said, with other major household names—Taylor Wimpey and Bellway among them.

Buying a home is probably the most important purchase that most of us will ever make. Young people save up to buy a home, in which they invest their hopes for the

future. They look forward to putting down roots in the community, but I have too often heard stories of shoddy workmanship, failure to repair defects and homebuyers facing serious risks in the place where they should be safest. I have heard of unsafe staircases, dangerous electrics, gaps and cracks in walls and floors, leaking plumbing and gardens that are not safe for children to play in.

I have also repeatedly heard that house builders refuse to respond to owners’ complaints, but all the owners want is for someone to come round to make good the defects. Instead, they are fobbed off. Appointments are made and not honoured. Repairs are done that are as shoddy as the original work. Promises of improvements do not materialise. When MPs try to intervene, as I said in the Chamber just last week, the companies too often simply refuse to deal with us.

The Government are aware of the problem and, indeed, have recently consulted on improving customer redress in the housing market. We have also had two excellent reports in the past two years from the all-party parliamentary group on excellence in the built environment, which has proposed a number of measures, including a mandatory new homes ombudsman funded by a compulsory levy on house builders, a review of warranty schemes, timescales for settling disputes, and better recompense and inspection arrangements.

My first ask is that the concerns of the House on these matters are relayed to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whom I urge to respond to the consultation and take action as quickly as possible.

Secondly, we also know there are problems with smaller builders that carry out renovations and refurbishments. My constituent Mr Clint Wiltshire has highlighted some of the problems people experience. There are advertisements for small traders on trusted websites that make no checks on the qualifications, experience or track record of those selling their services. Local authority trading standards departments are now massively overstretched as a result of local government funding cuts and are unable to intervene where poor quality workmanship is experienced. Insurance companies frequently try to wriggle out of liability. Indeed, I understand there is no requirement for builders to have professional indemnity insurance cover.

Again, I ask that my concerns are relayed to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and I ask the Ministry to look at how better protection could be afforded to consumers through a code of practice, increased capacity for trading standards departments and a recognition of the importance of our homes to all of us and of our need to feel confident that we are safe, secure and comfortable in our homes.

Finally, another issue of great concern to my constituents is the increasing pressure on our emergency services. I have heard increasing reports that our police are unable to respond in person to reports, often of serious incidents, including most recently in my constituency a case of homophobic hate crime and another of serious sexual offences. We are seeing similar pressures on the North West Ambulance Service, which has been unable to respond for some hours when elderly people have suffered falls or illness and needed the services of paramedics. It really is time we looked at the funding for these vital emergency services to make sure they can properly

[Kate Green]

meet the demands of our communities, and I hope the Minister will convey my concerns to the relevant Departments.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I take the opportunity, as others have done, to wish all in this House the very best of summer recesses? I hope that everybody enjoys a restful break and returns refreshed in September.

5.45 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), whom I have had the privilege of serving with on the Select Committee on Justice. May I also take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Members for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) and for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara) on their distinguished maiden speeches today?

I want to take a few moments to speak about CrossCountry services from Cheltenham, because this matter relates not only to the convenience of my constituents, but to social mobility and opportunity. Unless those rail services are at the standard my constituents are entitled to expect, both those vital priorities will be undermined. Putting it simply, those services are too costly and too crowded, and they finish too early. It is particularly important that I mention them at this moment because a public consultation has been announced by the Government about the future of CrossCountry's rail franchise and it is important that these points are made.

So what is the context? Cheltenham Spa is the busiest station in Gloucestershire, with 2.35 million passengers using it last year, which is an increase from 1.73 million in 2011. So we are talking about some 800,000 additional passengers in that relatively short time. The next busiest station, Gloucester, had 1.48 million users—about 900,000 fewer. There has been good news in recent years: there has been a new, additional, early morning, 200-seat service from Cheltenham to Bristol and through to Taunton and Exeter, as well as an additional 1,000 seats per day on the CrossCountry routes between Bristol, Cheltenham Spa and Birmingham. It is the cost that is the problem. An off-peak return ticket from Cheltenham to Manchester will cost £81.90 and a peak return will cost £129.40. That is extremely expensive—prohibitively expensive. That is important because, if we want to drive things such as the Cheltenham cyber-park, people need to feel that they can go between Manchester and Cheltenham in an affordable way. Oddly, not only is this travel expensive, but there is a strange discrepancy; someone who wants to go north from Cheltenham has to re-mortgage their house, whereas someone who wants to go south from Cheltenham finds that a return to Bristol costs £25.40—[*Interruption.*] I appreciate that it is a bit closer, but there is an enormous discrepancy.

Overcrowding is a really important issue for my constituents, a number of whom write to me about it. When we drill into the service that is put on, we see why there is overcrowding. The 7.10 am train from Cheltenham to Birmingham, which Members might feel is at a peak time, has just four carriages and the 7.41 am has just five. That means trains are running at or beyond capacity. To put that in context, trains running from Cheltenham

to London on the Great Western Railway line have about 10 carriages. So CrossCountry really needs to resolve that.

The final point I wish to raise is the business of these trains finishing too early. Cheltenham residents who want to go to Bristol have to get the 10 pm train back and Cheltenham residents who want to go to Birmingham have to get the 10.12 pm back: the trains finish quite early. By comparison, a Bristol resident who wants to get the train back from Cheltenham gets to stay in Cheltenham until 10.50 pm and if they want to go to Birmingham they get to stay there until 10.58 pm. In other words, these trains need to run until later in the evening.

I wanted to make those short but none the less important points. As I say, it is an issue not only of convenience for my constituents, but of how we provide opportunity and social mobility to people in Cheltenham so that my town can continue to provide great opportunities for young people and for people across its demographics, and so that they are well connected to some of our great conurbations, including Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and beyond.

5.49 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I join other colleagues in congratulating those who have made their maiden speeches today. I urge them to get their bound copy of their speech and treasure it—something that I failed to do in a timely fashion; I regret it very much.

I wish to take this opportunity to make up for a dreadful oversight of mine during the Westminster Hall debate earlier in the Session on children's play areas, to which everybody paid close attention and which was secured by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie). In that debate, I referred to just one remaining youth centre in my constituency, but since then I have rightly been reminded of other centres that, although not technically youth centres, certainly provide excellent youth services for those in my constituency.

One of those centres is the West Marsh community centre, which is run by Neil Barber and hosts the Grimsby Town Sports and Education Trust football club for local children. Another centre is the excellent Fusion Centre, which I visited last week. It is a community interest boxing and fitness club run by the incredibly committed Wayne Bloy, who runs classes for young people. If they do not have any money, he will often allow them in for free. The centre also hosts classes for disabled people of all ages. It covers the Heneage and East Marsh areas. I apologise to those clubs, and to the many other clubs and organisations that operate in my constituency—there are so many unsung heroes across all our constituencies who are giving so much back to their communities—but there simply is not enough time in the parliamentary calendar to cover them all, although I will mention Together for the West Marsh, because I am going to the open day there tomorrow.

On a point of policy, one of the best things that the Government could do is to properly fund youth activities of a broad nature and throughout the whole country, to appeal to a wide range of young people of all incomes and none. Mentors should be available to give an often much-needed guiding hand. We have seen a real destruction of youth services, in a way that we would understand.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) touched on the issues relating to local government funding, which is a key area where communities have really lost out over the past few years.

I also wish to raise a health issue. I have tried and failed on many occasions to secure either an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate on cauda equina syndrome. My constituent, Becky Harrington, was very keen for me to raise the issue to bring about greater awareness of the condition. She has become a voluntary ambassador for the Cauda Equina UK charity, so that she can make people better aware of how life changing it can be.

Becky sent me an email late last year to say:

“I am a cauda equina syndrome sufferer and have recently joined the CES UK charity as a voluntary ambassador. We are currently trying to raise awareness to the public about CES and how life changing it can be if gone unnoticed. If it is not dealt with within the first 48 hours you can end up with loss of function and numbness in the saddle area and needing to be catheterized or having a colostomy bag fitted or like myself having a paralysed leg and unable to walk without an aid. This can all stem from having a bad back and not knowing what to do if the symptoms occur.”

It is quite a frightening syndrome and warrants more attention from the House and from the Government Health team.

In my final minute, let me congratulate the Grimsby Institute on being the only college in Lincolnshire to achieve outstanding status. I congratulate Peter Kennedy on his appointment as principal of my old college, Franklin College, and I thank Trevor Wray for all his work as the former principal at Franklin and for raising the issue of further education funding and championing that cause for Grimsby students.

Grimsby had some good news this Session: we secured the Greater Grimsby town deal, in conjunction with Ministers, for whose attention I am grateful. The signing of that deal must not be the only thing that Grimsby sees from the Government; it cannot be left alone. We want to see genuine, tangible and long-lasting change for our community. Some elements are now looking a little shaky and I want to ensure that the Government will make long-term commitments to our town, make them explicit and give confidence to local and national businesses for their continued support.

I did want to touch on universal credit because I had whistleblowers in *The Guardian* yesterday who were highlighting some systemic issues, but I will bring that back in September. I will just take the opportunity to say thank you to everyone and have a happy recess.

5.55 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I rise to register my support for Congleton Museum’s aspirations to move to Bradshaw House. In its first 16 years of existence, Congleton Museum, a charitable trust entirely run by volunteers, has had considerable success locally, regionally and nationally. The museum was established as the local history museum for Congleton but quickly evolved to become recognised within the wider area of Cheshire and the north-west through the acquisition of hoards found in east Cheshire. It is now the area’s leading museum in collecting and analysing archaeological finds. It has been entrusted with the care of important Roman coin hoards from further afield in the county, the Knutsford

and Malpas hoards, in addition to two further 17th century hoards found locally, but there is now simply inadequate room to display these collections.

The Congleton Museum’s status has brought about many partnerships within the national museum community. For instance, it has been working with the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and regional holders of national collections such as the Museum of Liverpool. I pay tribute to the dedicated work of the museum’s trustees and other volunteers for those achievements. Given that success, a move from the museum’s current and—dare I say it—now cramped premises at the back of Congleton Town Hall to Bradshaw House would be fitting.

Bradshaw House is a fine Grade II listed late Georgian home from the late 1820s in the historic heart of Congleton. It takes its name from Congleton’s most famous, or possibly infamous, resident, John Bradshaw, who was president of the High Court, oversaw the trial of King Charles I and was the first signatory to his death warrant. Bradshaw House is currently owned by Cheshire East Council but has been unoccupied for some time.

The benefits of a move to Bradshaw House for the museum are manifold, not only for the museum, but for Congleton, the broader Cheshire East community and our wider heritage. The museum could be more sustainable in the long term. It is a highly appropriate tenant for such a listed building. Cheshire East Council says that it has no current plans for the future of Bradshaw House while seeking a commercial buyer, but if the museum were able to take it over, it could be fully restored and cared for for the full term of a 30-year lease, potentially taking advantage of Heritage Lottery Fund funding, which is much needed for restoration costs, which few commercial purchasers would readily commit to. The museum’s offering could be increased, with space available for larger numbers of children, making a visit more cost-effective for schools.

Bradshaw House is much more visible and attractive than the museum’s current premises, located as it is in the heart of the Lawton Street conservation area. The museum would be able to handle a much larger number of visitors and host conferences. Improved facilities would encourage more visitors to the town, thereby benefiting the economy. There would be exhibition space, storage, education and research facilities as well as room for a café and a larger gift shop. As I mentioned, it would also be able to accept and display more artefacts.

This proposal has not only my strong support, but the support of Congleton Town Council and of local residents, who, in just four weeks, have signed a petition. A total of 857 signatories have been added to the petition and the number continues to rise daily. I look forward to presenting it to the Speaker in this House in the autumn.

I am pleased that, just last month, Cheshire East Council, which has previously rejected the museum’s bid to move to these premises, agreed to suspend activity related to the commercial disposal of Bradshaw House—that is, disposal by way of commercial sale. It has suspended activity pending discussions taking place between the museum and the Heritage Lottery Fund on options for HLF support for this proposal.

I do hope that the proposals will be supported strongly by Cheshire East Council. I am today seeking the active support of the council, which is our principal authority.

[Fiona Bruce]

I also invite the leader of the council, Councillor Rachel Bailey—who I know is a good woman with a real heart for our local communities—to join me and museum representatives to meet the HLF to discuss what support may be available from HLF for this project. Such a meeting would also enable museum trustees to clarify to the leadership of Cheshire East Council that its reservations about the viability of such a scheme can be satisfactorily addressed.

6 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I would like to share with the House how I will be spending my recess. Today is 24 July, and what else would I be doing other than fighting yet another NHS-inspired campaign to close the A&E and the maternity unit at St Helier Hospital? The third week of July is always the time when my local NHS decides that it is a good idea to consult—to consult families who are on holiday, people who are away from work and people who could not possibly get to a consultation meeting in the middle of the day. There are no rules. It is the wild west in the NHS in south-west London.

Last year, at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, the chief executive, Mr Elkeles, bet his career on the fact that he could close the A&E and the maternity unit—something that nobody else has done over the past 20 years. So yes, deliver leaflets to the whole catchment area, other than any house in my constituency. Yes, tell nobody that responses will only be accepted on the official form. Yes, get 1,000 responses and accept them, but get 6,000 contributions from other people opposing this move, and, no, they are not to be included.

Let us now talk about the clinical commissioning group, which is following the same pattern as last year. It is about to begin its consultation of four public meetings—all held during working time and all held in July and August. Who says that there is a code of guidance on consultation in the NHS? Nobody in south-west London has ever read it. This is my ninth campaign to fight the reorganisation of my hospitals. The plan, as it has always been for the past 20 years, is to close the A&E and the maternity unit at the hospital, which is surrounded by those who are most in need, with the greatest health issues—those who are the least likely to have a car and the most likely to be dependent on public transport. But no matter; in the NHS in south London, as my mum would say, much gets more. If people live in a wealthy area, they can anticipate greater capital spending. The NHS in south-west London has built the Nelson health centre in one of the richest wards in London, but closed the walk-in centre in a portakabin in my constituency. I would be really interested to know the capital figures involved in doing up GPs' surgeries, and I suspect that a great deal more money has been spent in Wimbledon.

It is a travesty that over the past 20 years £50 million has been spent on these consultations, which have always come out with the same result. It really does not matter to me how many experts or marketing consultants the trust has or how much money it wants to throw at it. It is wrong to take an A&E, a maternity unit and all the associated services away from a hospital that is in huge demand. During the winter, the hospital saw an uplift

of 20% in the number of people turning up to A&E. But this is not just about my area around St Helier Hospital; it is about the health service in south-west London.

If St Helier A&E and maternity unit are closed and moved to Belmont, the consequence will be that the fantastic St George's Hospital in Tooting will not be able to function because of the number of my constituents who will be going to that hospital to use its services. Similarly, Croydon University Hospital—a hospital surrounded by a population in greatest need—will feel the brunt of my constituents from Pollards Hill and Longthornton using its services.

This madness should end. Somebody should listen. There should be rules about consultations. There should be criteria that people understand. If the NHS is to abide by the Equality Act 2010, it should, in all circumstances, take into account how those who are in most need access their health services. I hope that there is someone, somewhere, who just might listen.

6.4 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): We have heard some excellent speeches this afternoon, not least the two maiden speeches.

In 1772, Robert Hay Drummond, Archbishop of York, commissioned what is now known as Bootham Park Hospital. John Carr was drafted in as the architect, and in 1777 the hospital opened. It was a stunning building based in parkland and 17.85 acres of land, or 21.2 acres including adjacent public land. In 2015, following successive failed Care Quality Commission inspections, the site closed to clinical services, and the site closed to the trust last autumn. Now, a new mental health hospital is being built in Haxby Road, due to be opened in 2019. This leaves in question what will happen to the site. How will public land be disposed of in our city? NHS Property Services Ltd has been required to dispose of the site, and of course an attractive offer will be incredibly tempting.

Similarly, at Duncombe barracks in York, the Ministry of Defence is looking to dispose of that site, favouring 14 executive market-priced homes as opposed to 36 units urgently needed by the local community. Time and again, we are seeing public land being sold off to the highest bidder at the expense of the real needs of our city. No co-ordination or conversation is brought to our local community, which desperately needs homes. Surely, local government should have a say over these disposals. We are seeing more and more luxury apartments and executive homes. We have heard so powerfully today the reality of what happens then.

Of course, this is not what our city wants. The residents of York have been absolutely clear that they want to maintain the hospital site for vital health services for our city. I will explain the geography. Bootham Park Hospital is adjacent to York Teaching Hospital—our acute hospital—which is crammed on to a site that desperately needs additional land to transform health services and bring health into the modern age in our city. Without access to that land and the ability to repurpose Bootham Park Hospital and its site for health service use, health in our city will suffer.

We need transitional care and rehabilitation beds in a newly built specialised unit. We need a primary care-led urgent care centre so that our A&E is not crammed over yet another winter and our hospital is not exploding at

its seams. We need to ensure that we house our health sector workers in York. The hospital spends about £30 million a year on agency staff, because people cannot afford to work and live in our city. As a result, our services are poorer. We therefore need that land to create key worker houses for NHS staff. We need additional mental health services, particularly so that our young people have decent facilities. We need extra care facilities for an ageing population.

We do not want to see the magnificent parkland that I mentioned being utilised as the grand entrance to some luxury apartments, or even a hotel, or perhaps a golf course. No, we need a new public park for our city where children can play and sports activities can take place. We also need to ensure that third sector organisations have access to the land that they need. One Public Estate is on board and the acute trust is on board, but we need the Secretary of State to be on board, too.

Our city is crying out for this NHS facility. We need to expand and build for the modern age and transform healthcare from a medical to a social model and from a sickness service to a health service. We should not look at the short-term goals, which so often happens in politics, and miss the opportunity to build a health and wellbeing village for the future of my community that will touch every life and, of course, save money for the public purse in the long term.

Today, the clock is ticking, the gavel is raised and the highest bidder is making its move. The solution to Bootham Park Hospital is to save the site and ensure that it is there for healthcare in the future. Let us create a new life for Bootham Park Hospital and use our imagination to do so.

6.10 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is nice to round off my first year in Parliament with a recap of some of the highlights that I have been able to contribute to as a new Member. I think that any Member would agree that the most satisfying aspect of our job is seeing the real benefit we can have for our constituents' lives, particularly in casework. That has made a real impression on me in the past year, in particular when it comes to dealing with the hostile environment policy that this Government have been foisting on some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

My constituency has a relatively large migrant population, and some cases have struck me as particularly damning. It took a total of 18 years for the Government to grant the Kamil family, who are Iraqi-Kurdish refugees, leave to remain as a refugee family. They have spent their lives in limbo. Indeed, the youngest was denied the opportunity to go to university because the immigration status the family faced was insecure, and the eldest was unable to secure work at an engineering company, despite graduating with a first-class engineering degree from Aberdeen University.

These are highly motivated citizens who have so much to contribute to our society and our economy. We have to recognise the benefits that many of these people can deliver for our country, having overcome such terrible hardship and usually fled some of the most war-torn and desperate situations in the world. We cannot treat them with contempt any more. We have to recognise the value they bring to our country. I hope we can recognise that in a debate in the House in the forthcoming parliamentary term.

Another case was Duc Nguyen, who was not so much a refugee but was trafficked to this country from Vietnam. He was arrested and put in prison for being forced to work in a cannabis factory, released and then detained by the Home Office, even though its own guidance says that it should not detain trafficking victims. The Home Office recognised that. We need to have a debate about how the Home Office puts its policies into practice, particularly in relation to detaining victims of human trafficking. That was another case that struck me as particularly difficult.

I was very pleased to welcome a constituent, Giorgi Kakava, to the House yesterday, and he sat in the Gallery to watch a debate. It was great to bring him to the heart of our democracy, given that he has been under so much stress in the past few months. His mother tragically died in February this year, leaving him an orphan. He is 10 years old and has lived in this country since he was three, yet he was threatened with deportation by the Home Office. Luckily, after my intervention in Prime Minister's questions, the Home Office decided to grant him temporary leave to remain, but we have to continue to fight for him to be given permanent leave to remain. He speaks with a Scottish accent. He is one of us, and he is at school with his friends in Glasgow. The notion that he could be deported to Georgia—a country that is alien to him—is totally absurd.

Those are some of the absurdities that we see in our immigration system. I hope that we can address them in the forthcoming term, to re-establish confidence and dignity in our immigration system and uphold British values.

We have to address the Government's industrial strategy, particularly in relation to renewables. Gaia-Wind, a company in my constituency that is a world leader in small-scale renewable energy, nearly went into liquidation because of the Government's failure to introduce a transition from the feed-in tariff for small-scale renewable energy. That needs to be addressed, and it is irritating and extremely frustrating that the Government continue to leave companies that offer so much potential for wealth creation in our country in limbo.

I am worried about the roll-out of universal credit in my constituency in September. We have already seen failures when it comes to personal independence payment assessments. The level of appeals is absurd, and 71% of appeals are successful, which shows how broken the system is. We have to deal with that. I am worried about the transition from disability living allowance to PIP in my constituency, given that there have been 1.6 million underpayments. That shows that there is a severe drop-off in entitlement, which we need to address.

I have been asked by my constituent Daniel Haggerty to raise the issue of social housing. Last year, the number of social rented houses built was probably the lowest on record since the second world war. We need to seriously address that, and Labour's commitment to increase the number of social houses built and increase our social house building programme to the largest in 30 years is laudable.

I want to address the industrial strategy in this country. In an announcement sneaked out today, the Government have said that they will delay the procurement of the Type 31e frigate. We have already seen disruption to the shipbuilding programme in the UK from changing

[Mr Paul Sweeney]

the Type 26 programme to a Type 31 build split, and we now to have a delay to that programme. As a matter of urgency, we need to address this and provide certainty for our shipbuilding industry. As someone who grew up around it, I know what that means. In the 1990s, yards competed against each other for contracts—drip fed—which meant insecure employment, disinvestment and a lack of competitiveness. We need to get into a virtuous cycle for our industrial benefit, which means having highly secure jobs. The Government must get a grip on the Type 31 programme as a matter of urgency, which is why I look forward to debating it in the forthcoming term.

6.15 pm

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), who has definitely made his mark with the excellent things he is already doing in the House. I congratulate the two new Members who have made their maiden speeches; I am sure that they will be excellent advocates for their constituents.

As a member of the associate and retired members branch of the Public and Commercial Services Union, and as vice-chair of the PCS parliamentary group, I congratulate the PCS on yesterday's national pay ballot, in which 85.6% of people voted for action, on a 41.6% return. However, I would like to express my concern that because of the Government's anti-democratic Trade Union Act 2016, the ballot did not quite reach the 50% threshold, and the members were not allowed to do any kind of e-voting. Those civil servants will now be subject to another 1% to 1.5% unfunded pay rise. I hope the Minister agrees that this is particularly worrying because a recent survey by the Department for Work and Pensions showed that more than 70% of its staff had experienced financial difficulty during the past year. We can only imagine the depths of the low morale that civil servants are now experiencing.

As co-chair of the drugs, alcohol and justice cross-party group, I am aware that Public Health England is reviewing the impact of the introduction of minimum unit pricing in Scotland. I am not sure how long that will take, but have the Government considered the health impact of delaying the introduction of minimum unit pricing in England? The 2012 alcohol strategy gave a commitment for its introduction, and it was delayed only because of the drinks industry's legal challenge to Scotland's evidence-based policy. The rationale for further reviews is not clear. Surely more delay merely signals that England is less concerned than Scotland and Wales about alcohol-related illness, deaths and crime, and its vulnerable young people.

At last week's Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister gave a disappointing reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) when she restated the Government's refusal to allow a drug consumption room to open in Glasgow, despite a wealth of evidence showing that drug consumption rooms are effective in reducing transmissions of blood-borne viruses and drug-related deaths. The issue has become vital as there are now well over 100 cases of HIV among this population group, and the outbreak shows no signs of abating. This is a glaring example of what happens when harm reduction, as an approach to drugs policy, is ignored.

The drugs, alcohol and justice cross-party group is writing to the Home Secretary to call for permission to be granted for a drug consumption room to open in Glasgow. I urge the Government to show more compassion and less complacency in drugs and alcohol policy at a time when drug deaths are already at record levels and there are more than 1 million alcohol-related hospital admissions each year.

Finally, I invite the Minister to watch the BBC documentary "M.E. and me"—produced by Cat Donohoe and presented by her sister Emma, who has ME—which looks at how young people cope with this debilitating illness. I ask him to urge the Government to provide funding for adequate and appropriate research on ME in support of the 250,000 sufferers in the UK.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you a restful recess. I hope that everyone in the Chamber and across the House has a wonderful recess and comes back refreshed in September.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words. On behalf of everybody behind the scenes in the House, I thank everyone who has spoken so eloquently this afternoon and wished a good recess to everybody who supports us here in the House of Commons. No, I have not forgotten the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—far from it. It has become a sort of convention—almost a tradition—that the last speech from the Back Benches should be made by the hon. Gentleman. Right now is no exception when I call, to make his 44th speech of the Session so far, Mr Jim Shannon.

6.20 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): After such an introduction, I am almost overwhelmed. Thank you so much, Madam Deputy Speaker; you are very kind.

I wish to raise a topic that is very important to me: homelessness on our streets, and what we as communities can do to help. I do not have not enough time to go through this, but I will briefly summarise where we are.

All this started with a discussion in my office during the harsh storms at the end of March. My office manager and a number of friends in Belfast took it on themselves to cook up hot meals and soups, and distribute them to those who were on the streets. We can always measure a nation, a people or an individual by their compassion for others. It is my firm belief that in this developed nation, which seeks to help the poor in developing countries, there must always be a way of ensuring that we take care of our own. Charity must be abroad, but also evident at home.

I put on record my thanks to charities such as the Simon Community that help the homeless. The individuals involved are so kind-hearted as they set out to make the small difference that they can with all that they have.

I want to tell a quick story. A fellow I know quite well from my constituency, who is doing a doctorate in Irish history, recently told me that he had been going down from Ards to Portaferry, admiring along the way all the culture and the rich historic artefacts that we have. It was night-time, so he got on to a bench and went to sleep. Next morning he was woken by a gentleman shaking his shoulder, who gave him a hot coffee and a warm breakfast. In my constituency we have compassion for other people, and I believe that that clearly shows

the nature of Strangford. Are we in this place doing enough, like that gentleman, to ease the burden for individuals we perceive as needing a little help?

The Northern Ireland Audit Office says:

“Contrary to popular belief homelessness is not restricted to people who sleep rough, it encompasses a much wider range of individuals in a variety of circumstances”.

We must acknowledge that mental health certainly plays a role. The fact is that, as a result of the troubles, the prevalence of mental health issues is 20% higher in Northern Ireland than elsewhere, and that has a knock-on effect on our homelessness. Indeed, we have a higher proportion of homelessness than any other region of the United Kingdom, so the issue is extremely important. I was startled by the fact that the number of people deemed homeless has increased by 32% in the last five years. Some 12,000 households—individuals and families—were accepted as homeless in 2016-17, and between 2012 and 2017, homelessness in Northern Ireland cost some £300 million. That focuses our minds on the clear issues that we have in my constituency of Strangford and also, I believe, throughout Northern Ireland.

I want to put on record my wonderful relationship with those at the local Housing Executive, who work tremendously hard to secure appropriate housing for needy people as quickly as they can source it. In particular, I want to put on record my thanks to the regional manager for the Housing Executive—Owen Brady, certainly a man of action. He may be small in stature, but I tell you what: he is a man who makes up for that in his energy. Although he is unable to meet the needs of every person who presents themselves to the Housing Executive as homeless, his team works hard to do its best for those who need that the most.

There are simply not enough available houses for those in need. Last year, the Simon Community in Northern Ireland made 369 warm beds available in Northern Ireland, accommodating some 2,391 people. It is increasingly concerned about the high prevalence of mental health issues such as self-harm and suicide attempts among those experiencing homelessness. With mental health issues affecting one in five people in Northern Ireland, that homelessness charity wants to draw attention to mental health issues as both a cause and an effect of homelessness. We must do more in this place to offer and deliver mental health support—not simply to those in the street, but to those who are at risk of shortly finding themselves living in a sleeping bag in our city centre. Do I believe we have got it right? No. Do I believe that we have an opportunity to stop doing the same thing and do it differently? Yes. Do I believe that we must do this urgently? Yes, we must. It is incumbent on us to make changes to the level of housing and mental health needs that are found on our streets in every corner of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

To you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to Mr Speaker and the other Deputy Speakers, thank you for your kindness, your compassion and your help to Back Benchers. It is always good to speak in this House. I thank my family and my staff, and the good people of Strangford. It is truly the most beautiful constituency—I believe this with all my heart—in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Come to Strangford for your holidays! I think no matter who you are, you will enjoy it, and I will be there to welcome you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you and your staff a happy recess. To everyone here who makes our lives much easier—to the *Hansard* staff who try to understand my Ulster Scots, to the security staff who give us such service, and to those in the Tea Room who look after me with my coffee every day—I say thank you very much.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good wishes.

Just before I call the Front Benchers, it might be helpful for the House to know that, following the point of order raised earlier by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) about the availability of copies of the national planning policy framework, I can tell the House that the framework has now been laid before House and copies are available in the Vote Office.

6.26 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I just say that half an hour after I raised my point of order, the Secretary of State for Defence apologised and sent me a letter? That goes to show that if Members raise a point of order in this place, it can be very effective.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) and for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O’Mara) on their maiden speeches. I am touched that the hon. Member for Lewisham East is another proud trade union activist and former public sector worker like myself. This Chamber is graced with former public sector workers and trade union activists.

The Deputy Leader of the House is wearing yellow and black socks today. I thank him for that, because he is obviously commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Glasgow East by-election that was won by John Mason.

It is not funny how life imitates art? I was struck by that yesterday when a Scottish Conservative mentioned “Game of Thrones”. Those who watch the programme will know that the series ended with the sometimes popular male blond hero walking out on his female leader because of strategy and tactics. Isn’t that funny? How will this saga end, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Bob Stewart: The hon. Gentleman has just ruined it for me. I was really looking forward to the end of the series, but now I know the endgame—absolutely ruined!

Chris Stephens: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but the series ended a year ago.

How will this saga end? Will the male blond hero be the winner, or will the female leader somehow manage to find another way of clinging on to power? But never mind about that: when are going to get another episode of “Game of Thrones”? As the Deputy Leader of the House will know, Scottish National party Members call the Tories the Lannisters, which makes the Scottish Tories House Bolton.

Let me wish every Member a good summer recess. I think it was the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) who said it is not a holiday—he is absolutely right. I am hosting a universal credit drop-in event tomorrow morning in Penilee community centre in my constituency. I echo Members’ comments about the

[Chris Stephens]

effect that universal credit is having on the community. The Government need to look at this week's revelations by whistleblowers who used to work on universal credit about the very serious effects of systematic errors on claimants. It is time to pause and fix universal credit.

It is not just our social security system that is broken. As hon. Members have pointed out, the immigration system is broken too, with a "hostile environment" and asylum seekers waiting years for decisions. I discovered another issue this weekend when my constituent Hamid Ahmad, an Afghan interpreter for the British Army, came to see me at my surgery.

Several hundred Afghan interpreters for the British Army are part of a five-year resettlement scheme to the UK, and I find it astonishing that when some families who were brought over on the scheme, who now have children born in the UK, applied for British passports, they were told by the Home Office to apply for Afghani passports instead, because they are not being accepted as British citizens. I hope that the Home Office will deal with that. There are also some men who did not bring their families initially, but who tried to bring over their partners on spousal visas and are having difficulties with that, too. I would have thought that interpreters who have helped the armed forces in this country should be treated a lot better than that.

The hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) mentioned public sector pay and the Public and Commercial Services Union ballot, and I want to associate myself very much with her remarks. We have discovered today that the public sector pay cap is still in place, because the Treasury is still only funding each and every UK Government Department 1%, and each and every other Department has to find the additional money to fund a decent pay rise. I hope that as we go into recess, the Ministry of Defence will pay the living wage to those employees who are not in receipt of it. There are 220 in Scotland, and I am sure that there are others elsewhere.

I want to associate myself, too, with the comments by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on the suspension of the Type 31e frigates procurement process. It is absolutely astonishing that we come here but there has been no statement.

Vernon Coaker *indicated assent.*

Chris Stephens: Does the hon. Gentleman want to intervene?

Vernon Coaker: No, I was just agreeing.

Chris Stephens: It is absolutely astonishing that no statement has been made in the House on the suspension of that programme. What is even worse is that if there was one procurement process suspended in the Ministry of Defence, we would think it would be not for the Type 31e frigate but for the fleet solid support ships—the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships—which, astonishingly, are being put out to international competition, despite the benefits that a UK-wide bid would have to our economy. It is absolutely astonishing.

As an MP from Glasgow, I was delighted to table early-day motion 1534, commemorating the centenary of the birth of the great Nelson Mandela and to congratulate the Nelson Mandela Scottish Memorial

Foundation on its work, which is fundraising and trying to find £250,000, so that there can be a statue of the great Nelson Mandela in the city of Glasgow.

Comments have been made by many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), on the work that I am proud to have done in the last year with Show Racism the Red Card. As the vice-chair of the Show Racism the Red Card all-party group, I was delighted to see schools in my constituency—Lourdes Primary School and Hillington Primary School—win awards in the Show Racism the Red Card Scotland's creative competition.

I am proud to be a part of the Youth Violence Commission, which has just published its interim report. It is important that we try to spend some time in this place discussing how the creative industry can help to address the problem with youth violence, giving young people an opportunity to express themselves through film making and various other creative arts. I was delighted that the South West Arts and Music Project received a grant of £91,000 from the Scottish Government.

As I said earlier, this is not a holiday; it is a recess. I want to thank you, Mr Speaker, and the whole parliamentary staff, who look after us, speak to us and often cheer us up. I wish them all the best for the summer. I also want to pay tribute to the constituency staff right across these islands—I am sure that everyone in the House would agree—who help us as Members of Parliament. I place on record my thanks to Joe Murray, Scott McFarlane, Tony McCue, Mary Jane Douglas, and particularly, Keith Gibb and Roza Salih. Their energy, enthusiasm and hard work are infectious, and I look forward to working with them in the summer and beyond.

6.34 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): This time last year saw my first speech at the Dispatch Box in this role. We had just returned from the snap general election, and I talked about the clear message the public had sent the Government. I rather hoped the Government had learned from it. I thought they might have learned a bit of humility or taken the opportunity to reflect on the red lines and whether the "no running commentary" approach was perhaps not working, or that maybe it was time to respect Parliament and the voices of Members speaking on behalf of constituents in scrutinising the Executive. But no! Here we are a year later, and the public infighting over Brexit in the Conservative party and the Cabinet is like nothing ever witnessed. When after two years a Brexit White Paper was produced, it had more holes in it than a Swiss cheese, and it was devoured just as quickly. Remarkably, we have had another one today—snuck out on the day when last week they did not even want us to be here. We wait two years for a Brexit White Paper, and then, like the proverbial buses, two come along at once.

The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) has warned us that we might be heading for a state of emergency. The Brexit Secretary resigned, the Foreign Secretary resigned, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union resigned, and a handful of Parliamentary Private Secretaries resigned. The Prime Minister's own Back Benchers rebelled, allegedly were duped and then rebelled again. The Work and Pensions Secretary admitted misleading

Parliament over her response to the National Audit Office report on universal credit but then apologised—sort of.

If only the Prime Minister had taken a different path last summer. There has been a worrying disregard for parliamentary sovereignty and convention. The history books have been trawled for ways to avoid scrutiny. We have seen a breaking of the pairing convention and nodding through and Government Members continuing not to turn up or vote on Opposition day debates. How do we justify this to the people who send us here to represent them and to debate issues that affect them? How can this be explained to my constituents as a good use of parliamentary time?

Beyond this place, many are giving up raising an eyebrow at Brexit developments—perhaps that was the Government's plan all along. All the while, critical legislation and policy making are getting kicked into the long grass while this weak Government spend their time infighting rather than governing in the interests of our country. Just 26 Government Bills have received Royal Assent since the general election—a relatively small number considering the amount of legislation that needs to be passed before we leave the European Union.

On a more positive note, one piece of legislation that did pass that I was pleased to see pass was the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Act 2018, which I worked on with the Government, trailer safety being an important issue in my constituency. I look forward to working with them on that in the next year.

Today we have heard a tremendous range of speeches and two maiden speeches, and I am delighted at how full the Benches are behind me, 16 Labour MPs having made speeches this afternoon. We started with the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) talking passionately about his constituent Sergeant Guralp Viridi and calling for an inquiry. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) talked about the history of Colman's. I did my undergraduate degree in the fine city of Norwich, and he put the case well on behalf of the three generations of workers in those companies and how shoddily they had been treated.

The hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) talked about a range of issues and the potential to designate his area as a national park—it is certainly an area of natural beauty. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) spoke on behalf of several businesses. She was very successful last year on behalf of the Sweetland factory, and I wish her good luck this time on behalf of those other companies. The hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) gave us a feast of issues, as he always does, and again mentioned the campaign to make Southend a city. I wish him good luck with that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) raised several issues on which he hoped the Government could offer assistance and gave a graphic depiction of the impact of domestic violence on women and children and the shocking conditions in which people are living in hostels and Travelodges without basic facilities. The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) also talked about a range of issues and gave a strong commitment particularly to Equitable Life pensioners. Somebody from that campaign came to my surgery, and I wish the hon. Gentleman luck with that. I know he will continue fighting on their behalf.

My good friend the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), a champion for the Potteries, highlighted the importance of using Staffordshire bricks and tiles in future housing developments. She gave us, though, some shocking statistics on the quality of unfinished estates in her constituency and rightly put the developers on notice. I know that she will follow that through. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) made an important speech on behalf of Gibraltarians about the impact of Brexit. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) told us the old know and the young think they know. She joined me this year in the over-50s, so I am hoping that one day both of us will know. However, she made a serious speech about the real need for discussion of older people's care and what is happening in Wales.

The hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) made an important speech about the menopause. She was right to raise that taboo subject, which, as she said, had been discussed only 27 times here in the last three years. She has upped the average today, and I wish her luck with her campaign on women's health.

In the first of two maiden speeches, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) said, "Lift as you climb." Hers was a well-made speech. We are all looking forward to the party on the streets of Lewisham to which I think she invited us, and we must make sure that our own street parties are equally good.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) highlighted problems with benefits of which, as he said, even Ministers are aware. He also made a passionate defence of the important priority for the police of dealing with forced labour and modern slavery, which he will continue to do.

In the second maiden speech, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara) talked about his constituency, and also about the important issues of inclusion, equality and social justice. He said that he wanted to be the best MP that he could be, and I wish him well in that endeavour.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) focused on her experience of managing to visit Yarl's Wood after waiting for 18 months, and of hearing from the women there about the mental torture that they had endured.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) presented a great case for making the cultural and artistic heritage of Reading Gaol available to the country, and I hope that he is supported in that aim.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) raised a range of issues on which he is well known for running important campaigns. He will introduce the final Adjournment debate this evening, ensuring that the Government keep on working to the very last.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) made important points about local government finance as well as international crises. My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) highlighted the work of developers in her constituency, and the importance of our homes as places in which we need to feel safe. She also spoke of the pressure on the emergency services.

[Karin Smyth]

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) talked about trains from Cheltenham, and how much more expensive it was to travel to Manchester than to Bristol. That is astonishing, when we consider how much better Bristol is as a city than Manchester. The extra £25 is well worth spending—every penny of it! I also discovered that if I visit Cheltenham for the evening, I can stay there until 10.50 pm, but if the hon. Gentleman comes to visit Bristol, he must leave at 10 pm. Bristol is barely getting going at 10 pm, so I wish him well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) talked about youth services, and her important constituency campaign on cauda equina syndrome. She also talked about the Grimsby town deal, and the need to ensure that the Government make a long-term commitment to support Grimsby.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) made an interesting speech about local museums and Bradshaw House. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) reminded us that she was involved in her ninth campaign to save local hospital services. She said that the NHS had spent £50 million on consultations in 20 years, and that there would be four public meetings in August. I hope that she enjoys them all. I am sure that she will be there and will make sure that people listen, as she always does.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) continues her Bootham Park hospital campaign, on which I have worked with her before. She recognises the importance of land as an enabler for decent healthcare services and key worker housing, and I wish her luck with her campaign.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) talked about refugees and the value that they bring to our country, about renewable energy, about social housing, and about the importance of shipbuilding to his constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) talked about the Public and Commercial Services Union and how its recent ballot worked; she also talked about drug and alcohol policy and ME.

Finally, we heard the 44th speech of the Session—quite remarkable work—from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who also invited us to visit his constituency.

I talked about chaos earlier, but at least during the last few months the country has been blessed with weeks of wonderful sunshine, an exciting World cup to enjoy, and—for most of us—an England football team to be proud of. We have also had a royal wedding and a royal birth, and “Love Island” is beguiling the nation. Looking forward, I can tell any Members who are not tired of too much hot air so far this Session that in Bristol in August we will have the annual balloon fiesta, which I can highly recommend. In my constituency this weekend we will have the “Upfest”, a three-day festival celebrating some of the world’s best graffiti art. Apparently, 100 years of women’s suffrage will be celebrated in collaboration with “The Simpsons”; I have been told to watch out for a post-feminist Lisa.

Last year I invited Members to visit my constituency, the home of Bristol City football club, to watch some high-quality football. During the season, Watford, Stoke City, Crystal Palace and Manchester United found out

about that high-quality football to their cost. I am sure there will be more victories in the coming months, but this year I extend a special invitation to followers of a different sport, as Bristol rugby team, the Bears, retake their place in the top division. My right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) will be particularly welcome.

Mr Speaker, it has not been dull: since last we broke at Easter it has been a veritable rollercoaster, and I am sure colleagues across the House are looking forward to some well-deserved down time with their families and friends, as am I. I offer a big thank you to all the House staff for their hard work in keeping this unique and wonderful estate running: the kitchen staff, the Clerks, security, housekeeping, facilities, and our own staff, as we have mentioned—the list is endless. I thank everyone present and wish everyone a happy, healthy and peaceful recess.

6.45 pm

The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty’s Treasury (Paul Maynard): In these 95° temperatures, I am sure we have all noted Public Health England’s advice to stay indoors and I am glad that so many hon. Members have taken that advice today and gathered here. But this is a strange venue in which to seek shelter from the heat, given the heated debates we have had over recent weeks here—so hot that perhaps we ought to be wearing aluminised fibreglass suits to withstand the hot air that has been generated. None the less we were all gathered here. Sleepless nights, increased irritability, vexatious points of order—harmony has perhaps not been the watchword of this Chamber over recent weeks. But it has undoubtedly been an historic parliamentary term that will live long in history for what we have collectively achieved, and we can all say that we were there, even though many of us maybe wished we were not.

It is fitting that before our recess—a recess is not a holiday; we are all working hard; I have meetings too this week—we have had the traditional “Matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment” debate. We have had many contributions, far more than usual, and I cannot guarantee to reply to every point raised, but my diligent officials will make sure that all relevant comments are passed on to the relevant Departments.

Many of us attend summer fetes—we have done so already and will do in the coming weeks—and this debate is rather like dipping our hand in a lucky dip bran tub. In it goes, we feel some indistinct, indeterminate shape between our fingers, pluck it out and wonder what it could be. Today it turned out to be the constituency correspondence of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). We look at it and wonder what to do with it—I will respond in due course. We have also had two fine maiden speeches today, and I congratulate both Members on making them, in particular the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby), who I see in her place. She gave a passionate speech and I look forward to her contributions in the House.

I will do my best to get to every Member who was here. Those who have not made it back for the wind-ups might not get my fullest attention, but those who are here will get an iota of my attention.

First and foremost, the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) spoke passionately about his town—

Clive Lewis: City.

Paul Maynard: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon; as Blackpool is only a town, not a city, I assume everywhere else has to be a town as well. He spoke passionately on behalf of his constituents and we heard what he had to say about the actions of Unilever in the city of Norwich.

On the speech by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), I am delighted to hear that I achieved something during my relatively brief phase as HS2 Minister. I am also glad to hear that there is plenty more for my successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), to engage in in the days and weeks to come. I heard with great sadness the story the hon. Lady told about young Sophie and I am sure the whole House passes on our thoughts to her family at what must be a very difficult time. My officials will make sure that the hon. Lady gets an answer to her question from the relevant Ministers about how the organ donation scheme might operate.

The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West was a masterclass in compression. I gather he raised 32 separate issues in seven minutes, which you, Mr Speaker, can only approve of: *o si sic omnes*—if only we could all achieve that, and I rather fear we might. He highlighted the rich fabric of community and voluntary activity in Southend, and again he plugged the case for Southend city status. I reiterate my two-for-one deal: if he backs Blackpool for that status, I will back Southend in turn, but I have heard only a deafening silence since our last recess debate.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) spoke with great passion. He reminded us of the significant benchmark for Louise Brown, a significant lady in the life of this country, and all that she represents. I particularly agreed with him about the unsuitability of using a Travelodge as a domestic violence refuge. I know the importance of the work that Fylde Coast Women's Aid does, and the importance of refuges, and I am surprised that we still have to have recourse to using travel lodges for that purpose in this day and age.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) disappointed me: I was hoping to hear rather more about yoga, which I know he is a great proponent of. Given the many contortions that hon. Members have had to go through in recent weeks, and the odd positions that they have found themselves in, yoga would no doubt have been very helpful. It might well come in useful in the weeks to come. None the less, my hon. Friend spoke sensibly about the Equitable Life issue, and drew our attention to his personal role in developing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which I know is so important.

The hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) spoke on the issue of new homes, and I entirely agree with all the points they made. I have seen some horror stories myself, and I am sure that the Government will be inspired to action. I know that the hon. Members' pressure will continue. There were many ideas, particularly from the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston, that I am sure Ministers will want to take forward.

It was a delight to spend seven minutes in Gibraltar with my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I have no doubt that Ministers are more than aware of their responsibilities with regard to the people

of Gibraltar. They are a valiant people on their Rock, and I am sure that we would not wish to let them down in these difficult times.

In responding to the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), I shall avoid the temptation that many at this Dispatch Box often feel to criticise the Labour Government in Wales. I shall simply point out that there is always a great deal that we can learn from the devolved Administrations—even, just occasionally, the one in Edinburgh. I am never insensitive to what we can learn from Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) spoke with great personal insight and demonstrated how we all bring immense personal experience to our proceedings in the Chamber. There should be no taboos in the House of Commons. We should all be able to speak about what we have learned from our own lives. We all have a unique insight, and we should always feel free to contribute in that way.

The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) spoke with his usual force and passion on the issue of mental health and the personal independence payment. I very much recognise the points that he made. It is a case of constant improvement with the PIP; we have to make sure that it continually improves. I know that Ministers are particularly focused on that matter, and the hon. Gentleman was right to raise it. I was disappointed to hear about the comments from the councillor he mentioned. I have fought long and hard to ensure that disability hate crime is recognised for what it is, and he was right to encourage people to continue to report examples of it.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) spoke with her usual forthright trenchantness, if that is a word; I am not sure that it is. I hope that she will have welcomed the Home Secretary's comments earlier today when he made his statement on the Shaw review. It is important to remember that anyone who is in detention, for whatever reason, is still a human being. They have a dignity that is unique to them as an individual.

The hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) and my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) showed creativity in what they put forward for their local areas. I will make sure that the Arts Minister gets a bumper pack of things to think about over the summer.

My former MP, the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick)—he is perhaps still my best former MP—again gave us proof of why he should always be listened to on issues of electrical and fire safety. His list of policy adjustments is not so much a Government achievement as his own, and it proves the Speaker's adage, "Always persist." He is certainly persistent on the things that matter most to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) demonstrated why he continues to be held in such high regard on both sides of the House. I am sure that he awaits our social care Green Paper with anticipation, as do I. I am also pleased that he joins me in welcoming the fact that Eritrea and Ethiopia are now getting on better. I saw a fascinating photo of the first flight from Asmara to Addis Ababa just the other day; that was good news.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) overlooked the key fact that I am not the Rail Minister any more. None the less, the shadow Rail Minister,

[Paul Maynard]

the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), is here to note his concerns, and I am sure that she will take them up. I could talk for half an hour about the CrossCountry franchise, but don't worry—I won't. However, my hon. Friend's points about overcrowding were very well made.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) had the chance to visit more youth services in her constituency after what I am sure was her unintended oversight. She made an important point about the role of youth services in areas of greater deprivation, and I wholeheartedly agree with her on that. I also welcome the town deal that she mentioned, which gives me an idea to follow up in Blackpool, so I am grateful for that if nothing else.

I say to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) that what she described does not sound like a consultation; it just sounds like, "We're not interested." I wish her luck with her ninth campaign, and I hope that it is her last, but I am cynical, as I suspect she is.

The hon. Member for York Central raised some important points about the distribution of public land in her constituency and had ideas for new parks. I happen to think that parks are one of this country's urban treasures, and we should always do more to promote them. I wish her well in her campaign.

It may be the first year that the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) has been in the Chamber, but I can certainly say that he has made his eloquent presence felt. I welcomed his recap of stuff that I recognised from business question after business question after business question. His fortitude does him great credit.

The hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) demonstrates why APPGs do matter in this place. Her forensic approach and knowledgeable contribution show that the hours spent in dusty Committee Rooms are not ill-spent at all.

To the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), I say that it should be 344, not 44. I hope that he goes on forever and ever and ever, amen. I am sure that he will.

I am so grateful that the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) paid attention to my socks—so few do—but I hate to tell him that they are Australian, not Scottish. His allusions to "Game of Thrones" were wholly lost on me. I am a "Mad Men" fan, although I have only got to season four of that, so no spoilers, please. I am so busy being an MP that I do not have time to watch the latest television shows, but I am glad that he has the time to do so—only joking.

As we look to our summer recess, I note with some degree of trepidation that the Prime Minister is once again walking at high altitude. I hope she has a pleasant and relaxing break and no bright ideas. Just to be on the safe side, I am very much sticking to low-lying areas for any breaks that I may take.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr Speaker, for your stewardship over the past year, your team of Deputy Speakers, the Clerks who keep us ticking over, the catering staff who keep us fed and, most importantly, watered, the Library staff who fertilise our brains, and the security staff who protect us from all anxieties.

I wish all right hon. and hon. Members the most calm and peaceful summer recess, because I think we all need a bit of a lie down after the time we have had recently, don't we just?

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the petitions and any points of order that might precede them, I want to echo what the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury has said on the Government's behalf by way of appreciation. Perhaps I can start by thanking all colleagues who have contributed to this debate, but more widely I want to recognise the conscientious application to their task that they have shown ever since we came back after the general election. Whatever may be said about colleagues, and whatever people think of politicians, I know from my vantage point how hard and dedicatedly people on both sides of the political spectrum work in the Chamber, in Committees, in all-party groups and in constituency-related meetings and that should be recognised. People are trying to do the right thing by their constituents and their country. I thank colleagues for their engagement.

I thank the Leader of the House, who applies herself with enormous intensity and commitment to the work that she has to do, and wish her a very agreeable and well-earned summer break. I wish the same to the deputy shadow Leader of the House. Recognising that we can do what we do only because we are magnificently served by a vast number of dedicated, caring, efficient and effective staff at all levels of the House, I thank the staff of the House. Their work does not go unnoticed, and it will always be appreciated. Have a good summer.

Vernon Coaker: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. First, I think everyone would associate themselves with those remarks.

May I apologise to the House for not mentioning my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests before my speech? I should have referred to my entry, and I did not. I apologise to the House for not doing so.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said, which I think will be readily accepted by everyone in the House.

If I might be forgiven, I want to say thank you once again to our maiden speakers. We heard two outstanding speeches. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara) is not now in his place, but I have offered my respects to him. I reiterate to the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) that hers was a speech of great passion, authority and empathy. My very clear sense is that it commanded enormous support and respect across the House, and I wish her and the hon. Gentleman a very good experience here in the House of Commons.

PETITIONS

Litter in East Northamptonshire

7 pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): This petition declares that residents of East Northamptonshire and the surrounding area want litter to be cleared, particularly by the side of the A14. A similar petition has received 50 signatures.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that litter should be cleared from the East Northamptonshire area.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compel local councils to help clear the East Northamptonshire area of litter.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002248]

Mr Speaker: In case people attending to our proceedings wonder what is going on, the hon. Gentleman has not one petition but, to be precise, four, so I encourage him to give us the flavour of each of the other three petitions before troubling himself to walk in this direction again.

Oundle North Bridge

Tom Pursglove: I present this petition on behalf of the people of Oundle and the surrounding area who rely on Oundle North bridge, which provides vital access in and out of the town. A similar petition has received 1,474 signatures.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that a timely and satisfactory repair of Oundle North Bridge must be agreed between local residents and Northamptonshire County Council and East Northamptonshire Council.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compel Northamptonshire County Council and East Northamptonshire Council to agree on a plan to make sure repairs are implemented as soon as possible, and with as little impact as possible on the lifestyle of the local residents and the local economy.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002250]

Residential development on Addington Road, Irthlingborough

Tom Pursglove: I present this petition on behalf of the people of Irthlingborough and the surrounding area who have concerns about the impact of development 18/01009/OUT on Addington Road, which is already heavily congested. Residents are concerned about increased problems with parking, traffic and damage to vehicles.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares an objection to the proposed residential development of 49 dwellings on Addington Road in Irthlingborough - 18/01009/OUT.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compel East Northamptonshire Council to object to the proposed residential development 18/01009/OUT.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002249]

Residential Development on Cheltenham Road, Corby

Tom Pursglove: I present this petition on behalf of residents of Corby who object to the proposed development of 18 new-build dwellings on Cheltenham Road. A similar

letter of petition to Corby Borough Council has been signed by 102 local residents, and 93 other objections have been submitted.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares an objection to the proposed residential development of 18 new build dwellings on Cheltenham Road in Corby - 18/00365/REG3.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compel Corby Borough Council to object to the proposed residential development.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002256]

Asylum decisions

7.4 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am presenting only one petition this evening. May I start by drawing the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests? It was notified to the Petitions Office yesterday, but I am afraid it appears not to have made it on to the Order Paper. I present this petition on behalf of the residents of the United Kingdom, and I want to thank my friends in Refugee and Asylum Seeker Voice, who have worked so hard to bring people together to draw this petition to the attention of the House. It requests that

"the House of Commons urges the Government to follow its guidelines and ensure initial asylum decisions are made within six months"

It continues by stating that if the Government are not able to do that, they

"should ensure that claimants are informed of the reasons behind any delay."

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the current government policy which states that initial asylum decisions 'will be usually decided within six months' has not been followed in many cases, with some people waiting years without being able to work, choose where to live or move forward with their lives; further that in 2017, almost half of all asylum claimants waited six months for their initial decisions; and further that, this leaves many people in a state of uncertainty regarding their future, affecting their health, mental health, careers, education, and their financial situation as evidenced in the report, 'The Waiting Game' produced by Refugee and Asylum Seeker (RAS) Voice, a group of people seeking asylum living in Manchester.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to follow its guidelines and ensure initial asylum decisions are made within six months, failing this, the government should ensure that claimants are informed of the reasons behind any delay.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002252]

Football club ownership

7.6 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I present this petition with the support of my hon. Friends the Members for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon), who, like me, are Newcastle United fans and represent

[*Chi Onwurah*]

Newcastle United fans. It follows on from the “If Rafa Goes We Go” campaign and online petition directed against Sports Direct and Newcastle United owner Mike Ashley.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Newcastle upon Tyne Central,

Declares that football is an integral part of Newcastle upon Tyne’s social and cultural wellbeing; notes that fans of Newcastle United are heavily invested both financially and emotionally in the success of the team; further that the current manager Rafa Benitez needs the support of both fans and the club’s owner; further that this support should include investment in players, training facilities and community engagement; and further that the owner Mike Ashley has not made this support forthcoming.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons to urge the Government to take action to prevent unscrupulous football club owners from exploiting the clubs, their fans and local communities, with particular reference to Mike Ashley and Newcastle United FC.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002251]

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

7.7 pm

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): I present this petition on behalf of the residents of the Coventry North West constituency, whom I have the honour to represent. It is about the “Home education: call for evidence and revised Department for Education guidance”, which is now, in effect, operative.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Coventry North West constituency,

Declare that the ‘Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance’ has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002253]

First-tier Tribunals and Freeholders

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

7.9 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am delighted to be here this evening. There have been several obstacles to the debate taking place, but we are here none the less, and I am pleased to see the Minister in the Chamber.

I secured the debate to highlight some of the things that seem to have gone terribly wrong with the property tribunal procedures. We know that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is committed to reforming the law in respect of leasehold tenure, but the Ministry of Justice needs to do more in respect of first-tier tribunals. I am grateful to Martin Boyd of the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership for his extensive assistance with this speech, and I am glad to see other colleagues who take an interest in these matters in the Chamber.

The property tribunal, or first-tier tribunal, is described as “quite informal” by the Government-funded Leasehold Advisory Service, which states:

“Tribunal hearings are quite informal. You can state your own case or have a friend or professional to speak for you. The Tribunal normally sits as a panel of three consisting of one legally trained member, one surveyor and one lay person to provide a balanced perspective. The Tribunal panel have control over the hearing and will decide in which order things are dealt with... You may require the services of a solicitor.”

That might be a correct statement in respect of some smaller cases involving smaller landlords, but in almost all large cases, or in cases involving large landlords, the tribunal process can be not only horribly complex, but formal and expensive.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): This is an important issue. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Law Society must do all that it can to encourage firms to provide pro bono legal advice so that help is available for tenants if they are in a tribunal facing a big-firm opponent that is lawyered up?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the advice available to individuals who seek redress in law and where they might seek it. As I will go on to explain, the playing field is not at all level in these tribunals. I hope that the Minister will comment on that later.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I was under the impression that first-tier tribunals were meant to be informal. We do not really want lawyers there; we want tribunals to look at the case and to give a decent, sensible, honest judgment.

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. He is quite correct that these tribunals are supposed to be an informal means of dispute resolution, although it is thought appropriate for people to have some legal advice if they need it. However, we now regularly see highly specialist barristers and even QCs appearing for landlords before what are often part-time solicitor judges in what are meant to be our lowest form of court. Cases often go on for days, with landlords’ counsel ponderously

reviewing the most basic elements of a lease and the simplest issues of law. In some cases, tribunals seem to allow counsel to pontificate on the rights supposedly provided to leaseholders, which can be either uneconomic or impossible to apply. It may be true to say that the tribunal procedure rules are less formal than the civil procedure rules in the main courts, but this often seems to work to the benefit of well-represented landlords rather than leaseholders. Landlords are often able to ignore tribunal procedure rules with impunity.

There is a total costs imbalance at the tribunal. What was meant to be a low-cost forum has now become a costs regime that benefits only one side, and that side is the landlord. It is a one-sided arms race. In almost all cases, the landlord now arrives at the tribunal knowing full well that they will probably have a right to their costs under the terms of the lease. The tribunal has some powers to limit costs, but those powers are often ineffectual and may not be applied, even if the leaseholders win. Conversely, the leaseholder arrives at the tribunal knowing that they have no right to recover their costs under almost all circumstances.

Let us take a hypothetical situation in which a landlord overcharges 1,000 leaseholders £250 each. If the individual leaseholders want to dispute those charges, a single letter from their solicitor will probably cost them more than they could ever recover, but the landlord can afford to invest a substantial amount of the £250,000 that they may have overcharged to defend their position.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is raising an important point in his very important speech. Does he agree that this disparity of resources and funds is particularly iniquitous when the landlord is a charity and is using the funds not to give the leasehold to their tenants? That is the case with the St Mary Magdalene and Holy Jesus Trust in Newcastle.

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. It is very dispiriting to see charities and other institutions that one imagines would be on the side of morality and fairness being caught up with offshore tax evaders and individuals who are unscrupulously taking money from leaseholders hand over fist and not actually looking after the building. Some institutions and individual organisations that are freeholders and landlords aid and abet developers to make this an unlevel playing field, and that is most dispiriting.

Let me go back to the point that I was making. If leaseholders want to take joint action, and that is if they can actually find each other—in multiple developments, there are investors who own the properties and people who sublet the properties, so it is not always easy to find them—someone will have to take on the burden of the work, knowing that they will never be paid for their time and effort. Almost inevitably, the leaseholders will recover only part of the £250,000, given that the test of reasonableness for costs at the tribunal has no concept of “good value”, let alone “best value”. Even if the leaseholders win, and the tribunal limits the landlord from passing on costs, it may not happen. With many developments, leaseholders have found that it is heads the landlord wins, and tails the leaseholders lose.

Under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, a badly managed development can apply to the first-tier tribunal for the appointment of a manager independent of the

landlord who has mismanaged the site. This is known as a section 24 appointment. Removing a landlord's management can be difficult. It can take more than one attempt, and each time costs are awarded against the leaseholders. Those costs can run to several hundreds of thousands of pounds—more like Supreme Court costs than those of first-tier tribunals. Freeholders can try to obstruct the court-appointed manager from doing his or her job. Some have been known to try to block residents from forming their own association to represent them. I have residents who have successfully resorted to the tribunal system to force the freeholder to recognise them. In one instance, the landlord appointed a Queen's Counsel to fight their case, and they compared residents' associations to 1970s militant trade unions—in this instance, the leaseholders were City professionals. Incidentally, as a 1970s trade union member myself, I feel a bit insulted that that was said as some kind of disparaging comment. Despite losing, the freeholder and landlord sought costs for a half-day hearing totalling £74,560, which the leaseholders had to pay. It is surreal.

Landlords in the social sector have also started to use highly expensive counsel. The Government could and should do something to stop this practice when the process should be about the facts of the case, rather than convoluted arguments about the law. I give as an example a social landlord in my constituency who also happened to be trying to stop a residents' association from being recognised. The landlord went so far as to take a group of residents to the tribunal in three separate cases. The landlord presented a bundle of documents only on the day of the hearing in the second case, which was put down to “an internal reorganisation”, but also registered errors of fact from the original hearing. Only after a third hearing in the upper tribunal was the matter finally settled, with the residents gaining their formal recognition. Even though the leaseholders won in the second hearing, the landlord still sought to obtain not just a costs award, but a wasted costs order against the leaseholders. The net outcome of the case is that the social landlord will have less to spend on their buildings, their tenants and their residents, having spent large amounts on third-party lawyers.

That brings me to the main issue that I want to raise today: section 24 appointments. When the tribunal appoints a section 24 manager, that manager acts as an officer of the court. He or she is required to act impartially in the best interests of the building. In theory, they are meant to report to, and to be supported by, the tribunal that appointed them. The reality seems to be that, once appointed, the tribunal has little interest in supporting its manager, who may face challenges from the landlord. In one case in my constituency, the court-appointed manager sought advice from the tribunal. The tribunal has repeatedly declined to support its manager.

The purpose of a section 24 appointment is to replace the landlord's failed management, and then effectively to set out the business plan for the management of the site. The tribunal has wide powers in drafting this order, which can go wider, giving the manager powers beyond those provided for in the lease. The first-tier tribunal has powers to move problem cases to the upper tribunal, but that does not seem to happen, and certainly not in the experience of a number of my constituents. Furthermore, there appear to be many in the legal profession who are only too happy to take advantage of

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

a system that charges leaseholders costs whether they win or lose. That cannot be right and sounds like very unprofessional conduct. There are millionaires with fortunes to protect, and cash cows such as developments in my constituency that keep them rich.

My constituency has the second highest number of leasehold properties in the country. Some are owned by well-off City professionals who know their rights and will fight for them, no matter the intimidation and the pressure laid against them. Some of these leaseholders are young individuals, couples and families starting out who are compromised by service charge hikes, and unfair and expensive refurbishment costs post-Grenfell. They will defend their homes, but the law is against them. And some of these leaseholders are pensioners who exercised their right to buy, or subsequent buyers of right-to-buy flats and houses who are also at the mercy of a landlord who might be a housing association—a registered provider. The one thing that these people all have in common is that they will find that the first-tier tribunal disputes resolution procedure, which is supposed to be simple, inexpensive and informal, is no such thing.

The Government have recognised that leaseholders need better regulation and that their homes are undervalued and under-protected. Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministers have pronounced in recent months that they are looking at all aspects of tenure, including: spiralling ground rents; hikes in service charges; inflated refurbishment costs; overpriced insurance; outrageous event fees; forfeiture; difficulty securing lease extensions; non-recognition of residents associations; selling of houses as leasehold; and bullying and harassment. If that list was not bad enough, post-Grenfell there are the fire protection costs for the removal and replacement of defective cladding, interim arrangement costs and the rest. The first-tier tribunal is supposed to offer a simple, informal and inexpensive way forward—they wish! I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say to explain or defend the procedure as it stands because, in the experience of my constituents, it stinks.

The Ministry is on record saying that it will review leasehold tenure and all its failings, and will be bringing forward legislative and regulatory proposals in due course. This has been echoed by the former Secretary of State, the present Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, and those comments are very welcome. Governments have been trying to fix leasehold for 30 years, but both Labour and Conservative Administrations have failed. I will be grateful for some reassurance from the Minister that her Department is signed up to the Government's reforms and will improve the legal protection available to leaseholders through the first-tier tribunal system and section 24 powers. Indeed, I would be grateful if officers of the all-party parliamentary group on leasehold and commonhold reform met the Minister, at some point in the weeks and months ahead—at her convenience—to discuss these issues. I look forward to the Minister's response.

7.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): I congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing today's debate on a subject that is clearly very important

to his constituents, as it is to other Members in the House. I thank the other hon. Members present for their valuable contributions, particularly the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I was very interested to hear in the last debate that it was his 44th speech in this Session. I am pleased that he has remained for the final debate before the recess.

It might be useful for me to explain a little bit more about the first-tier tribunal and the matters it deals with. The chamber was created in 2013 following the transfer of the functions of three tribunals—the agricultural land tribunal, the adjudicator for the Land Registry, and the residential property tribunal—into the first-tier tribunal. The residential property jurisdiction deals with a number of matters relating to landlord and tenant law, including leasehold enfranchisement and lease extensions, liability to pay service charges, variations of leases, and the acquisition of the right to manage. It is an expert jurisdiction. The tribunal panels include valuers and, as the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse said, lay people with experience of landlord and tenant matters.

I turn to the specific question of the powers of the first-tier tribunal to appoint a manager under section 24 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, and how they are enforced. Section 24 allows the first-tier tribunal to appoint a manager to carry out obligations contained within a management order that is issued by the first-tier tribunal. Although the tribunal makes the appointment, it is often the case that leaseholders apply for a manager to be appointed because the landlord has in some way breached the management obligations that it owes to them. In most cases, before the leaseholders make such an application, they must serve a notice on the landlord specifying in broad terms the landlord's alleged breaches and what the landlord must do to remedy them. If the landlord does not take remedial action within a reasonable period, the leaseholders may then apply to the first-tier tribunal for the appointment of a manager.

Usually, the party applying nominates the individual manager they wish to have appointed, who is then required to prepare a management plan setting out his or her experience and explaining how he or she will manage the property. The first-tier tribunal has wide powers to decide on the matters to be included in a management order under section 24, which will typically deal with initial transfer of information, documentation, money and other items necessary for the manager to be able to perform his duties properly. It will also cover which management matters were transferred to the manager, such as maintenance, repairs, and collection of service and other charges from the leaseholders.

It might be helpful to explain the manager's status in this type of arrangement. The manager is not a managing agent, nor is he employed or directed by the landlord or the leaseholders, including those who apply for his appointment. The Court of Appeal has stated that the appointed manager carries out the functions required by the tribunal, and he or she carries out those functions in his or her own right as a tribunal-appointed official. He is not appointed as the manager of the landlord or to carry out the landlord's wider obligations under the lease, unless specified in the management order. In an appeal to the upper tribunal, His Honour Judge Huskinson said that if there is criticism of the conduct of the appointed manager and complaints are brought before

the tribunal, those criticisms must and will be examined with care, because they are made against the manager as a tribunal-appointed officer.

To be clear, the manager is appointed by the first-tier tribunal to carry out the duties required by the order appointing him. He is answerable to the tribunal, not to the leaseholders or to the landlord.

Bob Stewart: So who do people who have a complaint about the way that the management is functioning—leaseholders, in particular—go to if the manager is not answerable to them? Do they have to go to the tribunal again, or what?

Lucy Frazer: As the manager is a court-appointed officer, people can complain directly to the tribunal about his actions. The manager is a court-appointed officer answerable to the court, and any issues in relation to his conduct would be brought before the tribunal.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse asked about the support and protection available to managers who are carrying out their duties in what can be very difficult circumstances. As I said, the obligations are set out in full in the management order. It is for the first-tier tribunal to decide how the order is to operate and how the manager is to fulfil his obligations.

If a landlord is being so obstructive that the terms of the management order cannot be fulfilled, the manager can apply to the first-tier tribunal for further directions, and an order under section 24(4) can be made. Such an application can include a request that a penal notice be attached to the management order, and if a penal notice is attached and the landlord disregards it, the manager can apply to the county court for permission to enforce the management order. Enforcement of any provision of a section 24 management order, monetary or otherwise, is a matter for the county court, not the tribunal. That includes enforcement of penal notices that can attach to such orders.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important point about the inequality in some cases in relation to parties in the property chamber. He was right to say, as my hon. Friend

the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) was, that certain features of the tribunal are designed to make it less formal and more accessible than the courts. Where one side has retained legal representation, tribunal members are trained not to permit attempts at oppressive behaviour by legal representatives and will help unrepresentative parties to frame questions where necessary.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse made some interesting points about inequality in respect of costs. Parties should meet their own costs of litigating in the tribunal system, even when they are successful in their own claim. There are powers, however, for costs to be awarded where there is unreasonable behaviour. The tribunal has powers under its rules if applications are being brought oppressively by those with a stronger bargaining position and stronger powers. It can strike out proceedings that are frivolous, vexatious or abusive under rule 9(d), or if there is no reasonable prospect of an application succeeding under rule 9(e), but I acknowledge that he made interesting points in relation to costs.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned quite rightly that the MHCLG is looking at a wide variety of matters in the area of leaseholds. We are always looking to improve our processes. On 2 July my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government announced that the Government would issue a call for evidence this autumn, to better understand the experience of people using the courts and tribunals services in property cases, including considering the case for a specialist housing court. My Department is also discussing with MHCLG officials what further work is necessary to speed up the appeals process for housing disputes across the courts and tribunals.

The hon. Gentleman asked to meet, and I would be very happy to meet him, to continue to discuss this important matter. I thank him again for securing the debate. It is right that we look at how we can continue to protect people and their property rights.

Question put and agreed to.

7.32 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 24 July 2018

[JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

Office for Budget Responsibility

9.30 am

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility.

It is always a pleasure to speak under your guidance, Mr Gray. I thank those who have turned up on the last day of Parliament before recess; I know that we are all keen to get back to our constituencies, but the opportunity to debate the remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility was evidently too good to turn down. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the OBR, the Congressional Budget Office and the CPB in the Netherlands, as well as the House of Commons Library, as the key sources of my speech.

Credibility has become an enormous problem in modern-day politics—the credibility of not only individual politicians but policies and the numbers in our political discourse. The old adage rings true: Members often use numbers as a drunk man would use a lamp post—as a prop, as opposed to for illumination. We need to get back to numbers helping to illuminate our debate. They should help to inform decision making to bring a degree of objectivity to our debate—in this Chamber and the main Chamber.

I will start by looking in depth at the OBR's current powers, in order that Members better understand why I believe we should expand its remit. First, I want to provide a brief overview of what the OBR currently does. The OBR was created by the coalition Government in 2010 to provide independent, authoritative analysis of the UK's public finances, on the back of the 2008 financial crash. It has five main roles, and I will look at each of them, starting with economic and fiscal forecasting.

Twice every year—for the Budget and for the spring statement—the OBR produces five-year forecasts of the economy and the public finances. Forecast details are set out in the “Economic and fiscal outlook”, while the annual “Forecast evaluation report” it publishes each autumn compares the forecasts to the subsequent out-turns and draws lessons for future forecasts. The forecasts also incorporate the impact of any tax and spending measures announced in the two statements by the Chancellor.

The OBR also has a responsibility to evaluate the Government's performance against targets, using the public finance forecast to judge the Government's performance against their fiscal and welfare spending targets. Furthermore, in the “Economic and fiscal outlook”, the OBR assesses whether there is a greater than 50% chance of hitting the targets under the current policy measures.

For example, in March 2014, the Government set a self-imposed cash limit on a subset of their social security and tax credit spending. In the 2016 autumn

statement, the Government redefined the cap to apply only in 2021-22, preceded by a pathway to that fixed date. The charter for budget responsibility requires that the Government set a new welfare cap in the first Budget of a new Parliament, so the cap was adjusted in the 2017 autumn statement, which applied to 2022-23. It is the OBR's responsibility to monitor the Government's progress against that pathway and to assess in each “Economic and fiscal outlook” report whether they are on course to meet the cap in the target year.

The OBR's annual “Welfare trends report” also examines the drivers of welfare spending, including elements inside and outside the cap. Those represent just some examples of how the OBR continues to monitor and evaluate the Government's performance against their own targets.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter to Westminster Hall for consideration. Does he agree that the OBR's team has withstood internal and external scrutiny and audits extremely well? There is certainly scope to expand its remit, to deliver a high level of accountability across the wider region. In other words, what the OBR does now could go further. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Luke Graham: I agree, and I will go into more detail later on exactly how I propose the powers should be extended and how to move forward.

The OBR provides sustainability and balance sheet analysis, which assesses the long-term sustainability of the public finances. The OBR's “Fiscal sustainability report” sets out long-term projections for different categories of spending, revenue and financial transactions, and assesses whether they imply a sustainable path for public sector debt. That has arguably been a particularly important metric as we have sought to make the public finances more manageable and sustainable after the financial crash in 2008. There was a kick there aimed at the last Labour Government, but I will resist that for now.

The “Fiscal sustainability report” also analyses the public sector's balance sheet, using both conventional national accounts measures and the whole of Government accounts, prepared using commercial accounting principles. Since 2016, the “Fiscal sustainability report” has been published once every two years, reflecting the frequency with which the Office for National Statistics updates its population projections.

The OBR evaluates fiscal risks every two years by publishing a comprehensive review of the risks from the economy and financial system in its “Fiscal risks report”. The first was published in July 2017, and the OBR analysed tax revenues, public spending and the balance sheet and included a fiscal stress test. Furthermore, the OBR produces central forecasts and projections for the public finances, while the “Economic and fiscal outlook” and the “Fiscal sustainability report” include discussion of the risks—both upside and downside—to those forecasts and projections.

The whole of Government accounts provide further information on specific fiscal risks, notably contingent liabilities such as Government guarantees, and that is in the “Fiscal sustainability report”. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I have the joy of taking part in, and leading on, the inquiry into the whole of Government accounts. The Committee recognised the

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fine work of the Departments and the civil servants that pull together those accounts, which really are of a very high standard and are certainly world leading.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): One recent OBR report is about probably the biggest challenge that we as a country face—our ageing population and the associated social and healthcare risks. I found that report very useful. Does my hon. Friend think that such activity is a good use of the OBR?

Luke Graham: I do. That kind of objective analysis from the OBR could help to inform and shape some of our public debate. It could certainly make sure that policy debates in the House are informed by substantive, objective figures that would hopefully have cross-party support.

Finally, the OBR is responsible for scrutinising the Government's tax and welfare policy costings, which it does at each Budget. The Government provide draft costings in the run-up to each statement, which are subjected to detailed scrutiny and challenge. The OBR also states in each "Economic and fiscal outlook" report and in the "Policy costings" document whether it endorses the Government's published costings as reasonable central estimates and whether it would use them in its forecast. It also gives each costing an uncertainty rating, based on the data underpinning it, the complexity of the modelling involved and the possible behavioural impact of the policy.

Those five major roles all focus on the UK-wide public finances. However, the Government have also asked the OBR to forecast the receipts from taxes that they have devolved—or intend to devolve—to the devolved Administrations. It is therefore clear that the OBR already has an extensive remit, with a great deal of responsibilities, not only to deliver information to the Government, but to ensure accuracy so that that information is reliable enough that the Government can make acceptable fiscal decisions.

On the earlier point about the OBR's performance, it has forecast, on average, within 0.3% accuracy of actual economic growth over the past seven years. While the exact accuracy in any given year has of course varied, the OBR has, to its credit, sustained an accurate reporting standard over a significant period of time. If anything, it has slightly underestimated economic growth in its predictions, showing a propensity for conservative estimates, which does it much credit. Indeed, the one outlier in its predictions is from 2013. For that year, it predicted a slowing of growth, but, in fact, thanks to the Conservative-led coalition Government's policies, we experienced a 2.1% growth rate. It is worth noting that, without that outlier, the OBR has achieved accuracy of 0.1% in its predictions. That is a sound endorsement of its expertise.

Why do I believe that we should extend the OBR's powers? First, it is worth remembering that independent budgetary offices are well established and well respected in other countries. In the Netherlands, the Bureau for Economy Policy Analysis, the CPB, has been in place since 1945. It is fully independent; it has its own legal mandate and an independent executive and advisory committee. Research is carried out on the CPB's own initiative or at the request of the Government, Parliament, individual Members of Parliament, national trade unions or employers' federations.

It analyses the effects of current and future Government policies, and it is responsible for producing quarterly economic forecasts, as well as a spring forecast and a macroeconomic outlook, which is published alongside that country's Budget in September. Taken as a whole, those forecasts provide a basis for extended socioeconomic decision making in the Netherlands.

The CPB analyses policy proposals, but also evaluates the effects of policy measures that have already been implemented. Since the early 1950s, the bureau has been analysing the costs and benefits of large infrastructure projects. It also conducts research in a wide range of areas, including, but not exclusively, the economic effects of ageing, globalisation, healthcare, education, the financial crisis and the regulation of markets.

Since 1986, the CPB has offered political parties an analysis of the economic effects of the policy proposals in their election manifestos. The plans of the participating parties are analysed identically, which offers voters a comprehensive tool for comparison of the parties and contributes to the transparency of the election process.

However, it was during a visit by the Public Accounts Committee to our American counterparts earlier this year that the idea of expanding the OBR's remit came to me. During the visit, we learned about the Congressional Budget Office—a similar independent fiscal advisory organisation—based in Congress, in Washington DC. The CBO was created by the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act 1974 as a non-partisan agency that produces independent analysis of budgetary and economic issues to support the congressional budget process. Interestingly, the CBO was based on the Californian Legislative Analyst's Office, which manages the state budget in a non-partisan manner. To this day, the CBO provides analysis for state and local government where congressional committees report on legislation that applies to those levels of government.

The CBO's mission is to help Congress to make effective budget and economic policy. The CBO discharges a number of key responsibilities, and I want to examine a few of them in greater depth. First, in broad practical terms, each year the agency's economists and budget analysts produce reports and hundreds of cost estimates for proposed legislation. The CBO does not make policy recommendations; its reports and other instruments, which summarise the methodology underlying the analysis, help to inform policy decisions and the debates that subsequently take place in Congress.

If we look a little deeper into that, we see that among the CBO's statutory requirements is the production of certain reports, the best known of which is the annual "Budget and Economic Outlook". That report includes the CBO's baseline budgetary and economic projections. The CBO is also required by law to produce a formal cost estimate for nearly every Bill approved by a full committee of either the House of Representatives or the Senate. Those cost estimates are only advisory. They can, but do not have to, be used to enforce budgetary rules or targets. Moreover, the CBO does not enforce such budgetary rules, although its work informs them; the budget committees enforce the rules. The power still lies with the politicians, but they are making much more informed choices.

It is important to remember that it is Congress that sets the CBO's priorities; it is not the President, either of the major political parties or the CBO itself. However,

I understand from conversations with counterparts in the United States that the CBO has become more open to the majority and minority leadership—both sides—in the House of Representatives and the Senate putting forward proposals to or making requests of the CBO. The CBO follows processes specified in statute or developed by the agency in concert with the budget committees and the congressional leadership. The CBO's chief responsibility under what is known as the Budget Act is to help the budget committees with the matters under their jurisdiction.

For the CBO to be able to provide analysis to the breadth of recipients described, its analysis must be objective, impartial and non-partisan. The CBO achieves that by refusing to make any policy recommendations and by hiring people on the basis of their expertise and without regard to political affiliation. Analysts are required to conduct objective analysis, regardless of their own personal views. Strict rules to prevent employees from having financial conflicts of interest and to limit their political activities are enforced. That is in line with the requirements for our own civil service.

Importantly, the reports by the CBO are designed to reflect the full range of experts' views, as it is required to present the likely consequences of proposals being considered by Congress. By their nature, the estimates are uncertain, but the estimates provided are in the middle of the distribution of potential outcomes. The CBO also undertakes a range of dynamic modelling. It will look not just at the impact of one policy and assume *ceteris paribus* that the rest of the world is held constant; it will also look at the impact that that one variable will have on other policies, to provide a more complete scenario forecast and recommendations to the various committees.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making a very interesting speech. When the Government here announce that they will put in place a particular measure—a tax relief, for example—and that it will raise such and such revenue or cost such and such, I am concerned that that number is not then properly checked to prove whether the measure did or did not. Does the CBO check policies afterwards to work out whether its forecasting was accurate?

Luke Graham: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I believe that the CBO does do that and I will certainly come back to her on that point. When we were looking at some of the benefits, tracking after legislation was also, I believe, in the remit of the CBO, but I am more than happy to write to the hon. Lady to confirm that. I agree that what she refers to is incredibly important. Just in the year that I have been in the House, I have seen the pace at which Westminster moves. Policies flare up in the House of Commons; there is an enormous amount of press and focus on them; and two months later, they are almost entirely forgotten. Having some recourse is essential. Of course, that does exist through the Public Accounts Committee—and, in America, through the similar budget review committees. That is usually where the costs and benefits analysis to check whether policies have worked takes place, so this may be one less task for the OBR. It could certainly help to provide some of the analysis, but that task would probably fall more within the remit, certainly in the United Kingdom, of the National Audit Office, as opposed to an extended OBR, so that we keep the division of labour.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the very detailed, comprehensive speech that he is making. He has outlined clearly the issues in relation to this organisation; I just wonder whether he has given any thought to the idea that teamwork makes the dream work. Does he agree that there is a need to ensure that there is constant training of team members, so that the natural ingoing and outgoing nature of the job that they do does not affect the high standard of work being provided by the office? In other words, it is important that the staff are trained and kept up to date with all things that are happening in order for a good organisation to work better.

Luke Graham: I do agree. As I have mentioned, a hallmark of the CBO is the high standard of staff it employs. That is based on their expertise and ensuring that the right people are hired for the right role and that training is maintained in the office as well, so that expertise is not lost with standard staff turnover.

The CBO maintains its objectivity through a rigorous system of checks and balances. All the CBO's cost estimates and reports are reviewed internally for objectivity, analytical soundness, and clarity. That process involves many people at various levels in the agency. Analysts' consultations with outside experts help them to hear all perspectives on an issue.

Furthermore, the CBO evolves as the needs of Congress evolve. It has remained true to its original mission, but, as legislation has grown more complex, it has found itself spending more time providing preliminary analysis and technical assistance during the drafting stage of laws. The CBO is being asked more often to prepare cost estimates for Bills that are heading for votes without being marked up by committees first.

I emphasise that the CBO is strictly non-partisan. It conducts objective, impartial analysis, and importantly that analysis is accepted among economists and, consequently, by both parties in Washington. The CBO has historically issued credible forecasts of the effects of both Democratic and Republican legislative proposals.

That brings me to the last thing that I want to propose for the OBR. It is crucial that the independence of the Congressional Budget Office is accepted and beyond reproach, because it monitors and marks the policies and proposals of not only the Government, but the opposition. The independence of the Office for Budget Responsibility is, I believe, beyond reproach, but it only monitors Government policies. The Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011, which founded the OBR, states that where any UK Government policies are relevant to the performance of the OBR's duty of examining and reporting on the sustainability of the public finances, the OBR

“may not consider what the effect of any alternative policies would be.”

That rules out analysing Opposition spending plans.

My proposal, therefore, is to extend the powers of the Office for Budget Responsibility to create a body that replicates the function of the CBO in the United States, providing independent analysis to hold spending commitments to account. The aim of my proposal is to extend the powers of the OBR, providing it with additional responsibility to assess, analyse and score every piece of legislation that goes through the Houses of Parliament

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for financial or fiscal impact. It will maintain its strict independence, making it acceptable on both sides of House, regardless of which party is in government.

The purpose of my proposal is to enable the OBR to provide independent information and analysis, in order to combat “fake news” and misinformation being circulated on Government and Opposition spending plans. Wild spending commitments have been made, particularly by Opposition parties in the past, for example over the abolition of tuition fees, with no responsibility to deliver while out of office and, therefore, no accountability.

Let us look at the Brexit debate. How much better could the debate have been had there been an independent body, such as the OBR, providing accurate analysis of the impact of the costs and opportunities of Brexit? It would have taken the pressure off the Government and given us analysis that would be accepted by all parties. We could then have debated how to make the best of Brexit—or not—rather than the endless debates we have had over bus-side promises, scaremongering over power grabs or whether the Brexit deal was sufficiently hard, soft or anywhere in between.

John Howell: How does my hon. Friend think the OBR would have reported, if it had been given that role?

Luke Graham: I do not know whether I am sufficiently qualified to project on to the OBR the conclusion it might come to. I am sure it would have provided additional food for thought, to contribute to the debate.

As I have already mentioned, other countries have long-established and well respected independent fiscal bodies, which provide analysis that is respected and accepted across the political spectrum. That allows the politicians to debate the substantive matter, not subjective opinion. Establishing an independent system of accountability will hold manifesto commitments to account before an election, making fiscal sustainability a manifesto premium, and negating the opposition’s ability to garner support through unsustainable spending commitments. In turn, this will allow us, as politicians, to focus our debates on the content and direction of our proposals without having to waste time debating the credibility of the figures.

This is not the first time that this proposal has been suggested. In March 2014, Robert Chote, the chairman of the OBR, recommended to the Treasury Committee in a hearing that opposition party policies should be costed by the OBR, in order to improve the quality of public debate. Mr Chote was confident that it was within the OBR’s capabilities, although not in its current remit, to review party manifestos for a general election, so long as the parties could agree the terms of reference. During that Treasury Committee hearing, Mr Chote said that he supported

“the OBR having a role in the costing of political parties’ manifestos in the run-up to an election”.

He said:

“if Parliament wishes us to go down this route then it does offer the prospect of improving the quality of policy development for individual parties and it potentially improves the quality of public debate”.

The then shadow Chancellor, Ed Balls, wrote to Mr Chote, asking the OBR to assess the Opposition’s manifesto

pledges, while Danny Alexander of the Lib Dems—then Chief Secretary to the Treasury—also supported the proposal.

The *New Statesman*, hardly known as a Conservative party mouthpiece, wrote in 2015:

“Successful fiscal councils overseas demonstrate the need to balance responsibility with credibility. The Dutch CPB is an established part of the political landscape and plays an instrumental role in setting budgets and evaluating manifesto pledges. In the US, the Congressional Budget Office assesses alternative policy options for the government. The credibility of these institutions has been built over decades...evaluating manifestos should be the beginning of the OBR’s expanding set of responsibilities, not the end.”

Each piece of legislation put before the House, would, therefore, be scored, costed, and subjected to objective analysis and scenario planning, so that politicians can have a more informed debate. That would give us greater focus on smaller initiatives, many of which are announced in the House and passed within one news cycle. It would give us a better understanding of not only central Government funding, but devolved Government spending, so that we would always be clear about Barnett formula consequences and what direct funding is given to the different levels of devolved Administration throughout the United Kingdom. Finally, it would give us a more comprehensive view of our economic and fiscal outlook, so that politicians could have a more informed debate, hopefully leading to better decision-making.

There is something of a credibility crisis in politics just now. The public feel they cannot and do not trust politicians and the promises we make. That is why we should provide an independent, verified and reliable source for the figures we use in debates, one which all sides can agree on. The OBR already exists and has respect and esteem as an independent assessor of the Government, so why not extend that remit to cover all parties regardless of whether they are in Government or Opposition? There is clearly cross-party support for the proposal, as seen in my submission to the Backbench Business Committee. It would be a small but important step on the path back towards believability and reliability in our politics.

9.56 am

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) on securing this important debate; the relatively small number of Members in the Chamber is disproportionate to its impact, and I know our colleagues are desperate to be here and talk about these things. This is one of the most interesting and important debates the House has had in the last few weeks, in either Chamber, because underneath its surface is a series of questions that we as politicians, on both the Opposition and the Government Benches, have about what we want the debate to be around finance, fiscal policy and monetary policy in the coming years, and how we ensure that that is underpinned with a series of structures that make those debates useful and helpful for those who seek to understand and, eventually, vote on them.

I welcome the main thrust of what my hon. Friend talked about in trying to ensure that the Office for Budget Responsibility—the structure that we have in

place already—could be expanded, so that it gave an understanding and indication of the costings of the myriad Bills that are introduced, whoever puts them forward, in the white heat of an election campaign, however difficult that is. That would give the electorate an opportunity to stand back—if done correctly and appropriately—and understand what people and parties were suggesting, and how responsible and, in some cases, irresponsible, those parties were being about our future financial and economic health. We have seen, over several decades, across the world, an increasing move to independent structures, whether independent central banks or independent fiscal watchdogs. I think this is a natural extension of that trend, which I would welcome.

I have both non-partisan and partisan points to make, so I will get the non-partisan ones out of the way first, before the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) intervenes on me, as I am sure she probably will. These things are important for having an educated democracy. To understand where we are going as a country, how much we are spending and the opportunities that we are putting forward for our communities, the public have to have the information so as to understand the different choices being placed before them. It is an excellent idea to give people the tools to understand the implications of the policies that are being made—with the caveats, which I will come to and which my hon. Friend has explained.

We have myriad policies that sound brilliant in isolation, and it seems they should have been implemented decades ago. In isolation, that makes the Government look as if they have been mean or not cared about certain areas. There are often reasons, however, why policies are not implemented. There are reasons things are not necessarily a good idea, even though they look good on paper. There are opportunity costs to decisions that are made. If we can have a discussion about economics and implications, we will be stronger as a democracy.

That discussion must necessarily accept that the world is complicated. In politics, there is a tendency to simplify discussions, particularly about finance and fiscal policy, to a point where they become meaningless. We talk about billions, gaps and black holes in finances without understanding the economic implications and realities of the assumptions underneath them. Wherever we are on the ideological spectrum, it is important to improve the quality of debate about our finances and about where the Government—whoever is in government—seek to take them in future.

I welcome the proposal from that non-partisan perspective and from a partisan perspective, because if it had been in place in 2017, it would have blown apart the Labour manifesto, which was the biggest work of political fiction and fantasy I have seen in my lifetime. I say that not to annoy the hon. Member for Oxford East, but on the basis that on 12 May 2017 the Institute for Fiscal Studies said:

“This manifesto cannot be summed up in mere numbers.”

It also said that the tax measures were “highly uncertain”, that key elements of it were not explained, and that there was an inherent contradiction in borrowing more and seeking to reduce debt. I know that there is a way to do that, but the quantum of debt that the Labour party manifesto suggested was entirely unrealistic. If the Labour party had got in, and if I were not here today as one of

the six Members of Parliament who gained a seat from it, we would be in a problematic economic and fiscal position.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I will do the large-scale demolition later, but I will ask the hon. Gentleman one question now: where were the costings in his party’s manifesto?

Lee Rowley: No one assumes that the 2017 election was perfect on both sides. I accept the principle of what the hon. Lady says to some extent: we did not have a good economic debate in the 2017 election, and I hope proposals such as this will improve the quality and standard of future debates.

My underlying point, which is partisan but not party political, is that I am extremely concerned about the level of debt that western democracies have taken on over several decades—that is one of the reasons I am in politics. That debt is storing up huge challenges for our children and grandchildren in the coming decades.

Speaking about debt has gone out of fashion in the last couple of years; it has not been a central part of our discourse, as it was when we had a large deficit several years ago. It is a credit to the Government that that deficit has been brought down, but it has not been eliminated. On a daily basis, we still add costs and create debt for our children and the people who will be here in 30 years’ time. Although debt is less than it was eight years ago, we should never forget that it is still significant. Between 2002 and 2014, debt as a proportion of GDP rose in every western democracy in the G7. In some cases, that rise was minimal, but in others it was extremely large. Western democracies have a debt addiction that will be problematic in the long term.

As a country, we have moved from paying £30 billion annually in interest payments to paying nearly £50 billion in recent years, and that will only increase. The problem with paying £50 billion is that some of the conversations that we have here every week—about how much money we should put into the health service, the education system or welfare—would be much easier if we were not spending 8% of our budget on debt repayments to financial institutions elsewhere in the world, just so we can hold money that we spent many years ago and that cannot have any benefit today.

That £50 billion is the equivalent of building a hospital every four days, of employing thousands of nurses, doctors and other people in the public sector, or of significant cuts to income tax. The problem is that if we, as a representative western democracy, do not arrest our continued debt addiction, in 20, 30 or 40 years’ time, the figure will be £75 billion or £80 billion in real terms.

Many people have suggested that extending the remit for independent fiscal watchdogs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire has proposed, does not work, because it is ultimately impossible to model some of the underlying implications as there is an inevitable political bias in the assumptions that will be utilised to assess the activities, and because they might not be truly independent.

My hon. Friend also talked about the situation in 2014-2015, when the former shadow Chancellor suggested that the Office for Budget Responsibility look at Labour’s manifesto costings, but it did not have the capacity to

[Lee Rowley]

do that. Those are all interesting points, and probably worthy of debates in themselves, but we have to decide whether we want to improve the quality of debate on financial and economic policies—and I do. The extension of the OBR's remit would be a positive step in that direction.

Those watchdogs work and are useful, as my hon. Friend showed by talking about the Congressional Budget Office in America and institutions in several other countries around the world. I will point to two examples from Australia, where I have family; I am particularly interested in the political machinations there.

In 2007, the Liberal party, which I would closely ascribe to if I were in Australia, was moving out of office and the centre-left party was coming in under Kevin Rudd. In the heat of that election campaign, there was a big debate between John Howard, the Prime Minister, and Kevin Rudd, who would become Prime Minister, about financial and economic costings. The centre-right Government were trying to splurge to win an unprecedented fifth term in office, so they proposed approximately double the increase in spending that the centre left proposed.

I would naturally support my Liberal friends in Australia, but they were not proposing the right policies at the right time, and in doing so, they were not recognising the challenges of an overheating economy. Australia's independent watchdog came along and said that the proposals would cause problems, which gave the mantle of economic credibility to the Labor party—something that is rarely done across the world.

Kevin Rudd is not a natural fellow traveller for me, but his biography says that

“barely 10 days out from voting day... we had won the all-important battle for fiscal credibility...the political dividends were reaped not only from a slew of Australian financial and economic commentators but from the international credit rating agencies too. Fitch stated that Australia would retain its AAA credit rating if Labor was elected”.

That is an example of why this kind of policy, and this kind of proposal, is really important.

If we fast-forward to the 2013 Australian election, Kevin Rudd was at the end of his second term as Prime Minister and was seeking to splurge to stay in office. In the white heat of the election campaign, his party put out a number of scare stories about why the incoming coalition Government were going to cut loads of things, cause huge economic problems and really affect the economy—the kind of thing that we hear quite regularly. *The Australian* published a book called “Triumph and Demise” by Paul Kelly, an eminent journalist in Australia, in which he said:

“In the second-last week of the campaign, the heads of Treasury and Finance issued a statement repudiating Labor's claims”

on the costings of the coalition—the opposition. He continued:

“It was an unprecedented event, the biggest story of the campaign and a humiliation for Rudd as prime minister. Rudd had over-reached and been repudiated by his own advisers. The symbolism of a dying, dysfunctional and dishonest government was irresistible.”

I would not particularly like to have been in John Howard's or Kevin Rudd's shoes, but that demonstrates that if we get structures right and have an independent watchdog that can look and say, “This doesn't work.

This is wrong. These numbers are obscured,” that can improve the quality of debate and focus people on the underlying questions that are being asked.

However, that will only ever be useful if we, as politicians, and the country at large, recognise that statistics are not necessarily the be all and end all, that there is a wider context to be gained from them, and that we need to treat them with caution, as my hon. Friend outlined. But in principle, the extension of the OBR's remit is extremely important. Although I recognise that there are challenges, if we are looking to take steps to improve the quality of debate—both within this place and without, in the wider community—we should seriously consider ideas such as this, which I welcome strongly.

10.9 am

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray.

I thank the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) for securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to it. I particularly thank the hon. Gentleman because his speech was not terribly partisan but just laid out the facts, which is important, and I will attempt to do the same.

First, I will give a bit of context about the Scottish Fiscal Commission and what it does, so that we are all aware of the situation regarding budgetary scrutiny in Scotland, and then I will talk about some of the things that the hon. Gentleman talked about.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission is structurally and operationally independent of the Scottish Government, and it produces robust forecasts about devolved revenues, spending and onshore GDP. The interesting thing about it is that because it was formed fairly recently, we can talk about how it was formed and the decisions that were made about it. When the Scottish Government proposed it and introduced the Bill to create it, they engaged with MSPs and the proposed commission to ensure that the strongest fiscal commission possible was created. In Scotland, we sought to learn from international experience in designing the legislative proposals, and we reflected on the work of the OECD and the International Monetary Fund.

The proposals for the Scottish Fiscal Commission recognised that there was not a one-size-fits-all model for fiscal councils. I think that is part of what we are discussing now; the debate is not so much about a one-size-fits-all model as about the best possible structure for a fiscal commission, given how the UK operates and how the UK Parliament operates, and about whether the hon. Gentleman's proposals actually fit with the way our democracy works and make sense for us.

The Bill to create the Scottish Fiscal Commission expressly provided that it would not be subject to the direction or control of any member of the Scottish Government in performing its functions, and it would be directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament. The Bill also gave the commission the full freedom to determine how it scrutinised forecasts, and protected it from any actual or perceived direction or interference from the Government in carrying out that scrutiny. That is really important, and it is part of what we have discussed today, in terms of the genuine separation between the Government and fiscal forecasting. If we are to have what has been said is the position of the Congressional

Budget Office and agreement from all parties that the Office for Budget Responsibility is non-partisan, we need that very clear separation; the OBR clearly needs to be an independent body.

It was interesting to hear about the situation in America and Australia in relation to how those countries' fiscal commissions operate. However, it would be particularly useful—I am always suggesting this when policies or suggestions are put forward—to hear about countries in which these things do not work, so that we would be aware of any potential pitfalls before we make any decisions. It is always useful to consider how things operate differently in different countries—where these commissions work and where they do not work—so that the pros and cons can be assessed before any decision is made about any changes.

Regarding where things are different, it would be useful to look at other fiscal commissions to see whether their scrutiny works. Whatever any organisation does, there is an accusation of bias, and my particular concern about the OBR is that it would be difficult for it to be in a situation where it was not accused of being biased and that it would find it hard to find that middle ground, if you like. Generally, my view is that the right middle ground is when people on both sides are disagreeing with someone or something and saying that they are wrong—if that happens, they have probably found something there. That is certainly the position that most politicians find themselves in. However, it would be difficult for the OBR to prove that it can strike that balance.

Luke Graham: The hon. Lady is making a very valid point. I just want to refer back to my speech, where I looked at some of the results of OBR forecasts. On average, when we take out the one outlier for 2013, the OBR is actually only 0.1% off, and that was the result of it working on a more conservative basis and underestimating growth. So perhaps we can let the facts speak for themselves, which will help to build credibility, both for the OBR and the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which she has mentioned—obviously, they already work together.

Kirsty Blackman: Absolutely. I am definitely not saying that extending the remit of the OBR is impossible; I am just suggesting that it would be a difficult task for the OBR, particularly if it was forecasting on the basis of individual policies, which it has not done to any great extent in the past. That would be a new place for the OBR to prove its worth and to prove it is non-partisan. However, as I say, I do not want to say that that is an impossible task; I am just suggesting that it is a difficult one and that the OBR would probably take time to find its feet in performing it.

Looking at individual policies and their wider impact would be a very good thing to do. We should consider the fact that we have had so many Finance Bills; even in my three years as an MP, the Finance Bills have kept coming and coming. In each of those Finance Bills, there are changes to legislation; sometimes there is new legislation, and sometimes there are changes to legislation. However, I do not feel that we have adequate information about exactly what the full impact of those changes to legislation will be.

For example, in the last few years, the Government have increased insurance premium tax, and there has not been particularly wide-ranging analysis—certainly

not independent analysis—of the cost of that change. It is all well and good for the Association of British Insurers to produce a forecast of that cost, but I assume people would argue that such a forecast might be biased. Equally, it is all well and good for the UK Government to produce an analysis, but, again, people would assume that that analysis was biased.

So we have a situation where there is not an independent forecast of exactly what the cost of increasing insurance premium tax will be. If increasing insurance premium tax means that individuals could no longer afford to pay their insurance, might such individuals become homeless, and would the state have to step in to help them? If that happened, there would be an additional cost that was perhaps not accounted for in the Government's forecast of how much additional revenue would be created. Consequently, looking in-depth at such policies would be very important.

Policies such as the bedroom tax could be considered. In considering the reduction in benefits for individuals who have an additional bedroom, we must ask what the resulting cost of that policy will be. It perhaps saves the Government money, because people will choose to downsize rather than live in properties that are too big for them. Actually, the evidence perhaps bears out that that does not happen nearly as much as the Government predicted it would. People would perhaps also have to move away from their communities and the support mechanisms they have around them, so there would be an additional cost for the state, as it would have to pay for the lack of support structures that those people have around them if they move. There are incredibly wide ramifications with some of the costs of such a change, so it would be good to have an organisation such as the OBR—if it could be proven to be independent in this regard—looking at the wide-ranging impacts of a policy and examining the draft clauses for the Finance Bill later this year.

I think there is a clause in the upcoming Finance Bill—I think it is clause 31 or clause 32—in relation to VAT interest accrual payments. Basically, the Government proposal is that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will no longer pay interest on repayments that it is due to pay to VAT-paying organisations that have overpaid their VAT. I am not clear what the wider ramifications of that will be. Will it cause cash-flow problems for small businesses? I do not know, but for me to be reliant on the Government's forecast on that issue would cause me some issues, because I would be concerned that the Government's forecast might be biased.

As I have said already, I am similarly concerned that organisations with a vested interest might have a biased position in this regard. It would be very good to see an unbiased perspective on some of these proposals, particularly, as I mentioned, because of the number of Finance Bills there have been and the number of tweaks they have made to policies. I have yet to see a Finance Bill that has not made changes to benefits in kind for people who have vehicles for their work. Now, in the grand scheme of things, not that many people have vehicles for their work, but the fact that every single Finance Bill tweaks the legislation means that there was something wrong with the legislation in the first place, and it is also difficult for us to consider the potential ramifications, because we are not getting extensive information about these things.

[*Kirsty Blackman*]

Finally, I just want to highlight another issue. In my intervention earlier, I asked whether the policies the Government have put forward have produced the outcomes the Government said they would. I appreciate the point of view of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire, and the Public Accounts Committee does a huge amount of work, getting through an incredible amount of information and producing very good reports. Perhaps it is my feeling as an MP that I am not saying to the PAC, “How about you check out this tax relief and whether it has had the impact the Government said it would.” With some of the tax reliefs that have come through in the past, I have asked the Treasury, “Can you tell me whether this tax relief has made the saving, or had the additional cost, you suggested it would?” Generally, it comes back with, “Oh yes, we keep all reliefs under regular review,” but it does not provide me with the tangible information I would like so that I can be assured that the position the Government took, and the case they made, were the correct ones, so that, if they make a similar case in the future, we can agree or disagree with it. That is really important.

I still think there is an issue with the information the Government provide to the OBR, regarding not just the post-situation, after policies comes through, but before they come through. I want to read some statements from the OBR’s 2017 “Economic and fiscal outlook” and elsewhere:

“We asked the Government if it wished to provide any additional information on its current policies in respect of Brexit...it directed us to the Prime Minister’s Florence speech from September and a white paper on trade policy published in February.”

About the Brexit negotiations, it said:

“we still have no meaningful basis on which to form a judgment as to their final outcome and upon which we can then condition our forecast.”

It is all well and good to argue for the OBR to have a wider remit, and I am not opposed to the idea—it is interesting, and we should explore it further to see how it might work—but the OBR can make good forecasts only if it is provided with good information from the UK Government. I get that the UK Government have very much struggled to convince all their MPs to support any proposal on Brexit, but if the OBR had the flexibility to say, “This would be the fiscal outcome if the Government chose this path, and this would be the outcome if they chose this other path,” that would help parliamentarians make the correct decisions about how to go forward.

I was shocked when I read that 2017 Office for Budget Responsibility “Economic and fiscal outlook”, and as soon as I heard about this debate, I immediately thought of those words. It was as if the OBR was having to act with one hand tied behind its back, regarding forecasting. Whatever the situation, and whether or not the OBR is further reformed to look at specific policies—I am not opposed to that—we must ensure that the quality of information that the UK Government provide to the OBR to make good forecasts is better. They should provide as much information as possible, and if they cannot provide information on their policies, they should ensure that the OBR has the flexibility to make forecasts on two, or three, potential outcomes, so that parliamentarians, during the Budget, or any spending process, can make better decisions.

10.23 am

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Gray. I thank the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) for securing the debate, as well as the Backbench Business Committee.

I am delighted that we are talking about the remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility. I strongly agree with the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) that it is an important issue. I regret that we do not have many Members thronging the Chamber; the last time but one I was here was for the debate about safe standing for football grounds, and it is a shame that we do not have the huge numbers we had then. It is incredibly important to talk about the robustness of figures when it comes to budgeting. I have to say, if you will permit me, Mr Gray, that it is also a delight for me to be able to talk about Labour’s manifesto and spending plans. It feels like summer has come slightly early for the Labour party—perhaps not quite as early as the Prime Minister had hoped. Still, I am pleased to be able to cover those subjects, but I will do so briefly, Chair, so as not to strain the patience of those in the Chamber.

Labour, of course, supports the OBR. We have had a good summary and discussion here of its origins and its work, and Members have usefully referred to how it follows on from similar independent fiscal institutions in other countries, not least those in the Netherlands and the US. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place, rightly mentioned the significant expertise we have in our OBR, how it compares favourably with other parts of Government and how we need to ensure that we support the people who work there. I very much want to pay tribute to all their hard work.

The OBR’s analysis, particularly in recently years, has been enormously helpful, especially in performing the task—referred to briefly by some Members—of having a long-term perspective on Government spending and its potential impact on economic sustainability. Of course, it was the OBR that pointed out, at the time of the last spring statement, how projections for both GDP and productivity and investment growth are set to be lower than anticipated, thus counteracting, perhaps, some of the media coverage that has suggested that as a country we are out of the woods in some way. On the long-range issues, the OBR has suggested that much work needs to be done if we are to get our economy on to a more sustainable basis. I very much agree with the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire’s praise for the OBR’s accuracy in that regard, even though the office sometimes has negative, or at least concerning, lessons to impart about the long-term economic sustainability of our country.

The OBR has been unafraid to speak some perhaps uncomfortable truths when necessary. There was much discussion of its role around the time of the last Budget, when the new stamp duty holiday policy was being introduced. The OBR was concerned to look at its potential impact on house prices. It was criticised for doing so, but it was absolutely right that it did.

The hon. Member for North East Derbyshire helpfully mentioned some of the trade-offs involved in policy making and suggested that we need more of a focus on those, particularly when assessing the economic impact of Government policies. I strongly agree that that issue

needs to be much more explicit. We need a far better quality of debate in that regard, and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) gave us some very good examples of where short-term savings appear to have been made in Government budgets but have long-term impacts, often not for central Government but for local government. In practice, debt has been transferred over recent central Governments to local governments, foundation trusts and other bodies. In many cases, the debt has not gone away; it is just in a different place, and we need a greater focus on that.

Above all, we need a far greater focus on our long-term productivity problems and the OBR has played an important part in encouraging evidence-based debate on the topic. In the long run, if we do not deal with our investment gap, which in Britain is far larger than in many comparable countries—our investment has not gone back to pre-crisis levels at the same speed as elsewhere—we will not have the capacity to raise sufficient Government revenue in the future. We have to deal with those issues quickly, and bodies such as the OBR help us to do that and perhaps to move beyond some of the sterile debates about making short-term savings that do not promote long-term sustainability.

Labour is such a strong supporter of the OBR that we agree with the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire about an extended remit. The OBR has helpfully raised the salience of long-term challenges for the UK's public finances due to demographic change—something the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) usefully mentioned—but Labour Members feel that it could have a more expansive role when it comes to a long-term threat that is not sufficiently considered by the Government, that of climate change and environmental degradation, to which many experts, not least Lord Stern, have drawn attention. We ask the OBR to report in particular on the fiscal risks of climate change, which could include the impact of raised food costs, the costs of flooding, and lost productivity caused by extreme weather events.

The current Government may be sanguine about lost revenue; we saw just last week another Treasury Minister talking about the potential trade-offs between being able to move goods across borders in the event of a no-deal Brexit and potentially losing revenue by not being able to collect VAT. No study has been done on the potential impact of that. We have had nothing from the Government that spells that out, but we should have. We need transparency on such issues and on the short and long-term risks to the public finances, particularly in relation to, as I said, environmental damage.

Widening the OBR's remit would go with the grain of developments in many other countries. The hon. Member for Aberdeen North rightly referred to the fact that we always need to look at international examples. She helpfully referred to some of the thinking that was done about the Scottish Fiscal Commission; other Members referred to that as well. I agree with her that negative lessons can often be particularly important—learning from what has not worked as well as what has. Certainly we can learn from the EU's fiscal forecast and the countries that look more expansively at environmental matters.

Adding more of a focus on environmental matters to the OBR's remit would go with the grain of what the Bank of England has been doing by incorporating a consideration of banks' exposure to climate change-related risks and stranded assets as it regulates banks. It would echo the approach of many long-term investors who are

increasingly considering environmental matters when it comes to assessing the promise of different investment opportunities. The OBR would probably be willing and happy to do something that would usefully build on its existing activity.

We also want to strengthen the independence of the OBR, requiring it to report to Parliament rather than merely to the Executive, as was helpfully mentioned by the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire. That is the approach of the CBO in the US, and it could be usefully adopted here. It is not unusual for an independent fiscal institution to report to the legislature rather than the Executive, and it would aid the OBR to show that it is a truly independent evidence-based body that can have a real impact on policy making. It might also then lead to a greater salience of its reports at a political level and at the level of public discourse and debate as well, which would be a good thing.

There are many other areas where we need more data and analysis to truly assess the impact of economic decision making. One area that has come up frequently in recent Budgets concerns the lack of distributional analysis of Government economic decisions. I am pleased to see support for that from the hon. Members for Ochil and South Perthshire and for North East Derbyshire, who are nodding. The Department for Work and Pensions carries out such analyses frequently. The Treasury appears to do such analyses, but it does not report them publicly very often, which is a problem. The Government have a duty under the public sector equality duty to consider how their decisions affect people with protected characteristics, but at the time of a Budget, for example, we do not have that analysis in front of us, so we cannot examine the impact of policies on different groups, and it is very difficult for members of the public to assess the impact on them.

Recent policies have had very different impacts on different groups of people. If we look at changes to social security, the incomes of lone parents, particularly black and minority ethnic lone parents, have dropped substantially by up to around £9,000 in some cases, and that has not been made clear from Treasury analyses before Budgets. It is important to have a clearer handle on such impacts at the time when we actually vote on such measures.

On the point about greater evidence and analysis before economic decision making, the hon. Member for Aberdeen North rightly referred to the need for greater post hoc evaluation of economic decisions. She referred to the case of tax reliefs, which is something that I have worked on for some time. We rarely have post hoc evaluation of the impact of tax reliefs in the UK, which contrasts with the situation in many other countries. India has an annex to the Government Budget that covers tax reliefs, but we do not have that in the UK. There is a real contrast with how we assess spending decisions in terms of direct spending programmes as against foregone income in the form of tax expenditure. There is a huge gulf there and we need to deal with that. The OBR could play a part in that, and we should think about that for the future.

The Labour party's position remains that the core role of the OBR should be to scrutinise the Government's fiscal and economic plans, but it should do so in a more expansive and open manner than previously, as I have explained. An extension of its remit to cover party manifesto pledges might be warranted, but if it occurs it

[Anneliese Dodds]

must be in concert with an extended remit to examine governmental spending commitments and it must be adequately resourced to enable it to fulfil that task. I am aware of the Dutch example that the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire referred to. I was pleased to see him inter alia praising the role of trade unions in decision making, which was slightly unexpected but good to hear. We can usefully learn from the Dutch example and the extended remit to look at Government spending plans. We had an interesting discussion about the Australian situation that the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire mentioned.

The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire referred to the CBO and its more extensive role in ongoing policy making—not just at Budget time; it looks at discrete policies on an ongoing basis. Before we talk about potentially extending the OBR's remit in that manner, it is important to focus on the activities of the Treasury first. In many cases the Treasury should carry out analyses, anyway. There is the question of independence; I do not take that for granted. But in many policy areas we do not even get to the level of understanding what the Treasury analysis is, let alone then having that independent analysis as a guarantor.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Aberdeen North on everything, but I did agree with her on Brexit. Internal analysis has been conducted within the Treasury, but it has been like trying to get blood out of a stone to allow Members, let alone the public, to see that analysis. If the Treasury were a little more open about its processes, we would be in a different situation and we could then consider whether there should be additional independent analysis, but let us have more open analysis from the Treasury first.

Some Members referred to Labour's spending plans. I regret that the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire tried to wriggle out of my question about where his party's spending plans were set out in pounds and pence. He spoke elegantly and eloquently, but he managed to wriggle out of it because his party failed to include any costings anywhere in its manifesto at the general election. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has commented, the only numbers in the Conservative manifesto that we have been able to see are the page numbers. We have seen nothing about how different approaches to spending would be carried out. We have seen a similar approach continuing in Government. The huge elephant in the room in this discussion concerns plans for NHS spending. A commitment has been made to a huge boost to NHS spending, but we have no idea where the additional funding will come from. Initially there was a suggestion that it would come from a so-called Brexit dividend, but it does not appear from the current approach to Brexit that there will be any such dividend. We heard whispers about where the funding will come from, but they are just whispers.

James Gray (in the Chair): In the context of the OBR.

Anneliese Dodds: In the context of the OBR, the problem is that we have just heard from some Members that the OBR's remit should be extended to cover party political manifestos, and we have the Government making

a huge spending commitment during its period in office, and yet no details have been provided for how the spending will arise. Many public servants are reading the tea leaves, not least those in the police, and assuming that the spending will come from cuts elsewhere. They are probably not wrong to do so.

Some Members referred to the discussion of Labour's spending plans at the general election. It was possible to have that discussion because Labour had set out its spending plans in our grey book. I can see the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire smiling. He will smile even more when I provide him with some summer reading: Labour's grey book, "Funding Britain's Future". It is very simple to read. I am sure other Members who are former accountants will find its layout very simple because it sets out on one side where more revenue will be derived and on the other side where expenditure will go. It is enormously simple to understand.

Luke Graham: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Anneliese Dodds: I would be very happy to do so.

James Gray (in the Chair): To intervene only about the OBR, I call Luke Graham.

Luke Graham: I look forward to that interesting summer read. Hopefully the hon. Lady will support my proposition that those figures would have even more credibility if an independent body could check them to ensure that the assumptions and figures featured in that document are credible, real figures and not socialist fantasy.

James Gray (in the Chair): To speak only about the OBR, I call Anneliese Dodds.

Anneliese Dodds: I absolutely will, Mr Gray. The hon. Gentleman suggested that the OBR's remit could be extended to look at such figures. As I said, Labour is not against that. We might be interested in looking at that, but the figures have to be provided in the first place. Sadly that was not the case for his party at the last general election. I humbly suggest that as a first step towards that outcome, his party might follow mine and set out some of its spending. That would mean that we could have a discussion with other independent bodies in advance of an election, as occurred with Labour's spending plans.

We had a useful, productive discussion with the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which looked into our assumptions. There were differences of view in relation to some areas of spending. For example, Labour suggested that it should not be assumed that removing the pay cap, which is something that we have committed to do for public sector workers, will be only a cost, because revenue would be positively affected by the additional national insurance that would arise from slightly higher wages. The IFS does not take that into account, so we had different assumptions on that. However, Labour wants to have that debate and discussion. To do that, we need to have the figures out there in the first place.

I thank the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire again for securing the debate. I also thank all those in the Chamber and, particularly, those who work so hard for the OBR to ensure that we have an independent, unbiased assessment of our public finances. Finally, I wish everyone a very enjoyable summer.

James Gray (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, may I clarify something that has been worrying me throughout the debate? When I was brought up in the foothills, I remember those hills being called the “Ochils” as in “ochre”, rather than the “Ochils” as in “Och aye the noo”. Perhaps the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), who led the debate, will clarify precisely how we pronounce the name of his constituency.

Luke Graham: It is the former, not the latter.

James Gray (in the Chair): Thank you. I call the Minister.

10.41 am

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) for securing the debate. There are few issues on which I would like to end the parliamentary term more than the remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility. As we have heard from Members on both sides of the House, there is widespread agreement that the credibility of our fiscal framework matters and that the quality of our national debate on economics is extremely important—not just to the economy and the country, but to the sustainability of our democracy.

The Government are proud to have established the Office for Budget Responsibility in 2010. On behalf of the Treasury, I thank—as my hon. Friend did—its staff, its first chairman, Sir Alan Budd, and of course Robert Chote, who has taken the organisation forward since. Were he listening to the debate, as I am sure he is, he would take heart from the fact that hon. Members on both sides of the House have praised the organisation that he leads and agreed that it has managed, in a relatively short time, to establish itself as a credible and independent organisation. I hope that that continues in the years ahead under his leadership and that of whoever succeeds him.

We created the OBR in the context of the fiscal disaster that was the last Labour Government, as part of our mission to restore credibility to the public finances. Since 2010, we have gone a long way to turn things around, reducing the deficit by three quarters and reaching the point where our debt will begin to fall this year, but I do not begin to claim that we have reached the end of the story.

There is a great deal more to do, and, as we heard eloquently from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), we are still paying, as a country, £50 billion a year in interest payments. That fact alone demonstrates the importance of the OBR and of improving the quality of economic debate in this country. As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, all democracies in the west have suffered in recent years from politicians over-promising at election times and at other moments. We need to ensure that we have fiscal credibility as a country to sustain our democracy.

We created the OBR specifically as an independent institution responsible for examining the sustainability of the public finances and ensuring that the UK maintain its credibility—something that was clearly in doubt back in 2010.

Anneliese Dodds: May I briefly ask whether the British economy was growing when Labour left office?

Robert Jenrick: The British economy had just suffered a severe recession, and we inherited the largest peacetime deficit since the end of the second world war. Nothing exemplifies the situation with the public finances more than the note that was left on the desk in the Treasury office down the road saying that there was no money left.

The OBR produces the official economic and fiscal forecasts for the UK. It does not cost Government policies, but scrutinises and certifies costings initially prepared by the Treasury and other Departments to estimate their impact. That is an important point, to which I will return in a few moments. The OBR also provides detailed public reports, including the fiscal risk report every two years, which we have heard about, and the fiscal sustainability report, which was published last week and which keeps us at the frontier of fiscal management internationally and demonstrates our commitment to fiscal transparency and accountability. I am pleased that, as we heard in the debate, Scotland has followed suit and, since 2014, the role of the Scottish Fiscal Commission has been strengthening. That institution is in its relative infancy, but it appears to be building credibility and working to help keep Scottish finances in check.

The OBR has won international acclaim. Earlier this year, Kevin Page, in a paper for the Centre for Economic Policy Research, said:

“The OBR’s commitment to transparency is likely the gold standard in the IFI community.”

He added:

“The OBR deserves to be considered a leader among” independent fiscal institutions

“for the transparency of its work and the credibility it derives”, as we have heard from hon. Members. Protecting that credibility should be as much a priority for Parliament as it is for Government.

Since 2010, there have been a number of calls to expand the OBR’s remit, including proposals, as we have heard today, to report on distributional analysis, performance against child poverty targets, environmental matters and living standards. Each has merits, and deserves discussion and further thought. The OBR was deliberately set up to report on the sustainability of the public finances, and to date that is where we have let the matter settle. Asking the OBR to expand into areas beyond its core expertise and experience carries with it risks to its credibility. We need to consider that carefully before taking any such steps.

The OBR has also been called on to produce costings of policy proposals for Opposition parties. Again, we have heard about that today, and it has been raised by successive shadow Chancellors, including Ed Balls before the 2015 general election. Respected institutions such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies already perform that function well, and we should bear that in mind as we consider such proposals. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire, the IFS recently exposed the folly of some of Labour’s proposed tax increases.

Anneliese Dodds *indicated dissent.*

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Lady shakes her head, but the IFS said that those would lead to taxes being raised to their highest in peacetime history. The IFS also questioned whether they would raise as much as the shadow Chancellor claimed, and said that they would hit working families hardest. We do not always need to rely on the OBR to twist the knife, as the IFS has certainly done so repeatedly.

Anneliese Dodds: May I respectfully ask how exactly the IFS was able to analyse the Conservative party's policies, when there was no indication in its manifesto of how any of them would be funded? It appears slightly peculiar to pick on the small number of criticisms made by the IFS of some elements of Labour's assumptions when no information whatever was provided by the Minister's party.

Robert Jenrick: I would not characterise the IFS's criticisms of the Labour party's manifesto as "small". They were pretty fundamental; the remarks I have just described speak for themselves. The IFS did analyse the policies of the Conservative party in the lead-up to the last manifesto, but let us stick to the question before us today, and apologies to you, Mr Gray, for deviating from it.

A number of arguments have been made today for widening the remit of the OBR. Over previous years, such arguments have been looked at in some detail. Back in 2014, Robert Chote wrote in response to Andrew Tyrie, now Lord Tyrie, who at the time was Chair of the Treasury Committee, setting out his views on the matter. He said that, while some of those arguments undoubtedly had merit and deserved proper consideration by the Government and by Parliament, it was important that we consider

"the significant practical issues that would need to be addressed".

Let me briefly set out some of those, which we would all need to consider.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire referred to the US Congressional Budget Office. That is a good comparison, although the US system varies from our ours in a number of ways—in particular, Congressmen, Congresswomen and Senators have a much greater ability than Members of the House to initiate legislation that carries with it significant financial implications. However, it is worth considering the remit of the CBO, and its capacity.

The CBO undertakes analytical work in-house and has around 235 members of staff, with an annual budget of around \$50 million. In comparison, the Office for Budget Responsibility has just 27 members of staff and costs us around £2.5 million. The OBR is clearly dwarfed in comparison. Although that is not in itself a reason not to proceed, we would have to consider the financial consequences of doing so.

The CBO is required by law to produce cost estimates for nearly every Bill approved by a full budget committee of either the House or the Senate, and produced 740 such formal costings last year, so a significant amount of work would be required. It is worth pointing out that the CBO does not—this is perhaps a more relevant comparison for some of the issues we have discussed this morning—evaluate the costings of candidates for Congress, or indeed of presidential candidates. Clearly, to increase the remit of the OBR would require it to have a significantly larger operation.

Undertaking Opposition costings as part of the parliamentary process would have important implications for the OBR and departmental resources in all Departments, including the Treasury, but the greatest impact would be felt were it to be involved in manifesto costings. The time that the OBR and Departments needed to produce costings would pose very particular difficulties during general elections, some of which are unplanned. It is difficult to see how parties could be afforded the customary flexibility in developing their manifestos until a relatively late stage in the election process, to reflect the public debate in the run-up to the election. Instead, they might have to submit detailed proposals two or three months ahead of a general election. Of course, we could consider that, but we would have to consider carefully the implications for the general election process and the way we have traditionally approached that.

The policies in scope for OBR costings also differ in type from the policies that have dominated the political debate. The detailed costing process at fiscal events covers only tax and welfare policies, which are clearly very important and a significant element of general elections, but are not all the issues reflected in a general election or all the policies in manifestos.

The other point to note is that the OBR does not produce the work in-house. It relies on detailed data produced for it by Departments, including the Treasury, which are then submitted to the OBR for scrutiny and analysis. As the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) said, the quality of the information is extremely important. Civil servants in Departments would be required to work through political parties' manifestos and then provide high-quality approved data to the OBR, with which it could do its usual costings.

Kirsty Blackman: I do not think that the problems the Minister raises are insurmountable; they could be overcome. A concern that I perhaps should have mentioned in my speech is how the OBR decides which policies it will look at, and which it will not. It could be accused of bias if it looked only at Labour party policies, for example, and not very many Conservative party policies. If the OBR were to be expanded, I would like to see a public consultation on what its expanded remit should be and which policies it should therefore look at.

Robert Jenrick: Were the OBR to see its remit extended, that would be a matter for Parliament. It would be debated extensively within Parliament.

To finish my point on civil servants, there is an important matter of principle here. Civil servants would have to undertake detailed costings and provide data on Opposition policies—we should all acknowledge that that would represent a significant constitutional development for the UK. We would have to be willing to do that in the knowledge of its consequences.

To answer other points raised in the debate, the OBR does, to some extent, look at the effectiveness of policies. For example, it re-costs policies at each fiscal event, and it looks again at tax policies that arose in previous fiscal events at each subsequent Budget. It does not evaluate the individual effectiveness of the policy, but evaluates only its fiscal consequences, although the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, as well as Select Committees, have the ability to do that—and do so, very well.

The hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) raised a point about the OBR's remit with regard to the environment. The Government are interested in how we can ensure that the Treasury takes account of climate change and other important factors. One example of our action is commissioning Professor Dieter Helm to carry out an important review for us and to take forward the idea, still in its infancy, of how we as a country could create natural capital accounts. We are very keen to work that through in the coming years.

This has been a helpful debate. It is important for Parliament to review the OBR at this moment. We have conducted two internal reviews in the Treasury, both of which concluded that the remit is sufficient. We do not intend to change it at present, but it has been helpful to hear views from a number of Members and we will of course give careful consideration to those views in the future.

10.57 am

Luke Graham: I thank all colleagues for joining me to take part in this important debate. I take to heart some of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), and the hon. Members for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds).

We have seen that the performance of the OBR is not in dispute. It has established itself as an independent and credible body for scrutinising Government expenditure plans. The Minister referred to points made in the debate and said that, at the moment, the Government have no plans to take forward any proposal to expand the OBR's remit. Any proposal has to be matched by political will. My purpose in introducing the debate was to raise some questions and shine some light on an area of policy that is perhaps a little less sexy than some others that get debated in the House of Commons.

I certainly hope that our next debate will be much better attended. As the Minister mentioned, the measures could be good things in themselves. They would cost more and require more resourcing, but if that were to lead to more informed debate and better law-making, that is a cost that the House and our constituents would be more than willing to pay.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Preston Park Train Services

11 am

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I beg to move,

That this House has considered train services to and from Preston Park.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I welcome the Minister and the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), who cares deeply about this issue and other subjects relating to rail services in Brighton and Hove. Today, the focus is on Preston Park.

This debate is sadly necessary because of the decimation—quite literally—of rail services at Preston Park station in Brighton. People travel from that very busy commuter station to London, and to the station to attend the many schools and the two sixth-form colleges in the area. The station also supports Brighton and Hove Albion—fans are shuttled to and from the station by buses located near it—and is essential for key events such as Brighton Pride and the marathon.

It therefore beggars belief that, following the introduction of the new timetable on 20 May, services have been slashed by about 30% at peak times. Cancellations on top of the devastated timetable have left Preston Park almost unusable. Even with the new timetable, since 16 July some 63% of Preston Park services have been either delayed or cancelled. Although cancellations appear to have been slightly improved, I hope the Minister will not suggest that people should be grateful that 37% of trains now run on time, compared with 29% after 20 May.

The ongoing fiasco is leading to dangerous overcrowding and distress. Preston Park commuters are at their wits' end. It is no surprise to me, given the daily messages of distress that fill my inbox, that in just five days more than 1,000 people signed a petition, which I presented to the House of Commons last Tuesday, calling for the restoration of services. I have repeatedly raised my concerns with the Rail Minister, and he recently wrote to me in response. I want to take this opportunity to explain to him directly why his reply did not go down well with the constituents I sent it on to.

On the inadequacy of the new timetable, it has been explained to the Minister that the Gatwick Express to Victoria no longer stops at Preston Park, after having served the station for 10 years. There is not a reduced Gatwick Express service; the service no longer stops at Preston Park. People have bought annual season tickets with a huge premium to enable them to use Gatwick Express services from that station. They moved to that area to make their lives work with a commute to London, based on an understanding and an expectation that the service would be there. The Southern trains that have replaced the Gatwick Express start at Littlehampton, 11 stops before Preston Park, so by the time they reach Preston Park they are—unsurprisingly—crammed full.

The service cuts are causing massive distress and are ruining lives. These are just three quotes from my bulging inbox. The first person said:

“I commute from Preston Park to London Bridge...The trains are cancelled and delayed more than they run on time. I spend the (standing) journey fretting as I'm late for work. I spend the journey home fretting as my child has one parent, me, and I'm left stranded 70 miles away.”

[*Caroline Lucas*]

The second person said:

“I would like to let you know about the severe difficulties I have experienced going from Preston Park to London Victoria and back for work. I pay nearly five and a half thousand pounds a year for a Gatwick Express service that no longer stops at Preston Park.”

Finally, the third person said:

“The train service from Preston Park is appalling with trains constantly cancelled. The ones that do are packed and often I am left sitting on a dirty floor.”

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for securing this debate. I had the pleasure of speaking to one of her constituents today, who told me that the train he now regularly gets to London now is only four carriages long. The problem is not just that some trains do not stop at Preston Park, but that the ones that do stop have only four carriages, so many people cannot get on in the first place. Does she agree that, if the Government are going to prevent the Gatwick Express from stopping there, at the very least they should ensure that every train that stops there is 12 carriages long?

Caroline Lucas: Of course I agree, but I do not want to concede yet that the Gatwick Express might not be restored. That is my big ask from today’s debate: we need those train services restored. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that it adds insult to injury, first, to see the Gatwick Express trains fly through Preston Park station pretty much empty and, secondly, to have four-car trains, which, as he says, are simply not enough. Somebody told me today that they had been commuting for 18 years through rail strikes and all kinds of problems, but this is the straw that broke the camel’s back and caused them to give up commuting and their work.

I have raised this issue with the Minister on many occasions. When he wrote to me on 12 July, he suggested that services to Victoria are better since the introduction of the new timetable:

“Before the timetable change, Preston Park received six services into Victoria in the morning peak made up of three Gatwick Express services and three Southern services. Following the timetable change, Preston Park now receives seven services into Victoria in the morning peak, all of which are Southern services.”

He ended the paragraph with a spectacularly out-of-touch comment:

“Scheduled journey times have in fact improved since the timetable change, with the average morning peak journey time being around a minute quicker.”

The purpose of the debate is to explain to the Minister again why his suggestion that Preston Park services to Victoria are more frequent and faster has gone down like a cup of cold sick with Preston Park commuters. When the seven trains he referred to are not cancelled, a large proportion are full on arrival. As I mentioned, they start at Littlehampton, 11 stops back, rather than at Brighton, just one stop back. I repeat that point, because I am not quite sure it is getting through. Trains are short formed, as the hon. Member for Hove identified, and often have only four carriages, making journeys extremely unpleasant, if commuters can even squeeze themselves on to the packed trains when they arrive.

Crucially, of the seven new services, one arrives in London after 9 am and two arrive after 9.30 am. Those times are too late for the large proportion of commuters.

In place of six reliable peak trains to Victoria, three of which were Gatwick Express, we have effectively just four or five totally packed short-formed trains, and on top of that there are chronic cancellations and delays. I want to ensure that the Minister really understands why people who have paid in advance for the premium Gatwick service are incredibly angry and not at all satisfied with his letter.

The solution to the mess cannot be only to address the cancellations and delays, because the base timetable itself is unacceptable. The Minister is aware that Hassocks has four Gatwick Express trains an hour and Preston Park none. That simply does not make sense. The Gatwick Express sails by virtually empty while people who have paid a premium to catch it from Preston Park are making the journey backwards into Brighton to get it—a significant number of them drive to do so.

More than 40 people have replied to a post on the Preston Park train campaign Facebook page, saying that they now have to travel to other stations by car or via other means because the Gatwick Express service no longer runs. It urgently needs to be reinstated. There is no justification for removing the Gatwick Express from that incredibly busy city station while Hassocks, a small town, gets four Gatwick Express services an hour. Gatwick Express must be reinstated at Preston Park, and more trains need to start from Brighton, with enough carriages to meet demand. People have paid a huge amount of money to commute a relatively long way. They need to be able to get on the trains that arrive, and they need to be able to get a seat.

The Victoria service is not the only issue. London Bridge-St Pancras trains have been massively hit with a 43% cut in the morning and a 53% cut in evening peak time. Again, the Littlehampton issue in the morning makes those trains unusable, and in the evening it is complete carnage as none of the 53% fewer trains start from London Bridge, which leads to massive overcrowding. Trains often miss out London Bridge completely because more passengers cannot be fitted on, so the trains and platforms are a serious health and safety risk.

Added to that, there are massive gaps in the timetable to Preston Park, including a 1.5-hour gap between about 6 pm and 7.30 pm. That is a key commuting time, but if people miss the train—or, more likely, the train does not stop or is full—they have to wait 1.5 hours with no service at all. Preston Park commuters want more trains that start at London Bridge, as they used to. Commuters face packed trains when they arrive for boarding, so it is plain that there is demand.

The Minister’s 12 July letter to me showed that he is aware of the huge cuts to Thameslink services from Preston Park to London Bridge, Blackfriars and onwards. He simply said that, before the May timetable change, there were 12 morning peak services to those London stations, and that from 15 July there would be eight. He said that, for people going home, the numbers went from 15 trains before the May change to seven. He had two comments for those affected: first, that journey times are now quicker, and, secondly, that he expects Govia Thameslink Railway to keep the timetable under review.

Constituents are incredulous, as am I. Nearly half their services have been removed and the ones that remain are overcrowded, and telling people who cannot get on trains that the ones that do go are very slightly

faster simply does not cut it. Vague assertions about expecting things to be reviewed are an appalling dereliction of duty. People are losing their jobs over this; they are missing family events, unable to pick up their children on time and looking at moving house. How bad does it have to get before the Government get a grip?

On the issue of demand, there are serious concerns that the footfall at this incredibly busy and vital station has not been accurately measured and taken account of. The Office of Rail and Road has produced statistics for Preston Park, but without barriers it is hard to know how many people are using that station. A lot of guesswork is going on. How confident is the Minister that he has a sound estimate of Preston Park numbers? It would be very interesting if he shared that estimate with us. Not only are there no barriers, so the number of people going through cannot be counted, but when commuters buy their season ticket they often designate Brighton, or even Hove, as their station of origin because it does not cost them any more to do that but it gives them greater flexibility.

I live near London Road station, another Brighton station, but my season ticket is for Brighton, because that allows me to use London Road or any surrounding station. Simply looking at the destination written on the season ticket will not make the Minister any wiser about the number of people using that station. I urge him to look at other ways of counting, perhaps manually if necessary, to demonstrate to him how busy the station is.

In response to the dire impact of the cancellations and delays that have come on top of the slashing of the base Preston Park timetable, the Minister is likely to talk about the new interim timetable of 15 July. However, from my inbox and just a glance at the Preston Park train campaign Facebook page, it becomes clear that that has not solved the problems. Indeed, the campaign analysed the new timetable and found that there are still severe cuts and the service remains, in commuters' words, "catastrophically inferior". The campaign explains that there are now even fewer trains or connections to the hub of Haywards Heath, making travel to all destinations more difficult and time consuming. At night, there is often only one Preston Park train an hour from Victoria; if trains are missed there are no timely connections at Haywards Heath or Brighton. My inbox is full. Last Thursday—19 July, after the new timetable came into effect—a constituent wrote to let me know:

"It has been consistently awful since I last wrote. Yesterday the 08.11 to Cambridge was cancelled without explanation so all passengers at Preston Park could do was watch as two Gatwick Expresses whizzed by. Getting home in the evening is still a game of chance."

Even when passengers get on a train, their station might be skipped. Following such an infuriating experience at the end of last week, one constituent wrote:

"How do you expect people to be able to run lives, collect children, arrive for NHS, police, rail and other security shifts, be punctual for meetings, keep businesses viable?"

I would like to hear the Minister's response. I must ask him, when he does answer, not to suggest that things are getting better on other bits of the network, as that is tantamount to saying that it is fine for Preston Park to be sacrificed in the interest of benefits somewhere else. It is not fine for my constituents to be sacrificed in that way.

Preston Park is considered a station for which the higher amount of one month's season ticket cost can be claimed as compensation for recent disruption. However, that is only for those whose season tickets start at Preston Park and are valid for Thameslink services. As I mentioned, plenty of people have season tickets from Hove, Southern-only season tickets or other types of ticket. They will be left out of that compensation, even though they start their journey at Preston Park. I urge the Minister to find a way to ensure that they too are eligible for compensation. Passengers are often advised at rail offices to buy their season ticket in a way that is more flexible, not specifically for Preston Park. As a result of doing so, they will lose out.

Why should my constituent, who is a low-income freelance worker who visits London only two or three times a week, be left out of the compensation? Many different people—men and women—work part time, but a disproportionately large number of those who work part time are women, such as those who go back to work after maternity leave. Has the Minister considered that the season-ticket-only system of compensation he has devised is discriminatory, particularly since we do not yet have part-time season tickets in Brighton and Hove? It cannot be right for non-season ticket holders to be excluded; there is no principled basis for that.

This debate is not long enough for a discussion on the shambles of our fragmented and privatised railways, which should be reunited and put into public hands, but I will say something specific to the dog's breakfast of the GTR franchise. As Ministers well know, the word "franchise" is utterly misleading in this case. GTR has a management contract and Ministers are meant to be overseeing it. The Rail Minister said last week:

"There is too much buck-passing, and we want to bring that to an end."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 417.]

I can only agree, but to follow that logic the Secretary of State himself should resign. If that is what was meant, I would certainly support it.

I want today's debate to be a constructive demonstration of what real democracy looks like: hundreds of people contacting their MP, and getting together to campaign to seek resolution and accountability over something that is drastically affecting their everyday lives. A very large number of passengers want to hear the Minister's response to their very reasonable demands, which include a reinstatement of Gatwick Express trains, for trains to and from Preston Park to have adequate capacity when passengers board, no gaps of more than 15 minutes in peak time services, investment in the stations and trains to be fit for commuting.

I end with a request for the Minister to provide solutions, not excuses. I want to hear that there will be an end to the ongoing Preston Park train nightmare.

11.16 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this important debate on rail services to and from Preston Park. She is a powerful champion for her constituents. This debate is the latest in a number of representations she has made to the Government on their behalf.

[Joseph Johnson]

I certainly understand the frustration and immense distress that the hon. Lady's constituents have experienced in recent weeks and months. The Government are alive to that and to all the concerns that she has raised on their behalf. They have not been well served by recent developments on the railways, and the Government are working hard to ensure that we see improvement for them, as a result of not just the timetable change introduced on 20 May but the interim timetable introduced on 15 July. Although there is still a considerable way to go, I hope that her constituents in Preston Park will have begun to see positive changes in the week or so that has passed since then. We will hold GTR to account for continued and accelerated improvement over the weeks to come.

The new timetable that came in on 15 July is by and large performing well so far. The last few days have certainly demonstrated that, but the Department for Transport is looking at this extremely carefully. We will hold the operator and its new chief executive to account for continued progress.

With respect to Preston Park, passengers should see some benefits, including a very significant reduction in on-the-day cancellations, which were an unfortunate and unwelcome feature of the aftermath of the introduction of the timetable on 20 May. On-the-day cancellations are sharply down. The public performance measure has improved considerably across Thameslink and Southern services from Preston Park. Although it is not yet where it needs to be, it is a significant improvement on where it was in the immediate aftermath of 20 May. The Thameslink Brighton main line is now more or less back to pre-20 May 2018 levels of performance. As I said, the Department is monitoring the rate of improvement by GTR and will hold it and its new chief executive to account in the coming weeks.

On compensation, the Government have said on many occasions that the disruption that Thameslink and Great Northern passengers have suffered is unacceptable. Compensation is part of the plan to put things right and to ensure that passengers have some redress for what they have experienced.

Peter Kyle: Under the scheme announced by the Government, passengers travelling from Brighton receive level 1 compensation, but those leaving from Hove receive level 2 compensation. They are one stop apart, they pay exactly the same for their tickets and their season tickets, and they leave from the same city, so does the Minister not think passengers leaving from Hove station are entitled to the higher level of compensation, which would fit what they pay for the service?

Joseph Johnson: The hon. Gentleman has been a strong voice for his constituents in recent weeks—I have had almost as many conversations and meetings with him as I have had with the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion. It is obviously important that the Government focus on compensating first those passengers who have suffered the most disruption. That is the approach we took to the disruption of Southern services a year and a half ago, and we are taking a similar approach now.

That means we have created two categories of passenger. Category 1 passengers are those with a very heavy dependence on Thameslink or Great Northern services from their station. Passengers with a lesser dependence

on those operators receive a lower level of compensation, reflecting the fact that they have an alternative means of getting to or from work, primarily. That explains the different approaches to passengers travelling from Preston Park and those travelling from the station the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his constituency.

The compensation scheme covers the period from 20 May 2018 to 28 July 2018, and it will go live in two waves. GTR will contact registered qualifying passengers proactively by the end of August before a web portal is opened for other passengers at a later date. As I said, that is identical to the system used for the Southern industrial action disruption about 18 months ago. Annual, monthly and weekly season ticket holders will all be eligible for up to one month, or four weeks, of the cost of their ticket. That is in addition to the standard Delay Repay compensation GTR passengers are entitled to after any 15-minute delay. That package was designed to compensate the worst affected passengers, who travel every day on season tickets bought in advance. Those who travel less frequently can claim Delay Repay compensation for the disruption they have experienced.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister address the point that there are people who are not season ticket holders because they work part time? There are a lot of flexible workers in Brighton who do not necessarily go up to London every day but none the less need to be there on the days they do go. Simply saying, "Use Delay Repay," does not address the fact that, as I understand it, if their train is cancelled rather than late, they cannot use Delay Repay. Will he look at ensuring that those part-time workers—particularly women—have some way of getting more compensation than he describes?

Joseph Johnson: Let me correct the hon. Lady. Passengers are entitled to claim Delay Repay against cancelled services—that very much is possible. On her broader point about part-time workers and those who do not have season tickets but travel regularly, our priority has been to get compensation out fast using a model that was already up and running—namely, the model that was used for the Southern disruption of about 18 months ago. That was the best way for the Department to get compensation out quickly to the people most affected by the disruption. As the Secretary of State has said, we are looking carefully at the logistics and affordability of compensating other groups of passengers. The logistical challenges of doing so when there is not a season ticket to look at as evidence of regular travel to and from work should not be underestimated.

The Department has not just compensated affected passengers; it is also looking to ensure it learns all the lessons from what has happened, and it has commissioned two reviews into what went wrong with the implementation of the 20 May timetable. The independent Glaister review by the chair of the Office of Rail and Road is under way. That seeks to understand all the factors that led to the disruption following the timetable change. Within the Department, we have also started a hard review of the franchise to establish whether GTR has met, and continues to meet, its contractual obligations.

I turn to the core of the hon. Lady's remarks: the pattern of services to and from Preston Park. I understand that some passengers would prefer to have the choice of travelling on either Gatwick Express or Southern services.

However, the timetable change was designed specifically to bring about improved performance on Southern services, and having a regular and repeating pattern of services during the peaks is important to making that work. That is why Preston Park now receives a half-hourly Southern service rather than the mixture of Gatwick Express and Southern services it previously received.

Caroline Lucas: Does the Minister not concede, though, that Preston Park passengers are worse off? Before, at least Southern trains started in Brighton—they were not already full—and passengers had the option of taking the Gatwick Express. The service they are now offered is massively worse. As I said, some trains arrive too late to be useful to commuters, no Gatwick Express trains stop at all, and the others start in Littlehampton and are full.

Joseph Johnson: I certainly recognise the hon. Lady's points about short formations and crowding on some Southern trains as the result of the knock-on impact on Southern of disruption elsewhere. Trains must have the capacity to meet demand, and GTR's performance regime, which the Department monitors very closely, includes capacity and short formations. Where they happen, short formations are counted by the Department as a fail under the performance regime, which we keep under close scrutiny. However, the consistent calling pattern that results from moving to just Southern services rather than the mixture of Gatwick Express and Southern services is designed to bring about a more reliable and resilient service in the long term.

As I wrote in my letter to the hon. Lady, the frequency of services to Victoria has remained roughly the same compared with the pre-May timetable. Before 18 May, Preston Park received six services into Victoria in the morning peak, made up of three Gatwick Express services and three Southern services. Following the timetable change, services from Preston Park have increased—her constituents now receive seven services into Victoria in the morning peak, all of which are Southern services.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Joseph Johnson: Let me finish this point. The hon. Lady complained that the journey time was just a minute quicker, but ultimately, when the service is up and running, that extra minute will be welcomed by passengers.

There is a similar picture in the evening peak, with the same number of services from Victoria to Preston Park as before the timetable change and a very similar average journey time. Although the request for another stop to be introduced on that service is reasonable, the service is already under significant pressure to maintain punctuality. Extra stops would increase that pressure and lead to additional delays, to the detriment of passengers using the service.

Turning to Thameslink, before the May timetable change Preston Park received eight services to Blackfriars and four to London Bridge in the morning peak. In the interim timetable, there are eight Thameslink services in the morning peak from Preston Park to London Bridge and Blackfriars, and onwards through the Thameslink core. Although, overall, that represents a loss of three Thameslink services compared with the pre-May timetable, it provides Preston Park with the same number of Blackfriars services and four additional London Bridge services. Before the May timetable change, there were six services from Blackfriars and nine from London Bridge in the evening peak. In the interim timetable, seven evening peak services make that journey. That provides an additional service from Blackfriars but two fewer services from London Bridge.

Journey times from Preston Park on Thameslink services are now quicker than they were before May. Once GTR has stabilised performance, it will reinstate the additional service in each peak that was removed as part of the interim timetable. In addition, the Littlehampton to Bedford service and the Brighton to Cambridge service are currently one train per hour, but the next wave of the Thameslink programme will bring one additional service on the Brighton to Cambridge route each hour all day, as well as additional services on the Littlehampton to Bedford route. That was originally planned for December 2018, but it will now be delivered once GTR has delivered the May timetable as planned.

I appreciate the hon. Lady's constituents' request for services to start from London Bridge. However, one of the key benefits of the Thameslink programme is that it provides passengers with direct services through London Bridge to Blackfriars, City Thameslink, Farringdon and St Pancras. In many cases, that provides an alternative route for passengers who would previously have changed at London Bridge to connect with the London underground.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Joseph Johnson: No, I am going to conclude my remarks.

I expect GTR to keep the timetable under review to identify any particular pressures and make amendments as appropriate if they are possible. However, GTR will be able properly to assess the viability of the timetable only once it is performing reliably, and ensuring that happens is our overriding priority. I will ask for an update from GTR on its assessment of the performance of the interim timetable and its impact on Preston Park passengers ahead of the hon. Lady's meeting with the operator on 23 August.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Wylfa Nuclear Power Project: Taxpayer Liability for Safety

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered taxpayer liability for safety at the Wylfa Nuclear power project.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I must say that when my alarm went off at 5.15 this morning, I was absolutely delighted to be getting up to travel here and deliver this speech. I am sure everyone else here in the Chamber is equally keen to be here, even though it is the last sitting day. I am equally sure that the power of my debating skills and the points I am going to raise will not only make the Minister ponder when she gives her response, but lead to changes in Government policy over the summer recess, so I look forward to some announcements when we come back.

To get to the main point of the debate, we must first look at the wider picture. We must look at the history and question why the Government are hellbent on new nuclear power stations and why the official Opposition appear to be in such unison with them. Nuclear energy was the future at one time; it was the low-carbon technology at a time when all other methods of generation apart from hydro were carbon based. However, while nuclear has been responsible for helping to keep the lights on for decades, keeping the lights on has come at a price.

We have a legacy of contamination, and the National Audit Office estimates that the clean-up will come in at £121 billion by 2020. The Magnox Swarf storage silo, in operation since 1964, contains waste sludge that is corrosive and radioactive, which is expected to pose a significant hazard until 2050. We have many more sites still to be decommissioned, which will lead to further increases in taxpayer burdens. According to Dr Paul Dorfman of the Energy Institute in London, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority estimates that clean-up costs for the next 120 years will be in the region of £190 billion to £250 billion. That is some legacy to bequeath future generations.

On reflection, it is clear that the privatisation of the nuclear industry has proven to be another case of privatising the profits while renationalising the liabilities associated with the industry. We still do not know what to do with radioactive waste other than storage. We have a long-term problem looming because of the increasing volume of waste to be stored and managed, so why on earth do we want to create further liabilities with the proposed new power station at Wylfa?

We once thought asbestos was a wonderful heat-resistant product, but once we learned about the health risks associated with it, we stopped using it. Why, then, when we know the problems with nuclear, do we want to repeat the past mistakes associated with it? The UK Government tell us that we need more nuclear as a low-carbon means of energy generation, and Wylfa is one of eight sites proposed for a total programme of 13 new reactors. Yet renewables already provide a bigger proportion of electricity than nuclear within the UK, and in Scotland the divide between nuclear and renewables is even greater. While the nuclear process may be deemed to be low carbon, I suggest it is anything but green, given the toxic legacy I have already outlined.

Why do we want to commission more at exorbitant cost? The cliché is, “We need the baseload that nuclear provides,” but as far back as 2015, the chief executive of National Grid argued that the baseload concept was outdated. He added that large-scale nuclear reactors were also an outdated concept and that the future would be driven by

“demand side response and management”.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I will come on to Wylfa Newydd if I catch your eye in a moment, Mr Robertson. I just wanted to say that the statement that the hon. Gentleman read out from the previous chief executive of National Grid has been put to bed by the new one. Indeed, even the previous chief executive said that we needed centrally located energy sources, or baseload, to continue. The hon. Gentleman has taken a very small quote from a very long statement from a previous National Grid chief executive. Current National Grid policy is certainly that nuclear is strong baseload.

Alan Brown: Clearly, we can both tear apart quotes, but the bottom line is that that is what the then chief executive of National Grid said. I was just going to come on to a quote from Dr Mark Diesendorf, of the University of New South Wales, in Australia. He stated that the assumption is

“that nuclear power is a reliable baseload supplier. In fact it’s no such thing. All nuclear power stations are subject to tripping out for safety reasons or technical faults. That means that a 3.2GW nuclear power station has to be matched by 3.2GW of expensive ‘spinning reserve’ that can be called in at a moment’s notice.”

He further states:

“The assumption that baseload power stations are necessary to provide a reliable supply of grid electricity has been disproven by both practical experience in electricity grids with high contributions from renewable energy, and by hourly computer simulations.”

Therefore, the argument that Wylfa and other stations are required to supply baseload is flawed.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): On the point about baseload, does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that the whole point of managing a baseload with nuclear power stations and reactors is that they are organised to be taken offline in a scheduled programme of maintenance? In the case of Torness, it almost broke the world record for a continuous run of 495 days before being taken offline. Surely that is a huge achievement for engineers in Scotland?

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman tried to worm in a compliment to engineers in Scotland at the end of his intervention. Of course I welcome the skills of engineers, including nuclear engineers—I have no doubt that the guys doing that work are highly skilled engineers. I still do not agree with the concept that the baseload is required from nuclear. If we think about Hinkley power station, we were originally told that, because of the baseload required, if it was not commissioned by December 2017, the lights would go out. We are way beyond that deadline, since Hinkley will not come on stream until closer to the end of this decade, and we are still managing our electricity supplies. There are ways to manage baseload through alternate supplies, which I will come on to.

The only other reasoning I can see for this headlong rush into more nuclear is the equally outdated concept of the UK being a world leader in a particular sector, but that will come about because of other countries pulling out of the nuclear sector. The US is not building

new nuclear, Japan has changed tack and Germany has pledged to phase out new nuclear. It seems that the UK will be a world leader in propping up the nuclear sector for other countries. In a recent Westminster Hall debate on the nuclear sector deal, the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) stated that we should not be reliant on foreign countries for our energy, but with these new nuclear proposals, including Wylfa, that is exactly what we will still be: reliant on foreign countries for their expertise, knowledge and supply of goods.

I suggest that the UK might be the world leader in bad nuclear deals. Returning to Hinkley, we have a 35-year agreement at a strike rate of £92.50 per MWh, when offshore wind recently came in at a strike rate of £57.50 per MWh, and that £57.50 is only for a 15-year tenure. The Hinkley deal is so bad that it was criticised by the NAO as bad value for money. Part of the problem with Hinkley was the risk and the financial exposure to private investors, allied with the fact that the technology for the EPR, or European pressurised reactor, has still to be proven, with all existing EPR projects under construction still facing delays and cost overruns.

As investment in nuclear around the world falls, the UK has planning for 11 reactors on the go and two reactors under construction at Hinkley. In its latest report, released recently, the National Infrastructure Commission states that there should be a maximum of just one new nuclear contract signed before 2025 because of the reduced costs of renewables and the other emerging technologies, including the massive decrease in the cost of batteries. Its report also illustrates that, over the years, the cost of nuclear has not decreased, debunking another UK Government aspiration that continually commissioning new nuclear such as Wylfa will somehow reduce costs. Has the Minister assessed those comments, and will the Government provide a response to the report in due course?

Wylfa is also a different technology from Hinkley, and other proposed sites have yet further different technologies. It therefore stands to reason that, when employing those different technologies, the inherent price will not be brought down, because we will not benefit from repeat constructions and using the skills gained during one project on another. There will also be site-specific constraints and considerations.

This backdrop brings us directly back to the Wylfa proposals. Getting direct information from the Government remains difficult due to their claims of commercial confidentiality. However, the private developer, Hitachi, has clearly had difficulties with the costs and risks associated with the project, which has led to the suggestion of the Government taking a direct £5 billion stake. In principle, a direct Government stake in key infrastructure projects makes sense, as they can borrow more cheaply than private investors. However, in this case, it seems to be part of another, wider blank cheque-type agreement, with the Government desperate to get the project moving.

It is not only me using the blank cheque analogy. Will Gardiner, chief executive officer of Drax Group, said:

“I am not a fan of sweetheart deals, the government sitting down with Hitachi and writing them a cheque. That’s not good economics”.

On the economics, we have heard reported strike rate figures of £77.50 per megawatt-hour quoted for Wylfa. That reduced rate, compared with Hinkley’s, is on the back

of the £5 billion stake. While the Government are trying to keep information under wraps, managing to learn anything is still a bit of a smoke-and-mirrors game.

Under the Paris and Brussels conventions, a nuclear operator is liable for any nuclear incidents. However, that liability is capped at €1.2 billion, which is way below the cost of a catastrophic incident—the Fukushima incident ran into the hundreds of billions of pounds—so the cap is arguably too low. Hitachi has already had two serious safety breaches in other nuclear developments, and was fined \$2.7 million by the US Government for one of them. Apparently learning from that, Hitachi is resisting taking on liability for nuclear incidents at Wylfa. We do not know its exact proposal, but it marks a departure from current agreements, where the operator should be responsible for health and safety and attendant risks and liabilities.

The Times reports that Hitachi “won’t pay” for nuclear accidents at Wylfa, based on *Nikkei* reports that some of Hitachi’s directors wanted

“safeguards that reduce or eliminate Hitachi’s financial responsibility for accidents at the plant”.

It also marks a departure from the “polluter pays” principle. It is critical that the UK Government do not sign up to any such crazy proposals. I hope the Minister provides real clarity on this matter and does not hide behind commercial confidentiality.

We know the Prime Minister hit the pause button for Hinkley Point C to allow for a cost review. Despite that review, she somehow then caved in and accepted what the National Audit Office has subsequently confirmed is a bad deal. Why do the Government appear to be pulling out all the stops again to get Wylfa over the finishing line—by which I mean the agreeing of the contract? We know full well that the project will invariably end up over budget and delayed, just like every other ongoing nuclear project in the world.

Another argument in favour of Wylfa and other nuclear projects is the jobs they will create. I agree that these high-skilled jobs are vital for the localities with existing power stations, and I understand Members lobbying to maintain—or to create further—high-skilled jobs. However, those jobs should not come at any cost. Indeed, paragraph 23 of the Welsh Affairs Committee’s July 2016 report, “The Future of nuclear power in Wales”, explicitly states:

“We recommend that the Government negotiate a strike price for Wylfa Newydd below that agreed for Hinkley Point C and seek a price that would be competitive with renewable sources, such as on-shore wind. The Government should not continue with the project if the price is too high.”

It seems, based on that recommendation, that the Committee must by default be against this project continuing, as it clearly cannot be competitive compared with onshore wind. Has the Minister consulted the Committee on the recent developments in the likely cost of Wylfa?

I would not want to see job losses anywhere. I represent a deindustrialised constituency. Over the years, we have lost coal mining and many different manufacturing jobs. However, we can spend money more wisely to create jobs. Wylfa will cost up to £20 billion. The new nuclear legacy programme will cost circa £100 billion, and we have spent nearly £120 billion in decommissioning costs. Departing from civil nuclear projects, the successor programme to replace the Trident submarines will have whole-life costs of more than £200 billion, with future decommissioning costing up to £250 billion.

[Alan Brown]

Those are astronomical sums of money, and we should be able to think how to spend them more wisely. We could have proper infrastructure investment and a targeted jobs and manufacturing strategy that would create more jobs and a more balanced economy, and we will not have the toxic legacy of nuclear. By the time Hinkley and Wylfa are constructed, with their anticipated 6 GW capacity, we could build something like 20 GW of offshore wind capacity. We know that the costs of batteries are plummeting, and renewable costs have also plummeted.

We should invest in carbon capture and storage. I welcome the Government's latest report on CCS, but we should never have pulled the previous £1 billion allocation. How ridiculously small does that £1 billion seem compared with the costs of nuclear I have outlined? CCS will also allow for the decarbonisation of gas and biomass electricity generation and will open up the potential for a supply of zero-carbon fuel, in the form of hydrogen. However, each massive undertaking for nuclear is to the detriment of investment in renewables. When the Government give undertakings and risk guarantees for Wylfa, they reduce their scope to make similar guarantees for emerging technologies.

On jobs not coming at any cost, we also have to appreciate the potential health risks. As outlined by Dr Ian Fairlie, an independent consultant on radioactivity, the risks of leukaemia in nuclear workers are double those found in a 2005 study, and there is

“strong evidence of a dose-response relationship between cumulative, external, chronic, low-dose, exposures to radiation and leukaemia”.

He also states:

“When nuclear reactors are refueled, a 12-hour spike in radioactive emissions exposes local people to levels of radioactivity up to 500 times greater than during normal operation”.

He states in his blog that the research behind these findings is “impeccable”, as it was based on

“a huge study of over 300,000 nuclear workers adding up to over 8 million person years, thus ensuring its findings are statistically significant”.

I suggest we pay heed to such research.

As I have said, the cost legacy is bad enough, and we still do not have a solution to the long-term disposal of nuclear waste, so it is absolute folly to sign a deal in which the taxpayer takes on unlimited risk for a nuclear incident. This could prove to be the worst deal yet unless the Government change tack soon.

2.48 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. On this last day of term, I welcome the opportunity to highlight the benefits to the economy of new nuclear power and low-cost carbon, and also to promote Wylfa Newydd, which is in my constituency. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) did not notify me that he would discuss it; I saw it on the Order Paper. I think it is custom to do so, but I will let it go for now, because I will have the opportunity to deal with many of the issues that he raises.

I recently wrote a booklet, called “Resetting the Energy Button”, for a number of reasons. Its purpose is to show how my constituency, the Isle of Anglesey, can

play a major role in the move forward towards a low-carbon economy. Ynys Môn has a proud history of electricity generation. It has the natural resources, it has an experienced workforce and it very much mirrors the British Isles.

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):

Will the hon. Gentleman be so kind as to send me a copy of his booklet? I am in need of some good holiday reading for the summer.

Albert Owen: Absolutely. In fact, I will also send one to the Chair, because I know that he is interested in this subject. Indeed, I should send some to the entire Scottish National party group in the House. I will do that over the summer. That is a promise.

Many energy developers have recognised the potential of the Isle of Anglesey to contribute to this major investment not just in new nuclear, but in marine energy and other technologies. You will know, Mr Robertson, from the time that we have spent together in the House that I am pro-renewables, pro-nuclear and pro-energy efficiency. I see no contradiction in that: I think that all three are needed if we are to meet our climate change goals and reduce emissions.

In the decade from 2001—when I entered the House—to 2011, the House of Commons was moving towards consensus on this issue. That was important. I accept that it was not universal, but there was a view that we needed a rich and diverse energy mix and that new nuclear was part of that mix. I was very proud to vote for the Bill that became the Climate Change Act 2008, because that was very pioneering of the UK; we were the first nation to introduce such a law. However, to achieve the objective, we need rich, diverse energy. We need base-load, and I will argue with the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun that nuclear does provide base-load. He talks about offshore, but this is factored in. Base-load is important, as is the intermittent status of renewables and, in particular, wind. He talks about figures, but I point out to him that we have had a very hot period over the last 28 days, and wind energy, offshore wind, contributed just 3% for that period. The rest came from base-load such as nuclear; the nuclear percentage went up in that period. I am therefore arguing convincingly for both—that we have the intermittent energy that we need in hot periods, but also, when we have cold periods, that we have the full load that is provided by nuclear and renewables. We need that balance.

New safe nuclear generation started in my constituency in 1963. Indeed, my father worked on the construction of the first Wylfa power station. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun had family who were in the nuclear industry: he told us in a previous debate that his brother-in-law was. Many families, across the United Kingdom, have benefited from the high-skilled, long-term employment opportunities that nuclear offers. The nuclear power station in my area was opened in 1971 and it produced up until the date of closure, which initially was 2010; that was extended to 2015. We are talking about 44 years of generation. I mention the jobs issue, because many of my peers at school left school and worked in the nuclear industry at Wylfa for all their working lives. Very few other industries can offer the longevity of employment and quality of jobs that nuclear brings; indeed, jobs for life are very rare.

Construction jobs are also important. In the move forward to Wylfa B or Wylfa Newydd, as it is correctly known now, we see an important uptake of skills for nuclear engineers and apprentices, and many people are training for the construction jobs—plastering, building, welding and so on. That is hugely important for areas on the periphery of the United Kingdom, such as at Wylfa in my constituency and, indeed, in Scotland. Scotland has benefited from nuclear over many years and still does today; £1 billion of gross value added comes from the nuclear sector—the two power stations. I believe—I will take an intervention if I am wrong on this—that the life of the two nuclear power stations has been extended by the SNP Government. Safe generation of nuclear energy is hugely important in Scotland, Wales and England. If we did not have it, we would be importing nuclear at this time of year either from England into Scotland or from France into the United Kingdom.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman invited an intervention, and yes, he is correct: under the SNP Government, permission was given to extend the life of Hunterston B. Once an asset is there, if its life can be extended safely, we may as well do so. We will still have to deal with the toxic legacy at some point, but if we can make use of the asset in the meantime, we will do, so we are not absolutely blinkered.

Albert Owen: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says, but there is very little logic in that. If it is safe nuclear generation, it is safe nuclear generation. I accept that numerous previous Governments, of all colours, have not dealt with the legacy of nuclear waste. That is a fact, and we need to deal with it. But with new nuclear, the cost of decommissioning and of waste will be factored into the cost, which the hon. Gentleman did not explain; he did not take that out. The proper arithmetic of generation, of decommissioning and of waste will be part of the deal.

I do not know what the deal will be, but I do know that there will be some 850 jobs for the 60-year life of the new nuclear power station on Anglesey. That is huge for the local, regional, Welsh and UK economy. I also know that, at the peak, there will be 8,500 construction jobs. Again, that is a big figure. We have managed big projects in the past. I am thinking of the building of the nuclear power stations at Wylfa and Trawsfynydd and, indeed, the hydro at the Port Dinorwic storage facility. We have in north-west Wales a good legacy of these jobs, and I look forward to this project. Importantly, we are on the third round of apprentices. By the time Wylfa comes on board, there will be some 700 apprentices who have been trained in the area. Again, those are high-skilled jobs. They have had the opportunity not just to train in this country; many have been over to Japan and had the lifetime experiences that go with that.

The nuclear power station Wylfa Newydd has the support of Welsh Government. It has the support of the local council, which is Plaid Cymru led; it has the support of the Plaid Cymru Assembly Member; and it has my support. It has cross-party political support. That is important because of its potential.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun is absolutely right to talk about the cost to the taxpayer of nuclear and other technologies. I have supported in the House of Commons a number of subsidies—I do not

consider “subsidy” to be a dirty word—for offshore wind. When the cost was more than £100 per megawatt-hour and some people were arguing that we should not be doing it, and that the cost was too much, I argued that by investing at that stage we would be able to bring costs down, and that has happened. It has happened with onshore wind, with renewables obligation certificates—ROCs—and with solar, and it can and will happen with new nuclear as well. As I have said, I support this because we need that boost.

As the Minister will know, I argued—but was unsuccessful—for the Swansea Bay barrage, because the same principle applies to marine energy. We need to invest now for the future and the price will come down. We need a special, ring-fenced costing for marine energy and I will certainly write to the Minister, to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to get that into the autumn Budget, because it is important; we are missing an opportunity with marine.

What I am establishing here is that I am pro-nuclear and pro-renewables and that my judgment has been to invest in them all. That means public—taxpayer—liability initially. We can look at oil, gas and electricity. They were 100% supported by the state when they were nationalised industries, and many new stations that came on board were given that subsidy when they were producing energy.

The statement by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on 4 June was an important step forward for Wylfa Newydd, for the nuclear industry and for British industry in general. As I said, I do not know the details, but I do know that the statement confirmed that Wylfa Newydd would produce some 6% of electricity going forward. Electrification of surface transport is the big challenge for this country, and that is in addition to the built environment. We need that low-carbon extra resource, which I know Wylfa Newydd can produce.

I do not know the details, but it has been confirmed that the model will be different and, as we see from reading the “Nuclear Sector Deal”, the cost will be less than that of Hinkley. That is for sure, because when the first array of offshore wind was produced and the cost was much higher, we argued that it would come down. The nuclear sector deal asks for a 30% reduction in costs, and that is an agreement between industry and Government. It is important that Wylfa Newydd will come in at a much lower cost than Hinkley; we will learn the lessons of Hinkley. The Hitachi deal involves private money, and Government money from the UK—we do not know how much, and I doubt that the Minister will be able to help us at this stage, because of commercial sensitivity—and, importantly, Japanese agencies and their Government will be supporting it.

Alan Brown: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman saying that it is a different model. Does that mean that the costs cannot be compared directly to Hinkley? If the Government are taking on more liabilities and taking a stake in the project, we cannot just say, “Well, it costs less than Hinkley in terms of strike rate,” or whatever.

Albert Owen: No, the important thing to remember is that this is proven technology. The reactors that will be used have been produced—four in the world—on time and on budget, and they are effective. That is the

[Albert Owen]

difference with the Hinkley model, which has not been used before, and the risk is therefore a lot less. I have been to Japan and seen this technology in place. I know there have been incidents in Japan, but a delegation from Anglesey did go there and see it.

Sadly, this debate is about ideology. It is not about a low-carbon future, but purely the dogma of the SNP, which wants to close down nuclear per se. It is using the Wylfa argument to do that. The SNP is absolutely wrong. I want to see a balanced, diverse energy mix. I want to see the case for new nuclear, new renewables, jobs and skills, and research and development, so that the UK can become a leader in tackling climate change.

In conclusion, I wish hon. Members a happy summer recess. If they really want to find out about Wylfa, they should come to Anglesey. It is a great place to work, as I have indicated, for many people who work in the industry and are associated with the industry. I can assure hon. Members that it is also a great place to live, and it would also be a good place for them to visit. I am proud that Anglesey is ahead of the game in pioneering energy development.

3.1 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) on securing this debate. This is an important and pressing issue for the UK, because, as we have heard, all of Britain's currently operational nuclear reactors are due to go offline by 2030. So there is a pressing need to address this energy question.

In Scotland, the nuclear energy sector is worth £1 billion a year. Although 1,000 people are directly employed in Scotland's two nuclear power stations, which have four advanced gas-cooled nuclear reactors installed, 12,000 people are indirectly employed, through a large supply chain encompassing engineering and design, which is a huge benefit to the Scottish economy. This is, therefore, a pressing policy issue for not only the whole UK but Scotland in particular.

I find it extremely dismaying that there is this dislike of nuclear power production, when the sector presents so much opportunity for Britain to re-establish a lead. After all, Britain was the world's first generator of civil nuclear power. That is, unfortunately, an industrial lead that we have lost through lack of planning and lack of rigour in the 1990s. We can, hopefully, re-establish that lead with a bit of imagination and boldness.

I have the pleasure of serving on the council of the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland. In 2015, we presented a lifetime achievement award to Sir Donald Miller, inducting him into the Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame. He is Britain's foremost electrical engineer and was almost singlehandedly responsible for the design and development of Scotland's entire post-war electrical generation and supply system.

I was interested to hear what Sir Donald Miller had to say about Scottish energy generation today. When he was presented with his award, he delivered a speech, which I feel is worth quoting at length. He mentioned that when he retired as chairman of the South of

Scotland Electricity Board, which is now known as ScottishPower, in the early 1990s, he could take a great deal of satisfaction from the fact that

“we could claim to have one of the most secure and cost effective systems world-wide. Some 60% of our energy was from nuclear and with the hydro we could, incidentally, also claim to be one of the greenest systems with the lowest carbon emissions... The coal fired station at Longannet”—

which was recently decommissioned and was groundbreaking when it was built—

“was used mainly for back up and profitable exports to England for the benefit of Scottish consumers.

Today we see a very different picture. The decommissioning of our conventional generation is fast approaching”—

indeed, it has already approached—

“and yet there are no plans to replace the generating capacity at Longannet or the nuclear. Even more incomprehensible is that we shall, in a few years, be importing power for much of the time from the new nuclear station to be built just over the border in England at Sellafield. You may wonder just why Scotland (birthplace of so much engineering)—

a pioneer of nuclear energy—

“should be importing power we could well generate here, exporting highly skilled jobs in the process. And moreover ending up with the least reliable and insecure electricity supply that we have seen for a hundred years. And this at a time when electricity has never been more important in the lifeblood of modern society.

We seem to be drifting into this situation with our eyes shut; just hoping it will be all right on the night. But with no electricity for twenty four hours (and perhaps even longer) it will seem a very long night indeed.

No engineer would set out to build a complex structure without a detailed plan and an electricity supply system is no different in this respect from a road network or an aircraft carrier. But there is no plan and nor is there any significant engineering input into the main decision making.”

That is a chilling statement, coming from someone of such repute, about the current state of Scotland's energy system. That drives me to understand that there is an urgency here that we are not recognising but that we must address with imagination. The Scottish Government have been found utterly wanting for their lack of willingness to embrace new technologies when it comes to nuclear energy.

I have had the pleasure of twice visiting Torness nuclear power station, where the two advanced gas-cooled reactors are situated. The great tragedy of that advanced gas-cooled system is that the entire power station is limited by the life cycle of the reactor. The infrastructure around the reactors is highly modern. It is a great shame that, in 2030, infrastructure that could continue operating for many decades afterwards has to be closed and dismantled, because the reactors themselves cannot be moved and dismantled safely without that whole system being shut down.

Yet, there are emerging technologies that offer great opportunities, such as small modular reactors, which Britain will potentially pioneer, with Rolls-Royce in the foreground. I am hopeful that that is something that Scotland can look at and embrace. Not only can we secure the sector, which, as we know, is worth £1 billion and 12,000 jobs, but we can achieve so much if we are on the front foot. When I was working for BAE Systems at Govan shipyard, we looked at how we could develop and manufacture small modular reactors in the shipyard, thus sustaining not only nuclear supply, but our shipbuilding industry. There are huge opportunities for coastal locations.

Albert Owen: I was pleased that the Government launched the nuclear sector deal in Trawsfynydd. Trawsfynydd is a decommissioned station, but it has the infrastructure in place, and it has a community that understands and accepts nuclear energy for the future. I believe that putting the two together will benefit those communities and the whole of the UK.

Mr Sweeney: I thank my hon. Friend for that timely intervention. We have to think about this outside of these silos of energy generation. Although we want to decarbonise electricity in the UK, which is a laudable and vital aspiration, if we are to tackle the problem of climate change, it is critical that we recognise that nuclear has to be part of that mix.

Renewables, although we hope that they will eventually substitute all energy generation in the UK, are simply not mature enough, in terms of their reliability, to deliver output that is secure enough. The variability of wind is proving to be problematic. July's wind energy is 40% lower compared with the same period last year. That is simply not sustainable enough for us to generate reliable energy sources in the UK. We have to look at other technologies, and nuclear presents an opportunity. We are not talking about rebuilding advanced gas-cooled reactors, which was a technology developed in the 1960s—it was advanced for the time, but is simply obsolete today. We are not talking about rebuilding that, with all the legacies of toxicity and problems with waste disposal that were mentioned, although I have to say that the advanced gas-cooled reactor fleet in the UK is a global benchmark for safety. I do not think there are any substantial risks associated with the advanced gas-cooled reactor fleet—it has had a tremendous safety record in the UK, which is a great triumph of British engineering.

We have to approach this with an industrial strategy; that is where we have to grip this. We are talking about shipbuilding and energy generation. All of those things can be linked to deliver a huge industrial and economic benefit for the UK.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman is talking about emerging technologies—if new nuclear is an emerging technology. I presume he would welcome investment in carbon capture and storage in Scotland, and investment in tidal. The Scottish Government are not saying no to nuclear and no to new technologies; they are going to welcome wider technologies that are completely renewable and that do not have the potential toxic legacy of nuclear.

Mr Sweeney: That is an entirely legitimate point to make. We want to push on all fronts. We want Britain to be leading the world on all fronts. That requires investment in battery technology, where we have a huge disruptive opportunity. Let us push on that front. Let us push on carbon capture and storage. Again, the problem is that we have no rigorous industrial strategy. When I worked at Scottish Enterprise, for example, we watched Longannet drop off a cliff, with no plan for its succession and how it would be managed. As a result of that, we saw the collapse of Hunterston ore terminal in Ayrshire, which has now lost all its customers, because it was the input point for the transportation of coal to the power station.

Alan Brown: Longannet collapsed because it was no longer economically viable, due to the amount Longannet had to pay to connect to the grid, which is all based on

distance from the population of London. Does the hon. Gentleman accept, therefore, that that is a UK Government failure, not a Scottish Government failure?

Mr Sweeney: The issue was a joint problem because we did not embrace the possibility of carbon capture and storage at Longannet. Nor, as the hon. Gentleman mentions, did we address the calculation system and the price charged for generation at Longannet—we have to address this issue on all fronts. Longannet was a failure because, ultimately, the jobs and industrial benefits were lost. As a result, we now have a large brownfield site that will cost a lot of money to clear up, for want of a proper succession plan and a proper strategy.

I urge all Governments to get a grip. I do not lay the blame on any one of them. I am describing the reality that faces the community and our country now, and it is about time we gripped it. I urge people to get together to sort it out. We have a lack of strategy in dealing with succession planning when it comes to closing down our nuclear fleet and also our conventional coal-fired fleet, so we have to address that. We must have a strategy. We have the opportunity.

Emerging technologies, such as the integral fast reactor, which is under development, will address the waste problem in nuclear. As Professor David MacKay, the chief scientist at the former Department of Energy and Climate Change, said, the reactor could supply all the UK's energy needs for 500 years by consuming the UK's existing stockpile of waste. That also addresses the decommissioning of the nuclear submarine fleet and the nuclear weapons at Aldermaston. It is a huge cycle that we have to address, and currently we are not gripping it.

We have a huge opportunity to embrace these technologies and use them as a basis for Britain to re-establish a global leadership position in civil nuclear energy that addresses the huge legacy of problems that we have had with nuclear. This is not about saying we can write nuclear off because the technology developed in the 1960s was flawed; it is about saying we are where we are and there are opportunities to utilise nuclear not only to deliver a low-carbon generation capability, but to address toxic waste issues. It is about developing, regenerating and manufacturing an advanced engineering base.

That is why I urge everyone to be open-minded when approaching the issue of new nuclear technologies in the UK and to look at new technologies that can benefit the Scottish and UK economies. That is how we and the trade unions are approaching it, and it is an entirely legitimate and open-minded approach. I am dismayed that the SNP will unconditionally block any potential exploitation of the opportunity in Scotland at Torness or Hunterston. That is a great tragedy for Scotland, a nation that has done so much to be a world leader in civil nuclear technology. I hope the SNP might look at those technologies and change their minds.

3.12 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Robertson. It is less of a pleasure, however, to scrutinise the shoddy deal that taxpayers are being offered on the Wylfa power station. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) asked a serious question: why nuclear now that so many renewable energies are

[Ronnie Cowan]

available? If we invested in them properly, we would see the renewable sector move into a new field, a new area of prosperity that would be more clean and bountiful, so why are we not investing in all the alternative clean energies as well? Why are we repeating the mistakes of the past? Asbestos was going to be a great new product, but now we live with the dangers and the costs it caused.

My hon. Friend stressed the line we were fed that without Hinkley coming on line in 2017 the lights will go out. The lights are on, the air conditioning is working overtime and Hinkley is still not contributing to that. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) said he had produced a booklet, which I really look forward to reading, that promotes nuclear and clean renewables. I hope it will be better than the booklet that was produced by the UK Government in the '70s that said, "In case of nuclear attack, hide under a table." [Laughter.] It said hide under a table or in the cupboard under the stairs. I remember reading it as a child and being pretty frightened.

Albert Owen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ronnie Cowan: Certainly. I have been waiting for the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Albert Owen: I was born and raised on Anglesey. My children were born and raised on Anglesey. Safe nuclear generation has been with us for 40-odd years. That is the reality. Silly scaremongering about atomic power and nuclear bombs does not do justice to the spokesman for the SNP.

Ronnie Cowan: As I was born and raised within a short distance of Hunterston power station, I understand that people worked on building that station, but we are talking about power that can cause so much destruction that we cannot possibly comprehend it. I agree we need a balance, which is why I support wind, wave, tidal, solar and hydro as part of the mix. I want us to progress so that we do not need nuclear as part of the mix. That is the ideal situation that we should work towards.

The hon. Gentleman correctly highlighted job creation, but obviously the jobs are where the investment is. He highlighted the lack of support for the Swansea tidal bay, which is an absolute travesty by this Government. It was a great opportunity to invest in renewable energy and see where that could take us. How many jobs would that create in Swansea and how many within the supply chain around it?

Mr Sweeney: The hon. Gentleman talks about a comparison with asbestos and the idea that nuclear energy generation is somehow inherently toxic. What does he say about the integral fast reactor or the small modular reactor technology that consumes nuclear and therefore solves the problem that he claims exists? That is surely to be welcomed and embraced.

Ronnie Cowan: As I said, we are working towards a mixture of renewable energy. Ideally, if we could do away with the potential dangers, we should do so. One can say that about absolutely any industry. The coal

mining industry was a dangerous business. We always worked to minimise the dangers, which is what we should do in the case of nuclear energy. If we can do it with nuclear as part of the mix, that is what we should work towards. We should invest in new measures to see if we can attain that. We should learn the lessons of Hinkley, a point made by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn. I hope we will learn the lessons of Fukushima as well.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) said that nuclear was once seen as the future in the United Kingdom. He is right: it was once seen as the future. It was also seen as the future in Germany and Japan, but they have moved on. Unless we want to be left behind in areas of technology, we have to move on as well.

Albert Owen: On that point about Germany, an alliance or agreement with the Greens meant that they shut their nuclear capacity down, but now emissions have gone up as they import gas from Russia. They also import coal from Poland.

Ronnie Cowan: Obviously the Germans decided to bite the bullet while they heavily invest in renewable energy. If we do not do the same thing, in five or 10 years from now they will be way ahead of us and we will look back and ask why we did not do that.

We should be alarmed at a report in *The Times* that states that Hitachi will refuse to pay its fair share for nuclear accidents at Wylfa, with directors supposedly wanting

"safeguards that reduce or eliminate Hitachi's financial responsibility for accidents at the plant".

This is the same company that has been accused of lying to the US Government by concealing flaws in one of its nuclear power plants. It is a company in which a whistleblower said after the Fukushima disaster:

"When the stakes are raised to such a height, a company will not do what is safe and what is legal."

It is a company that may be expected to pay only €1.3 billion in the event of a nuclear incident, even if such a disaster costs the UK hundreds of billions in damages. Pursuing nuclear energy is a folly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun has clearly outlined. Like so much of its ideology, Tory thinking is stuck in the 1950s. UK Government policy on energy seems to be no different.

Support for renewable energy has been slashed while taxpayers are expected to foot the bill for truly eye-watering levels of funding for nuclear stations such as Wylfa. That is irresponsible and avoidable. I was always under the impression that the Tories were the party of small government and of making prudent financial decisions, or so they like to tell us. Yet they saddle the taxpayer with more and more and more debt. Wylfa is just another example of a poorly negotiated deal for the taxpayers that the UK Government are supposed to represent. Of course, that is only considering the immediate financial and environmental impact. It goes without saying that the UK Government, by committing to Wylfa, are burdening future generations with the toxic legacy and cost of nuclear waste. I can think of few greater impositions of a Government on the rights of an individual than that.

I recently read with interest that survivors of the Fukushima disaster visited Wales to warn against the building of new nuclear reactors. In their first-hand testimony they outlined the devastating impact that the disaster had on local agriculture, with some people still unable to return to their homes seven years after the incident. Is a serious nuclear incident likely at Wylfa? Perhaps not, but having the station at all makes it a possibility. Why take that risk when the operator of the station may not even be liable for costs in the event of an accident? Why take that risk when the company in question was forced to pay a fine in response to allegations that it had lied to US regulators over safety concerns? Why take that risk when other sources of energy are available? We need urgent reassurances regarding the contract—the costs, liabilities and environmental impact.

Finally, are the UK Government serious about developing an energy policy fit for the 21st century and beyond? If so, they should abandon their nuclear obsession and look to the Scottish Government for world-leading ideas on the best transition for our nations into being responsible producers of energy.

3.20 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I thought I would break with convention and attempt, this afternoon, to address my remarks to the debate whose title we have before us. The debate is about taxpayer liability for safety at the Wylfa nuclear power project. The matter has been dealt with in passing by the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), as it featured in the wider canvas of what they said about nuclear power in general and about what is, I am afraid, an attitude of dislike for nuclear in any way, shape or form. Analytically, the proposed Wylfa plant comes into that overall definition and, therefore, it needed to be treated in that particular way.

That is in contrast, of course, to my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen). I have known him, and we have fought many energy battles side by side, for many years. I can attest to his strong support for and deep understanding of the role that renewable energy plays in our energy mix, alongside his support for nuclear power and, indeed, the potential nuclear power station in his constituency. He spoke eloquently on both those issues.

In responding to the debate, I want to concentrate on what one might say is a narrower issue, but which gets to the heart of what we are talking about in terms of new nuclear over the next period. I want to distinguish between support for new nuclear in principle, and sober, detailed analysis of what deals and arrangements might result from resetting the button, so to speak, or pushing the button for new nuclear deals. What is under that button when we push it?

The problem with the proposed new Wylfa plant is not that a terrible deal will necessarily lie ahead; it is that we just do not know at the moment what that deal might consist of. There are, however, indications from the Japanese press, which I of course must read in translation, although I am sure the translations are reasonably accurate. They tell us quite a few things about what a new deal for Wylfa might mean, including that it is possible that the UK Government have already signed a memorandum of understanding with Hitachi,

and possibly the Japanese Government, on how a deal might proceed. They also talk about possible investment by the UK Government in a new Wylfa deal, and—this also appeared recently in the UK press—about what Hitachi says it may or may not do in relation to liability for safety incidents and nuclear accidents at the proposed plant: whether it will seek, as part of the deal to go ahead with the plant, to water down, or remove itself from, some of the liabilities it would otherwise expect to be subject to for nuclear accidents and nuclear safety matters.

I emphasise that those issues are suppositions in reports that are coming out. On 4 June, when the Secretary of State made a statement about the in-principle negotiations that were being entered into, and my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) asked whether

“Hitachi is seeking to ‘reduce or eliminate’ its financial responsibility for accidents”—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 78.]

he had nothing to say in response. Nor, indeed, had he anything to say about whether any deals had been entered into already, in principle or otherwise, and what the deals might look like. At the moment, we appear to have taken a step forward in agreeing to look at further activity in developing Wylfa, but what that would entail is shrouded in mystery. To my mind, that is not a good way to proceed with such arrangements. We need transparency from the word go, clear understandings of what is proposed, and the ability to analyse and look into the proposals as they proceed, not least for two reasons, which I shall put forward in a moment.

We are in a strange position, talking about an issue that we should, but do not, know quite a lot about—although the Government could tell us, but apparently will not at the moment. That may sometimes be for reasons of confidentiality, or because some of the reports are not accurate, or because the Government simply have not decided yet which way they will go. As to liability for safety in relation to the Wylfa nuclear project—the subject of the debate—it is certainly worrying that, if the reports are true, Hitachi may be seeking to downplay its possible liabilities as a way to continue with the negotiations, and might be looking to the UK Government to loosen the conditions on liability for nuclear accidents and nuclear safety as part of the process.

The reason that is particularly worrying is that, as the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) mentioned in his opening comments, liability for nuclear accidents and nuclear safety is not something set out on a piece of paper in a box somewhere that can easily be negotiated away. It is actually defined by the Paris convention of 1960 and the Brussels convention of 1963. Those are updated by protocols through the EU, but the conventions are international, as such, and they provide some pretty clear lines about who is responsible for what, as far as safety and nuclear accidents are concerned. They place a strict liability on the operator—that is liability without having to prove fault, with exclusive liability of the operator. They limit the operator’s liability with respect to amount, time and the type of damage that is subject to compensation, and they place an obligation on the operator to cover that operator’s liability by insurance or other financial security.

Those principles have been drawn into UK law, most recently through some wonderful statutory instruments with which the Minister and I have become very familiar.

[Dr Alan Whitehead]

A series of statutory instruments has been passed between 2016 and 2018, and a key one was passed in 2016. Essentially, that legislation was on bringing those protocols into UK law, together with the increased liability that doing that entailed.

I will not go into detail, but the 2016 secondary legislation essentially means that a substantial liability should be insurable, subject to liabilities over a certain level essentially being socialised through Government intervention if they exceed that total. There is a culmination principle of substantial liability and expected liability—underpinned not just by UK legislation, but by international convention—that applies to any nuclear power plant operating in this country.

That is perhaps the nub of this potential problem. If the UK Government were to discuss with Hitachi what could be done in loosening its liabilities for nuclear safety and nuclear accidents at the Wylfa plant, they could not do that by providing a little wayleave for Wylfa power station, and expect all other power station operators to continue according to the Paris and Brussels protocols. They would have to breach those protocols, and replace UK legislation in so doing, and would then need to make all liabilities for all nuclear power stations of a lower order. That seems to me very significant, given what the reports coming out of Japan say about what Hitachi will and will not do as far as nuclear accidents and nuclear safety are concerned.

I would be interested to hear whether the Minister thinks that the analysis I have presented is essentially where we should go regarding nuclear safety and nuclear accidents. If she does think that, and if she agrees that such action would reduce liability for nuclear power stations across the board, the suggestion that there should be any negotiation with Hitachi on liability for safety and nuclear accidents separate from everybody else should set serious alarm bells ringing.

Has Hitachi made any suggestions that it will not pay by way of insurance for nuclear accidents and safety at the Wylfa plant? What has the UK Government's reaction been to that? How do the Government see those suggestions—if indeed they are real suggestions—folding into wider discussions about the plant in general?

I should not turn down the opportunity to mention some wider issues regarding the negotiations. As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun also said in his opening remarks, we need to be careful of simply assuming that if a deal for the Wylfa power plant comes forward and produces—apparently—a lower strike price than Hinkley, everyone will be out of the woods and that will be the end of the matter. That depends entirely on what other deals are brokered as to other aspects of investment and underpinning the project's capital, and on any agreements about the nature of those capital assets that may be entered into as the project moves forward.

We heard in the Secretary of State's statement that the Government are considering putting assets on a regulated asset base arrangement, possibly in the context of Wylfa or of other nuclear plants. We do not know exactly what the British Government have signed us up to or will sign us up to regarding investment in the new Wylfa plant, but let me explain my understanding of regulated assets as they relate to nuclear power stations—this is a possible model that could be carried out for successors

to Hinkley C. Placing assets on a regulated asset basis would effectively mean that the taxpayer—the customer—would have the risk transferred to them before the plant was built. They would be paying an amount of money, which would be taken out of bills, to underwrite that risk as the plant developed.

Under the current arrangement, a strike price would be agreed after the plant had started production and the customer would then pay. We have argued, as have many others, that the amount the customer will pay in relation to Hinkley C will be about twice the prevailing price for electricity over the period, because of those strike price arrangements. If the strike price is reduced, but the customer then has another liability while the plant is being built, not only does that add up roughly to the original position, but the customer will be paying up front before any power has been produced. If there are cost overruns or delays in production, the customer will continue to pay for that while the plant is finalised.

The Government's stated position is that they will not undertake any more levy liabilities before 2025—the new doctrine produced in the Treasury recently. Customers may well pay that money before 2025, if this power station goes ahead in the way suggested, and therefore incur levies in breach of the Government's stated position.

There is a lot to think about regarding what might be the terms of these negotiations, and as I have said consistently in this debate and elsewhere, we are still substantially in the dark as to what those negotiations might be. We need not to be in the dark so that we can discuss those implications and between us ensure that, should there be a deal for Wylfa, it is not just a good deal that gets Wylfa online, but a good deal that gets Anglesey online, with its power plant and all the things that go with that. That point was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn. It must also be a good deal that Members of the House can frank on the grounds that it is good for customers, good for safety and good for the future of the nuclear power industry. At present, we are a very long way from that, and we need a lot more light shone on this arrangement before we can be sure that we will get the deal that we need.

3.38 pm

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Robertson. While I have the floor, may I take a moment to thank the Clerks and those who work so hard across the House of Commons to ensure that these debates take place? I particularly thank the *Hansard* reporters who are a miracle of accuracy, regardless of the quality of the debate—I just wanted to put that on the record before we go off on our summer holidays, although as we know, none of us are going on holiday; we will all be working hard in our constituencies.

I thank the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) for securing this debate. We have had important conversations today, including two very stirring speeches from the hon. Members for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) and for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney). I could not have made the case better myself—I will not try to, because Members probably do not want to hear me talking about that—but a point was made about having an energy supply that is diverse, strong, reliable, low cost for consumers, low carbon and, crucially, able to create innovation for reinvestment in the UK and for export.

I pay tribute to the long experience of the hon. Member for Glasgow North East in the shipyard. As he will know, if we had thought more about export potential when making some industrial decisions in the past, we would not have lost those high-skilled jobs. To reassure him, I was at the Cammell Laird shipyard two weeks ago to help to launch Boaty McBoatface. It was wonderful to see what £200 million of Government investment in polar research has delivered for that shipyard—thousands of jobs have been created and it has been able to bid for large-scale projects again. I enjoyed the speeches.

I will try to address the specific questions about safety, incidents and long-term liabilities. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn made a powerful case about our heritage. We should all be proud that we are leaders in the global civilian nuclear community in terms of safety and regulation, which we have built up extremely well over the years.

In this country, we do not set energy policy on the basis of ideology but on the basis of the test that I have discussed, so we will not make the mistakes of countries such as Germany. Last year, I was at the Conference of the Parties in Bonn to debate climate change, and barges of brown coal were sailing past the COP site—putting two fingers up to those who believe in reducing emissions and getting coal off the grid.

We all like to look at our apps, and there is an excellent one that tells us about the energy mix in the last 24 hours. We have burned no coal, which is excellent, and we used a bit of wind, which made up about 6% of the energy supply. Of the rest, 25% was from nuclear, 50% was from combined-cycle gas plants, some was from biomass and some was from interconnectors.

Mr Sweeney: Last year, for the first time since industrialisation, the country did not burn coal for energy generation, which was a huge milestone. The Minister talks about the huge industrial benefits and the benefits to the wider economy. Does she also recognise the benefits of the nuclear advanced manufacturing research centre in Rotherham, which has re-established large-scale casting capabilities in Sheffield—an industrial capability that had been lost in the UK?

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I will make reference to the nuclear sector deal that invests in the small modular reactor technology that he talked about and that engages with the industry and its supply chain by investing in innovation and skills and by thinking about what we can generate and export in the UK. I also pay tribute to the organisation that he mentioned.

Alan Brown: The Minister quoted the figure that 25% of electricity generated in the last 24 hours was from nuclear. In 2016, on average, nuclear supplied 21% of the energy mix, so 25% is not a huge variation and does not demonstrate the massive reliance that would mean we need to have nuclear forever.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman and I know, because we form a holy trinity of debating on energy matters with my friend, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), that we all look forward to that 100% renewable future, but the problems of intermittency and storage will not be solved in the near term. We will not make ideological decisions that will put up costs

and restrict energy supply if we do not have to—and we do not have to, because we have one of the best and most diverse energy mixes in the world.

Albert Owen: The figures that the Minister mentioned put gas at 50%. The big challenge is getting rid of gas boilers, which are in most houses. Moving to electricity will require a base-load from somewhere other than gas, which could well be nuclear.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman is right, but we should start from where we are on energy policy. There is a role for further decarbonising gas to keep it in the mix, which is why I am keen to investigate, using excellent environmental standards, the potential contribution of onshore shale gas. *[Interruption.]* He is chuntering; he may not agree.

We have an independent regulator, the Office for Nuclear Regulation, which has scrutinised the proposed reactor design for Wylfa. The design has received design acceptance, which means that all regulators are satisfied that the reactor meets the regulatory expectations on safety, security and environmental protection at this stage of the process.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test invited me to talk about the media reports—he is doing better than I am if he is reading the Japanese newspapers. I reassure him that any operator in the UK is required to obtain insurance to fulfil their financial responsibilities in the event of an accident, and as he referenced, international treaties, such as the Paris and Brussels conventions, provide the framework for the management of nuclear liability in the UK.

This deal will be no different. I emphasise that we are still going into negotiations and having conversations—we have not done the deal yet—but we are absolutely clear about the commitment to insurance for any form of accident. Not putting decommissioning liabilities on the taxpayer, as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn pointed out, is also part of those calculations. I agree with him that we did not think hard enough about that in the past; successive Governments had not worked out how to include those liabilities. We have learned, however, and we are moving forward with that.

Before the reactor can be built and operated, it will need a nuclear site licence. Wylfa will also always be subject to environmental permitting through Natural Resources Wales. A development consent order process that will run under the Planning Act 2008 will scrutinise the construction and operation proposals for the project.

The Energy Act 2008, passed by the Labour Government, introduced the funded decommissioning programme that moved the dial on who pays for decommissioning liabilities. It is now the case that all operators of new nuclear power stations are legally required to have secure financing arrangements in place to meet their full share of the costs of decommissioning and of waste management and disposal. We are absolutely committed to managing radioactive waste safely, responsibly and cost-effectively for the long term, but also to looking at other opportunities to reprocess some of that waste, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North East said. We will not repeat past mistakes where the taxpayer had to foot the bill for decommissioning.

There were some questions about liability in the event of an accident. I am happy to say that the last significant incident was the Windscale fire in 1957, and we are light

[*Claire Perry*]

years away from that plant in terms of nuclear operating technology and the safety regime that we operate. The Nuclear Installations Act 1965 makes the insurance that I mentioned a requirement, without which operators cannot operate. As the hon. Member for Southampton, Test mentioned, we also have legislation based on the Paris and Brussels conventions. If the total cost of claims ever exceeded €1.2 billion, a further €300 million would be provided by all contracting parties to the Brussels supplementary convention. Any further claims above that total would be met at Parliament's discretion.

The only liability-based agreement with Hinkley Point relates to insurance failure, and the Government will provide an insurance product in the event that one cannot be obtained on the market. I am not in a position to comment on what might be the case with Wylfa, but I emphasise that the operator of the plant at Wylfa will have the same obligations as all other nuclear power stations and installations in the UK, and will be required to fulfil those obligations in the event of an incident.

Hon. Members have asked about what happens with the Brexit negotiations. Nuclear safety is and always will be our top priority. We will continue to apply the international standards on nuclear safety specified by the International Atomic Energy Agency irrespective of our future relationship with Euratom. I emphasise that we want a close association with Euratom: a new relationship that is broader and more comprehensive than any existing agreement between Euratom and a third country. The Nuclear Safeguards Act 2018 provides the reassurance of a backstop in the very unlikely event of any changes.

Alongside that, the UK is negotiating nuclear co-operation agreements to add to those already in place. On 4 May, we signed a bilateral NCA with the United States, and we have further arrangements with Japan, Canada and Australia that are also on track. Those relationships facilitate the sharing of best practice in terms of nuclear operations and liability management. As I said, we are considered to be a proud leader internationally in the field of nuclear safety and regulation.

Further investment will bring huge benefits through innovation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State travelled to Wales to launch the nuclear sector deal on 28 June, which was a fitting setting to underline how the nuclear industry provides economic opportunities across the UK, particularly in more remote areas, as we have heard from many hon. Members. The nuclear sector deal is worth more than £200 million. It focuses on innovation and skills, which we can then use to export, and by striking it we aim to ensure substantial cost reductions across the nuclear sector, to ensure that the sector can remain competitive with other low-carbon technologies, because I constantly have to balance all investments with the potential pressure on consumers' bills.

Dr Whitehead: It would be really helpful if the Minister were able to indicate, either today or very shortly, when she will be able to place on the record the shape of the negotiations on Wylfa—the main components of the negotiations, what has already been agreed in principle and what remains to be discussed. I do not know

whether she can do that in the near future, but it would be helpful if she could indicate at an early stage when it might be possible.

Claire Perry: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's desire for transparency, but obviously I cannot do that, because doing so would prejudice negotiations that are ongoing. He will know, based on his long experience, that there is an interplay of costs, of contracts for difference numbers, and of potential asks from the UK Government and from shareholders, and these negotiations are long and complicated.

Part of the challenge, if you like, with large-scale nuclear is that a very large, up-front cost is associated with it; it is a very capital-intensive investment, although one that we want to make for the reasons I have mentioned. However, the conversation that we had earlier was about small modular reactors, which require less up-front investment, have more flexibility and allow us to invest in multiple sites, which are reasons why such reactors are so attractive; they allow us to spread those up-front costs much more widely.

In conclusion, this debate has been a very good opportunity to emphasise again the value of nuclear in our energy mix; to reassure people in this House and elsewhere that the UK Government will not make energy policy based on ideology but will soberly assess the cost, the innovation, the carbon and the security as we go forward; to celebrate the fact that we have one of the most robust nuclear safety regimes in the world, including world-leading independent regulation; to note the fact that people are hungry to see the details of the Wylfa deal and I will make sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is of course conducting those negotiations on our behalf, is aware of that; and, essentially, to reassure the House and others that—as is the case with all other nuclear generation in the UK—Wylfa will be a safe source of energy and one that minimises any form of liability being borne by the taxpayer.

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): I call Alan Brown to wind up.

3.52 pm

Alan Brown: Thank you again, Mr Robertson, for your chairmanship today.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) touched on this—some of what has been presented today is supposition based on information that we have been able to glean from the media, so it could be argued that this debate was premature. However, I wanted to get such supposition out in the public domain and challenge the Government on it.

We should not be learning things from the media, but that is what has been happening in the case of Wylfa. After the first speculation about the Government discussing financial arrangements about the tax on Wylfa, I tabled a parliamentary question. That was in mid-May, but I was not able to get a meaningful response because of commercial confidentiality. Eventually, the Government made a statement on 4 June. So, while we hear about checks and balances and scrutiny, in many ways we are denied that scrutiny because of the cloud of commercial confidentiality.

I welcome the fact that the Minister categorically stated that Wylfa will have the same obligations on accidents and liability as all other nuclear power stations

and nuclear power operators, and I hope that proves to be the case in the final arrangements. However, I will contradict myself slightly by saying that I hope we do not get the sign-off on those final arrangements, because of what I have said about attitudes to nuclear. I also remind the Minister that the National Infrastructure Commission's assessment was that there should only be one new nuclear deal by 2025; again, I look forward to the Government reflecting on that.

I thank all the hon. Members who have taken part in this debate and, like the Minister, I also thank the Clerks for their work and the *Hansard* reporters—particularly in my case, they have a real hard job and they do it well. It is amazing to pick up a copy of *Hansard* and suddenly think, “Oh, that makes me look coherent”, so they do a marvellous job. I hope that all other members of staff have a good recess, as well. And again, thanks to everyone who participated in the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered taxpayer liability for safety at the Wylfa Nuclear power project.

Rail Investment in the East Midlands

[SIR GRAHAM BRADY *IN THE CHAIR*]

3.55 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered rail investment in the East Midlands.

There are some firsts today, Sir Graham—I am always dealing with firsts. This is my first time under your chairship, which is very much appreciated. I also did not know before now that we could start early, which is very exciting, and I shall avail myself of the extra minutes to illuminate my subject matter further. I have sought this debate for quite some time, so I am really excited to have got it under the wire before the recess.

I am not naturally a whinger or shroud-wearer, but I will say a little about how the east midlands is perhaps not doing as well in terms of rail investment as it could be. I will also outline some really specific and really effective schemes that, with Government support, would deliver better rates of growth in our region. They are credible, ambitious and deliverable schemes, so I am trying to build support for them, and securing this debate is part of doing that.

The east midlands is at the heart of the country's strategic transport network; it is literally the crossroads of England. Given our growth potential and our good record in the east midlands of delivering big projects, people might think that we would be a prime target for rail investment. However, the latest Treasury statistics—indeed, pretty much everything in the Government's data—show that we are way behind where we ought to be.

Our region does not secure enough public investment in rail; in fact, we are at the bottom of the pile. The latest statistics bear a brief airing: the east midlands has the lowest level of public expenditure on transport, in total and per head; it has the lowest level of public expenditure on rail of anywhere in the country, at just £70 per head, which is £703 per head less than London and £180 per head less than the national average; for rail investment and transport investment more generally, the east midlands is not only the lowest funded region, but it has actually seen a reduction in funding in recent years; and the east midlands has the lowest level of public expenditure on infrastructure projects, at £230 per head less than the national average and £350 per head less than the north-west. And those figures are not a one-year blip; this is a trend over a series of years. The east midlands has actually experienced a steady downward slide to the bottom of the league.

I believe in levelling up. I do not see this process as some sort of competition against “That London”, and if it was, we would not win it. That is not the point I am making. However, it was very hard for me—I pride myself on being a pretty even-tempered person—to see what happened in one week this time last year. Despite an exceptionally strong business case, we saw the cancellation of the electrification of the midlands main line between Kettering and Sheffield, which represented nearly £900 million of investment. That happened just a day or two before the announcement of upwards of £38 billion of investment for Crossrail 2, the case for which is not as strong. I certainly would not wish to unpick Crossrail 2, but the point is that it was very difficult to hear those announcements on successive days.

[Alex Norris]

We feel under pressure from London and the south-east, but we also feel under pressure, Sir Graham, from your backyard. The northern powerhouse is a competitor too, and it has a significant head start already; it is £980 per head better off in terms of infrastructure investment than the east midlands. Even in terms of the midlands engine, which we are very keen to see succeed, there is a risk of that becoming the west midlands engine, as it is tilted towards Birmingham, which is already £500 per head better off than the east midlands in investment.

We have some real challenges, and perhaps we need to look at why. It is true that we do not have the high profile of cities such as Manchester and Birmingham, with their Metro Mayors, and perhaps we lack an obvious regional identity—that is something I get quite a lot, and I was told not so long ago that the east midlands is basically what is left after everywhere else is taken away, which is a little unkind. Perhaps we struggle to agree local priorities. Or perhaps it has been down to a lack of propositions—well, not any more. That is my key theme for the debate: there are clear proposals for rail investment, and I am confident the Minister will have seen the Midlands Connect and Transport for the East Midlands shared vision for the region, which has recently been discussed with the Secretary of State, and the east midlands declaration on infrastructure funding, signed by Sir John Peace, chairman of The Midlands Engine.

When I was first elected, I went out to speak to as many people as possible, and I asked the business community, and especially our local enterprise partnership, what they wanted from their MPs. I got a very clear message: agree a set of priorities between you and stick to them. Contradictory messages have not served us well in the region. The all-party parliamentary group on the east midlands, which the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) and I co-chair, has sought to build that consensus, and this year we are focused on rail. I think that that cross-party approach has served us well and has developed a broad consensus. That is astute. Tenacity is important too, and we certainly will not lack for that.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I commend my hon. Friend's work as co-chair of the all-party group. The point about cross-party working is incredibly important because there is a lot of consensus in the east midlands, particularly regarding the fact that we get £70 per head compared with £770 in London. We all understand the importance of the capital city, but that disparity really is stretching things too much. However, we are all being patient and trying to come together on the same priorities.

Alex Norris: I am very grateful for that intervention. That is exactly right. This is not, dare I say it, an issue for just the current Government; it has been an issue for previous ones too. Our approach has to be one of consensus, and I think that that is how we will best get what we want. In thanking my neighbour to the east, I ought to reference my neighbour to the south, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). It might give the Minister some amusement to know that she is not with us because her Transport Committee currently has the Secretary of State in front of it. I suspect that the Minister will have a slightly easier time than the Secretary of State.

We should be an ideal investment opportunity because investment in the local economies that make up our region offers a great economic return—better in many business cases, in fact, than in other parts of the country. By increasing the proportion of national infrastructure spending in the east midlands, the Government will have a better chance of unlocking the private sector investment needed to revive and rebalance the UK economy. We need only look at the levels of gross value added—GVA—driven out for every pound of transport spend, to see how compelling the case is. That is one league table that the east midlands tops, showing our ability to deliver growth not only locally but nationally.

What am I seeking to raise with the Minister and perhaps secure his support for today? I have four things, the first of which is making the most of HS2. The east midlands has set out plans to use HS2 to drive up economic growth across the region, creating an additional 74,000 jobs and £4 billion of GVA by 2043. The region's station at Toton will be the best connected HS2 station outside of London and will transform connectivity between the east midlands and Birmingham, Leeds, the north-east and Scotland, as well as London. We believe that HS2 can have a transformative impact on the east midlands; from the hub station at Toton and the Staveley infrastructure depot, to connecting Chesterfield to the HS2 network, there is an opportunity for the Government to invest in getting on with things and bringing them forward, starting HS2 services in 2020, three years early. Partially opening the hub station a little earlier in the next decade would stimulate growth earlier, unlocking the potential for 11,000 new jobs and radically improving connectivity between the east midlands and Birmingham. There is a real prize for us in HS2, and we can get on with it now. I know people think it is a bit of a long way away, but we can get on with it.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on a really important issue, particularly as regards getting the economic benefit from HS2. I want to flag, perhaps to the Minister, the opportunities that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) have been talking about in terms of the Robin Hood line, and the social benefits of connecting villages up to jobs, the tourist economy and, in the long term, the HS2 hub at Chesterfield, giving deprived communities access to the big economic boost that the hon. Gentleman talks about.

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. I am a big believer in our region's future lying in the strength of HS2 and the logistics hubs that we can put around it and our airport. However, the hon. Gentleman's community and mine will not benefit from that unless we can get there, and getting there cannot mean just going into the nearest big city and going out; we have to get there in other ways as well. I confess to enjoying a nice night out in Mansfield—a tasty night out, I would say—and I would definitely like to be able to get from Bulwell to Mansfield a bit more easily. However, I have picked up in dispatches that there might be a bit of a governmental wobble regarding HS2, especially its second phase, and I would be very interested to hear the Minister's reflections on that.

The second priority is investment in the midland main line—you would expect me to say that, Sir Graham. We welcome the investment in upgrading the track and

the signalling, but the importance of electrification should not be understated, as it is an opportunity to put really modern infrastructure in place for our region, make travel more comfortable, reduce running costs and carbon emissions, and improve air quality, journey times and efficiency. Electrification has an awful lot going for it.

As I said, the business case for between Kettering and Sheffield was really strong, and for it to be a casualty of cost overruns elsewhere is a real shame and a fundamentally flawed decision. That is not just my view or that of local business and council leaders; it is the view of the National Audit Office and the Transport Committee. But we are nothing if not pragmatic in our region. We appreciate that the rail franchise is now out to tender, and that it includes specification for bi-mode trains, so we must start in the world as it is, rather than the world as we want it to be. Let us make absolutely certain that whatever stock is procured for those lines can be converted to full electric mode in the future. Let us ensure that they can deliver on the journey time ambitions in both modes, and let us think about business growth. Our region is the international centre for rail engineering, so let us definitely ensure that those new trains are built in Derby.

Alongside that, in the spirit of pragmatism, let us think about the incremental electrification of the line. There is an opportunity to go bit by bit, and in time for the completion of HS2, so as not to risk losing one of the prizes of HS2 around speed. The Government have already committed to completing the section between Clay Cross and Sheffield in time for HS2. That will get us up to 62% of the line, so let us have a plan for the other 38%. I cannot help but think that we would save money by doing it properly, all in one go, but if it is incremental electrification, then let us have it, commit to it and plan for it, because it would progressively reduce the costs of running bi-modes on the line and release revenue to improve services elsewhere in the east midlands. Without electrification, it will also be more difficult to integrate HS2 into the existing rail network, so we really have to think about this and learn from mistakes elsewhere and from what has gone well in other countries.

The third priority is one I am particularly interested in. While waiting to start the debate, I saw the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) come in, and I thought he was going to talk, as a west midlands Member, about east-west connections, but I see he is in his place as Parliamentary Private Secretary. Nevertheless, if he had intervened, I would have made what I think is a neat assumption—that it is of as much interest to my neighbours to go to Walsall as it is to go to Wallington. That east-west has to be as important as the north-south. Sometimes it feels like a radical act to state that not everything for us is about getting to and from London more quickly; we are just as interested in moving east and west. So let us address the complex rail infrastructure in Newark and press for major investment to reduce conflicts between the east coast main line, which goes at speed, and the much slower Lincoln to Nottingham rail traffic. Let us reinstate direct services between Leicester and Coventry, which are important players in The Midland Engine.

One of my key things to highlight today is this: Midland Connect has developed the midlands rail hub concept, which would significantly improve rail capacity between the east and west midlands. It is a cost-effective package, with an additional 24 trains per hour improving

east-west connectivity. At the moment, it takes 69 minutes to go the 50 miles from Nottingham to Birmingham. As you may know, Sir Graham, I am pretty quick on my feet, and sometimes it feels like I could beat the train. I think we can do better than 50 miles in 69 minutes. The hub would also benefit links to the midlands' two international airports, and to the south-west and south Wales, allowing for an additional 36 freight paths a day, carrying £22 billion of goods every year. That is a really sensible package of ideas and, again, I am interested in the Minister's reflections.

Finally, when I am on my feet, I never miss an opportunity to talk about light rail. I am a proud Nottinghamian, so I punt for light rail at every opportunity. We are really proud of our tram system. We are proud that we are the least car-dependent city in the country outside London and that we have the best public transport outside London, but there is potential for us to go further, and it would be really positive to expand our network. Similarly, East Midlands airport is a key part of our local economy, but it is hard to get to from East Midlands Parkway, and local roads are snarled up with associated traffic. A light rail link could be the perfect solution.

We have talked a little about the past, but I want to focus on the future. In the east midlands we are practical and pragmatic. We are a can-do region, and that is reflected in Government statistics for employment growth and new business start-ups, but we can do much more. We want to work with the Government to boost investment in key rail and other transport projects that will release economic growth, to not just our own benefit, but that of the county as a whole.

4.10 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) on securing the debate. I commend him, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) and the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), for the work that they have been doing on the all-party parliamentary group on the east midlands, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), who is a bit further north of Nottingham. It is good to build cross-party links to ensure that the east midlands develops a coherent overall strategy for transport.

It is also a pleasure to have a chance to talk about the Government's planned rail investment in the east midlands. I remind the House that we are in the process of undertaking the single biggest upgrade of the midlands main line since it was completed almost 150 years ago. Through more than £1.5 billion of investment, we will reduce peak-journey times, increase capacity for passengers and freight services, reduce the environmental impact of railway operations, and improve the experience of passengers travelling in the east midlands. Some of that work has already been completed. In February, passengers began using newly commissioned track and signalling between Kettering and Corby, increasing the capacity, speed and resilience of the railway between those two Northamptonshire towns.

Ambitious works to modernise and improve the railway at Derby station began on Sunday. That upgrade includes 17 kilometres of new track, 55 new signals, 79 sets of

[*Joseph Johnson*]

points and nine new overhead gantries. The current complex and inefficient track lay-out will be simplified, allowing for more direct train movements to and through the station. Ultimately, that will reduce journey times and improve reliability.

Works to extend electrification infrastructure from Bedford to Corby are also under way. We have also asked HS2 Limited to begin preparatory works for the future electrification of a 25-kilometre section of the midland main line from Clay Cross to Sheffield station. As the hon. Member for Nottingham North said, new bi-mode trains, to be delivered under the next east midlands franchise, will provide us with the flexibility to use electrification where it is affordable and delivers real passenger benefits.

Improvements for passengers, while vital, are not our sole focus. The midland main line programme will also provide more opportunities for freight. Stations and bridges between Kettering, Bedford and Corby are being reconstructed to accommodate larger shipping containers, creating more train paths for freight. The next east midlands franchise will exploit and build on those capabilities.

The recently published invitation to tender specifies an ambitious programme of benefits and improvements. Through the new franchise, connectivity between the east midlands and London will be significantly improved. Journey times between Nottingham and Sheffield and London will be reduced by up to 20 minutes in the peak, and there will be a brand new fleet of bi-mode trains from 2022.

Mr Leslie: When the scheme for electrification was cancelled this time last year, the Government went for bi-mode train technology, but the National Audit Office said that the train technology to deliver the benefits did not exist. Will the Minister reassure us that the bi-mode trains that he envisages are real and will deliver on the specifications that he hopes for?

Joseph Johnson: Absolutely, and the decision means that passengers will benefit from the new trains sooner, and with less disruption, than had we gone ahead with plans to electrify the entire line. The upgrade of the midland main line will support much better journeys, faster journeys in the peak and more seats as a result of the new trains, with further improvements from 2022.

Thanks to modern train technology—the bi-modes that we will procure—we will not need to electrify every part of the line to deliver better journeys.

The capacity of services will be increased throughout Lincolnshire, and between Derby and Crewe, and an additional train per hour will run from Corby to London St Pancras. Throughout the week, services will start earlier in the morning and end later in the evening, and more trains will operate on Sundays. Passengers will also benefit from high-quality wi-fi and mobile connectivity, both on trains and in stations. Smart ticketing options will be introduced for leisure and business journeys, including better value-for-money fares for passengers travelling regularly but on fewer than five days a week. The new franchise has specified exemplary passenger satisfaction targets for trains, stations, customer services and dealing with delays.

All those investments will radically improve rail services in the east midlands. However, our plans do not stop there. As we look to the future, we are working collaboratively with bodies such as East Midlands Councils and Midlands Connect to identify more areas where rail investment can unlock new potential in the region. To that end, the Government are supporting Midlands Connect with £12 million of funding to develop a transformational strategy to boost productivity and growth through transport investment.

A further £5 million has been provided to support the development of the proposed midlands rail hub that the hon. Member for Nottingham North mentioned, which seeks to provide a significant uplift in capacity and reduction in journey times between Nottingham, Leicester, Derby and Birmingham. The new east midlands rail hub at Toton will be one of the best connected stations in the region, providing new high-speed links to London, Birmingham, Chesterfield and Leeds. The station will also link to the existing network with routes to Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, connecting those cities in turn to HS2.

The Government's commitment to continuously improving rail in the east midlands is evident, and the huge benefits that that will bring will be obvious. The measures that I have outlined will transform services across the breadth of one of England's most dynamic regions.

Question put and agreed to.

4.17 pm

Sitting suspended.

Family Hubs

4.30 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered family hubs.

It is a genuine pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, given your support for family life.

What exactly are family hubs? They are beginning to spring up across the country, and are being developed by innovative individuals and local authorities as a result of a fundamental rethink of how families can be better supported. The term is used in two main ways. First, it can mean a physical building in the heart of a local community, such as a former children's centre, a sports centre or a school, where a range of providers of adult and children's services from the public, private and voluntary sectors are based or co-ordinated. Crucially, it is a place where families can go for help and support, and where someone will have the answers. The Isle of Wight's locality hubs, to which I will refer shortly, are examples.

Alternatively, the term can be used to refer to a virtual community service hub. For example, in Newcastle, networks of services are co-ordinated in an integrated way, perhaps in a single building that is not itself a hub.

The examples I will refer to today are physical hubs. The advantage of physical hubs is that families know that there is somewhere local to go, where joined-up services are clear for all to see and access without stigma. No family is without its challenges from time to time.

Why are some local authorities developing family hubs? According to Dr Samantha Callan,

"the lack of readily accessible family supports, along a spectrum of need, throughout the time children are dependent on their parents (0-19) means that life chances are often severely impaired and social care services are faced with unremittingly high numbers of children who are in need, on child protection plans and coming into care."

The Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield OBE, who is very supportive of family hubs, rightly says in her child vulnerability report, published last month, that

"1.6 million children living in families with substantial complex needs have no established recognised form of additional support."

She is increasingly frustrated that vulnerable children are "let down by a system that doesn't recognise or support them; a system that leaves these children and their families to fend for themselves until things have got out of hand and crisis hits".

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My experience of children's centres is that they were not targeted, and the services they provided were completely wasted. How will my hon. Friend ensure that the hubs are targeted at the people who really need them, rather than at middle-class mothers who want to sit there or who take their children because they have other things to do?

Fiona Bruce: One of the ways—I shall elaborate on this—is to ensure that the centres are grassroots-built, that they engage with the local community and that they involve not just the statutory services but voluntary community groups. Each family hub will therefore be different and tailored to the needs of the local community, much more than Sure Start services were.

Anne Longfield says that

"in expanding the range of support we offer to vulnerable children and their families, we can support many more children in a more efficient and effective way. This is about an approach that works with children and their families, to develop resilience, confidence and independence".

She says that it is imperative that Government initiatives "focus on expanding the provision of lower-level services which support children and families, making them routine to access".

She says that some may simply need a "helping hand" but that

"for others it will be specialist support for them and their families."

Family hubs can offer that range.

The broader need that Anne Longfield highlights explains why exclusively focusing on the Sure Start children's centre nought-to-five model is no longer tenable. It is vital, if we are to give children the best start in life, that services are broader. However, we also need to address the massive challenges our country faces due to family instability. That is why family hubs are needed. Such challenges include children's mental health issues and educational and employment under-attainment, as well as a range of other challenges that can be lifelong, including addiction, housing pressures, pressure on GP surgeries, loneliness in old age and many others.

Although family hubs are as yet few in number, they are already beginning to have a real impact. I understand that the early intervention provision on the Isle of Wight means that fewer children are being put on child protection plans. At Middlewich High School in my constituency, when students have special educational needs or disability or mental health challenges, the whole family is supported. After just a few years, the evidence shows the positive impact of family hubs on the emotional health and wellbeing of students. There has even been an improvement in GCSE results.

I will describe one family hub in detail to evidence the range of support that hubs can provide, but before I do so, I will set out my key asks of the Government. National Government, from the Prime Minister down and across ministerial briefs, must really get behind this initiative. They must champion family hubs in policy, promote best practice and provide a transformation fund to help to accelerate the development of family hubs across the country.

I will describe just one example from a number of family hubs, represented at a recent roundtable to showcase good practice that was held at 10 Downing Street. Family hubs are all different because they are created by and tailored to the local communities in which they sit. Chelmsford family hub opened in March and is located in Chelmsford library. The refurbishment was paid for by a £145,000 grant from the Arts Council and £171,000 from Chelmsford's infrastructure levy fund. In its first two days of opening, more than 80 families received support from the Essex Child and Adult Wellbeing Service and library staff.

The Essex Child and Adult Wellbeing Service focuses on ensuring every child has the best possible start in life and on providing community services that are accessible and high quality, and that meet the identified needs of children, young people and families.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I am very interested in what the hon. Lady is saying. In my constituency, some church community organisations

[David Simpson]

have a wrap-around service, like a family hub, that provides not only education, but clothing, food and breakfast in the morning, and deals with young people who have issues. Is that the sort of thing she is talking about?

Fiona Bruce: Absolutely. A family hub could well be placed in a church environment. Indeed, a wonderful church community in my constituency—New Life church—provides a host of services for all ages, including a very effective job club.

Family hubs are at the heart of the services in Essex. The majority of services are delivered and co-ordinated from hubs. There is one in each district and, like the one at Chelmsford library, they are open for 50 hours a week. The hubs' approach to family care is to look at a family's strengths and then to work with the family, across all its services, aligning resources and focusing on prevention, early intervention and evidence-based practice. Working with families is so important.

At Chelmsford library, library staff, health and family support workers, and volunteers from other support agencies have come together to create a one-stop shop for free family services, including antenatal contact, parenting support, school readiness, school nursing, family health, substance misuse support, contraception advice, nutrition support, mental health support, smoking cessation, dental care, and SEN and disability support for young people up to 25. They work with an array of family support services, such as Citizens Advice, safer spaces, adult community learning and home start. Volunteers are proactively encouraged to play a role through peer support and by developing grassroots community groups to help to strengthen and build resilience in local communities.

Key features of that successful approach include a true integration of joined-up services and community engagement, the whole-family approach I mentioned and a flexible service that meets individual needs—the right type of support by the right person at the right time. Myriad outcomes are aspired to, including children and young people feeling safer; families being helped to improve parenting and children's behaviour; better emotional wellbeing of mothers and children in the perinatal period and beyond; good lifestyle choices; more resilient families who can respond well to crises and cope with shocks; young people having strong attachment to at least one adult; and people being connected to and involved in their local community.

So many families are increasingly without the support structures we took for granted only a generation ago, and often live far away from relatives. The impact of family hubs cannot be overestimated. As Javed Khan, chief executive officer of Barnardo's, said at our No. 10 roundtable, they should be

“at the heart of the domestic policy agenda”.

Family hubs could play a crucial role in fighting the “burning injustices” highlighted by the Prime Minister. Mr Khan also said:

“Our frontline experience strongly supports the proposition that early help for families is absolutely essential to build resilience and prevent more serious problems occurring later on. That's why, in our 10 year strategy, our first of three aims is to create Stronger Families, alongside Safer Childhoods and Positive Futures.

Amongst our 1000+ services, we have some great examples of Family Hubs. We all know that rising demand on safeguarding services and the care system, combined with tightened budgets, leave many local authorities without the means to invest in early support. Yet help for families is vital if we are going to break the cycle and step in when children are at serious risk of harm.”

Other family hubs, such as Woodland Academy Trust's, help with job and career opportunities. That hub has introduced a character toolkit for children and young people and has established a number of local projects in conjunction with local faith groups. As the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) mentioned, they can provide very strong community support. Westminster City Council plans to develop three hubs in collaboration with partner organisations, such as child and adolescent mental health services. I look forward to the launch of the family hub partnership in Westminster this November. We hope that there will be a ministerial presence there—ideally, the Secretary of State for Education.

The key aims of the Westminster hubs are just too many to mention, but they include identifying families with complex needs as early as possible, no matter which service they come into contact with; preventing family breakdown; preventing children from going into care and from entering the criminal justice system; helping parents to gain employment; providing access to first-line mental health support to reduce referrals to higher level, more costly interventions; and improving outcomes for children and young people across a range of health and wellbeing indicators. I hope that those descriptions bring home the tremendous potential that family hubs could have if they were sited in local communities right across our country.

The aspiration to support the creation of family hubs nationwide is one of the policy asks in the Manifesto to Strengthen Families, launched last September, which has the support of some 60 Conservative Back-Bench MPs, many other MPs and a large number of peers. I pay tribute to Dr Samantha Callan, whom I mentioned earlier, who has done so much work on how practical policies could be developed by Government to help to strengthen families. She is part of the team that worked on this manifesto, together with Lord Farmer—our representative in the Lords—and our executive director, David Burrowes and myself.

Key policy 6 of the manifesto states that the Government should

“encourage every local authority to work with voluntary and private sector partners to deliver Family Hubs... local ‘one stop shops’ offering families with children and young people, aged 0-19, early help to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships...the Government should put in place a transformation fund and national task force to encourage Local Authorities to move towards this Family Hub model...that will particularly help children in need.”

The manifesto also states:

“Alongside physical Family Hubs, the Government should work with the Family Hub Movement to develop a virtual Family Hub offering online support and guidance that mirrors the depth and quality of NHS.gov and links families to local provision.”

I want to emphasise, however, that vocal and practical leadership is required from central Government significantly to accelerate the creation of family hubs and their roll-out across the country. We need Ministers and the Prime Minister to champion family hubs. We need this to be a key component of our domestic policy going forward. Backing that up with a transformation fund of £100 million over four years could provide a rocket

boost by highlighting good practice and helping senior local authority staff across the country to reconfigure existing services to make them more holistic and co-ordinated. Focus should be on early intervention and prevention, as well as community self-help and developing missing services such as relationship support, which is too rarely available in the community.

Leadership from national Government to strengthen family life in our country is absolutely critical. The fiscal cost of addressing family breakdown, quite apart from the often lifelong pain and suffering of millions, has been estimated and oft-quoted in the House at around £50 billion, but that is a vast underestimate. The cost in terms of lost life potential and lost productivity is much more.

So much of that cost is borne, and so many of the related challenges are addressed, by a wide range of Departments: Education, Health, Justice, Work and Pensions, the Cabinet Office, Housing, Communities and Local Government, and even Defence. That is why our manifesto policy 1 asks for a Cabinet Minister to be appointed with responsibility for families. In the same way that one Cabinet Minister holds the equalities brief, another Secretary of State with a cross-Government brief, or one of the larger Departments such as DWP or Housing, Communities and Local Government, could bear named responsibility for families.

That Secretary of State would require an equivalent body to the Government Equalities Office—a dedicated budget and civil service team to prioritise and co-ordinate family policies across Government. That would also help to avoid the duplication of work that is becoming apparent across Departments and pots of money being allocated to address such challenges. There is serious risk that much good work across Government will not meet its objectives as effectively as it could because of the lack of integration and co-ordination across Departments, as well as the risk of duplication of manpower and money. That could be avoided if a Cabinet-level Minister responsible for families co-ordinated all that good work and more.

I mentioned that good work is being done across Government to strengthen families. Over the past year, our team that has worked on the Manifesto to Strengthen Families has been encouraged by the positive response to the manifesto not only from many Back-Bench colleagues, but from Ministers. We are delighted that the Ministry of Justice has fully adopted and is implementing Lord Farmer's review on strengthening prisoners' family ties, which reflects policy 18 of the manifesto.

We were also delighted by the announcement by Health Ministers of £6 million to help the children of alcoholics—a need referred to in policy 4 of the manifesto. Similarly, the budget of more than £90 million allocated to addressing the mental health crisis faced by young people was welcome, which we also referred to in our manifesto. However, our team has told the Schools Minister that if that funding is to be effectively used, it is critical that young people's families are involved wherever possible to help to address their mental health needs. Engaging families and early intervention are absolutely essential to avoid the continued mental health challenges among young people in this and future generations.

Only last week, we welcomed the announcement by the Secretary of State for Education of greater emphasis on relationships education in the newly proposed relationships and sex education curriculum guidance. It includes that pupils learn about the characteristics of healthy relationships and the

“nature and importance of marriage for family life and bringing up children”—

an emphasis reflected in policy 3 and elsewhere in our manifesto.

We also welcome the statements by Ministers in both Houses on the manifesto policy suggestions, including family hubs. My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), when he was Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said:

“I welcome the development of family hubs and we know that many areas are already moving towards this model of support for children and families.”—[*Official Report*, 30 October 2017; Vol. 630, c. 564.]

Earlier this month, the Under-Secretary of State for the School System, Lord Agnew, affirmed family hubs, saying of them and other strategies that the Government want

“to ensure that these innovations are recognised and shared, and we want to spread these successful approaches.”—[*Official Report*, *House of Lords*, 12 July 2018; Vol. 792, c. 959.]

Spreading the successful approach of the family hubs that are already up and running is important—indeed, it is urgent—hence the need for national Government support.

I have some short practical requests, which are examples of how the Government could support and help to promote family hubs. I understand capital clawback would need to be waived if the change of use of a former children's centre were part of a local authority's service redesign. Will the Government look at that? There should be a requirement for parents who are not in work but benefit from free childcare to spend at least one of those childcare sessions with their children in the hub to boost their own parenting confidence. Ofsted's single inspection framework could specify that early help for families must show regard to the need for support for couples as well as parenting support, and DFE could signal its support for a major gear shift in the development of family hubs by adopting “hub language” and encouraging local authorities to redesign family support along the co-ordinated lines of family hubs.

The good news is that positive outcomes can be achieved quickly, as I outlined. The health and wellbeing work and engagement with families in Middlewich, where such outcomes are already being seen, has been led by an inspiring headteacher, Keith Simpson, who was appointed just six years ago. I read in this week's edition of the local newspaper that he will be moving on. He has become deeply appreciated and respected in the Middlewich community, and has shown through his local leadership what a positive difference engaging with the whole family can make. I am sure I speak on behalf of the whole town when I say we wish him well with his move to Neston. Middlewich's loss will be very much Neston's gain, and he will leave a long-lasting legacy in many lives, particularly young ones.

Imagine the huge difference—the transformative impact—that could be made nationwide in just a few years by having a family hub in every community. Their positive, perhaps lifelong, impacts on individuals would ripple

[Fiona Bruce]

out into the community. Even the Chancellor has signalled his support for the concept, recognising the increased national productivity that may result.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education, who will respond to the debate, said recently that the Government have committed £8.5 million for councils to peer review one another to see what actually works in terms of outcomes for children. Will he confirm that that will include reviewing the effectiveness of family hubs? I know from a private meeting between him and our Manifesto for Strengthening Families team that he understands so much of what I have spoken about, so will he become a vocal champion for family hubs, press his Secretary of State to be so too, and in turn press the Prime Minister to take up the policy asks I outlined? It is not an exaggeration to say that this could be transformative for our nation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair): Order. Two Members are seeking to catch my eye, and we have a shade over 20 minutes before we need to commence the winding-up speeches, which I want to happen no later than quarter-past 5. I call Jim Shannon.

4.53 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Sir Graham. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. It is always an intense pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). There is probably not a debate she leads that I am not at, and I suspect there is not a debate I lead that she does not attend. We have kindred interests, and this is one of them, so I informed her that I would put my name down to speak in support of what she does. I commend her on her hard work on families and relationships, and on the alcohol strategy and how we address that issue. She takes on nitty-gritty issues that are commonplace but very important, and I thank her for that.

I, too, am from a very close community where everyone knows everyone else. It is common for me to walk down the street and be able to name all the people I meet. That is probably because I am of a certain age, so I know lots of people. I know the parents, I know the children, and now I know the grandchildren—that is how life is. That is what my constituency is like, and I suspect it is what other Members' constituencies are like. If we live long enough in an area, we get to know the area and its people, and we can name most of the people we meet on the street.

However, it is clear that we do not know all the troubles in people's hearts, minds and lives, or the struggles they face daily. I recently read in one of my local papers, "Be kind to people—you do not know the struggle that lies behind that smile." When I first opened my advice centre as a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, a lady gave me that quote, which I kept on the wall for a great many years until I redecorated the place. That is the thrust of what I have always said: "You're never quite sure what troubles that person has. That smile just may hide the cataclysmic problems they face." The problems I see in my office are the tip of the iceberg of what people face.

I will talk about family hubs from the perspective of the church groups in my constituency, because that is where family hubs come from. The hon. Lady knows that, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson), and I hope at the end of the debate other Members will know it, too.

From illness to losing a job, from grief to unexplained depression—I have found that the number of people who look like they have no problems but in fact have depression has greatly increased over the years, and how to help them and get them beyond where they find themselves is probably one of the greatest issues I face in my constituency office—and from a life of plenty to a life of poverty, I am amazed by the difficulties that so many people face. We face them every week in my office. I am sure others do, too. I am thankful that so many people volunteer to help others face those difficulties.

I work closely with the local food bank and Christians Against Poverty group, which work out of the specially designated compassion centre at Thriving Life Church in Newtownards. I have had a very good relationship with that centre over the years. I helped it with its planning application when it moved to where it is now. It took over a car sales place and totally renovated it to make it a really good compassion centre—the name was chosen specially. The centre supports people who need short-term and long-term help, of whom there are many in my area. That food bank was one of the first to be established in Northern Ireland, and its impact has been great. There is also a clothing bank, groups for elderly and young people, a coffee shop and a breakfast club. The Church is very community-orientated. Clearly, its work is based on its beliefs and its faith, but it works with lots of single parents, and it is involved in charitable fundraising, too.

My area is second only to County Antrim, which contains Belfast, in terms of people's need for three-day emergency food packages from food banks. The biggest cause for food bank referral in the Province is recorded as "low income—benefits, not earning".

I fill in forms with those categories when people come to see me, and I always ask whether they have no benefits, their benefits have been delayed, they have low income or they have been through relationship break-up, so I get a fair idea of what people experience. Low income accounts for 45% of referrals in Northern Ireland, and benefit delays and benefit changes, which each account for 12%, are also significant reasons for referral.

People need help, and that Church in particular helps to put food on the table and provides people with life-changing support to deal with debt and learn better money management, which is really important. The debt charity Christians Against Poverty reported that its clients had run up average debts of £4,500 on rent or utility bills, forcing them on to what the charity described as a "relentless financial tightrope" on which they juggle repayments and basic living costs, which leaves many acutely stressed and in deteriorating health. Lots of problems follow from the debts. What is important is helping people to learn to manage their money, stepping in and maybe even sorting out the repayments as well. In our office we have been personally involved with that and I know that the Church group has too.

The pressure of coping with low income and debt frequently triggers mental illness or exacerbates existing conditions, with more than one third of clients reporting

that they had considered suicide and three quarters visiting a GP for debt-related problems. More than half were subsequently prescribed medication or therapy. We may see the physical outcome of the problems they present to us, but what we maybe do not see is the emotional and mental issues that are just underneath.

Families are under immense pressure and Churches are stepping into the breach. The local Elim Church in Newtownards runs a cancer care club that provides support, encouragement and a listening ear for those suffering from cancer or their families. I have been to those groups a couple of times to meet some of the people; it gives me a focus on the problems that people have. The Church also runs an addictions night, which brings in some of the local addicts, feeds them and tries to offer help. I have met those people over the years. They are good people who just need someone to guide, support and help them at a time when they are at their very lowest.

Scrabo Hall runs a women's ministry to help vulnerable ladies and offer support, as well as youth work to give children an alternative place to safely hang out. There are kids' Bible clubs galore right through the summer in the major town of Newtownards and across the whole Strangford constituency. We have a lot of Bible clubs where young people come in, and it perhaps gives parents a chance to get a wee break or respite.

It is not possible for me to highlight all of the services that are offered in our Church, all voluntary and all out of a love for families, and I want to thank all those who so sacrificially give of their time, energy and resources to help struggling families. It would also be remiss of me to forgo mentioning the tremendous work that is carried out in our community groups, which connect older people through craft clubs or tea dances and provide homework clubs as well as youth clubs. There are so many people—I ask each right hon. and hon. Member here to think for a second about the volunteers who do so much in our constituencies and provide those in need with a listening ear. Sometimes people just need someone to talk to, and it is important that they can always call in and know someone is there for them.

I will finish, because I am conscious of time and I want to give the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) a chance to make an equal contribution. Life is tough, and tougher still for struggling families; Churches and community groups are doing a good job, but they want to and could do more if they were better funded and had a larger support base. It is on us as individuals to do that. The family unit and family hubs are an essential component of a functioning community. Offering tax breaks is great, but not enough. We need support for working families, and that can only be done through targeted funding. I implore the Minister, who I know will be responsive to our comments and requests, to address that need and to help the sterling work that is already being done.

5.2 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): It is a pleasure as ever to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on securing this debate on a very important issue. I commend the work she has done and the passion she shows for strengthening families. I approach this debate from the point of view of my own passion for early

years, primary schools and early intervention, particularly in vulnerable families and deprived communities, such as the many I see in my constituency.

In Mansfield, there is a high level of family breakdown, deprivation, domestic violence and other very concerning problems that particularly affect families. I am keen to ensure that we have the support services available to help those families, and I have been working with a number of local organisations in support of that. Family hubs are an excellent initiative to help the most vulnerable families by providing accessible early intervention and lifelong support. Often only a low level of support is required to keep families and individuals on the right path and to make them feel secure, but that preventive approach is the right one. Sometimes that is the aspect we miss across so many of our local services. We deal with crises when they happen, but often we do not deal with the early signs, and that prevention is arguably more important for a lot of people.

My hon. Friend mentioned duplication and lack of co-ordination. I seem to say this a lot about many different areas, but it seems that, across almost all our public services, whether health, social care, housing or regeneration—even bin collection—we are consistently battling with an increasingly complex array of different organisations with competing priorities, different budget pots and different agendas, with barriers being drawn between those services. I feel that is the result of decades of short-term fixes; over a long time, we have created new bodies and new organisations to deal with particular short-term issues, instead of looking at wholesale reform and change in services or local government, which probably needs to happen.

The challenge across all our services, particularly social services, youth services and similar preventive work, is collaboration. How do we bring those organisations together, overcome the barriers that have been built over decades and pool the resources? How do we get them to work toward shared goals? That is something that family hubs in particular can help to achieve.

Many vulnerable families have a wide range of needs across several different areas, such as mental health, addiction, parenting support programmes or low-level help, such as somebody to go and socialise with. There are a whole variety of challenges, and it is simpler for parents to have a range of services under one roof and to have different departments work as one team so that they communicate better, respond to local needs, catch the warning signs of problems earlier and deal with individuals in a more co-ordinated way.

That also builds trust between organisations and service users in a better way than if people are passed from pillar to post across different departments. Dealing with so many vulnerable individuals in my constituency, I find that trust is often the biggest challenge. People do not get themselves into a situation where their family is on the verge of homelessness if they have not been let down by people along the way, which breaks down trust.

As a councillor in Ashfield in a previous life, I saw at first hand the great benefits of the great work going on there, with cross-organisational collaboration targeting the most troubled families. The results have been amazing for the families and for the taxpayer. The New Cross teams, as they are known—their area, which is one of the most deprived in Ashfield, is called New Cross—target those families who might not always get picked out.

[Ben Bradley]

Those families have been dealing with one department because there is rubbish on their lawn, with another department because their children are absent from school and with another department for something else, and the police are aware of them because of antisocial behaviour, but nobody looks at the whole picture. If we do that, it is clear that they are not able to support themselves and have a range of challenges.

When we bring services together under one roof in what is effectively a family hub, although without the premises, they work across different departments. The family has one point of contact, who can deal with all those services for them and take a holistic approach to supporting the whole family with a range of issues, instead of dealing with little bits in isolation.

Mansfield has some great examples of schools—such as Forest Town primary—with what is known as nurture provision, supporting the most vulnerable children at primary school. It is almost a school within a school, providing holistic care for those kids to help them engage with primary education early, so that when they are 15 or 16, they do not become the kids who are expelled and who have a whole range of different problems in their adolescence. The earlier we can get families access to that kind of support, the better.

We also have Sure Start centres, which provide useful services for expectant parents and young children. I am keen to protect all those programmes, as we need to, but bringing services together is helpful and helps to direct families locally. If they have one point of contact that they are made aware of early on, they always know where to go to get help.

The creation of family hubs would offer a greater level of service. There are opportunities to bring different services together under one roof and potentially to expand them, while saving money in many cases if authorities can work together, which, as I have said before, is often a big challenge. A number of organisations have called for the Government to review these services, and I wonder whether the Minister might touch on that, and particularly on youth services, Sure Start and so on, where local government finances are sometimes challenging for some of these non-statutory services.

Action for Children has called for a new vision for the future of early years services, starting with a review of early years support to understand the level of provision and the best practice that exists around the country. I support such a review as it would help local authorities to deliver the best care. As with anything, there are some councils, local authorities and services that have dealt with funding pressures in a much better way than others. For every bad example of services being lost, there is a great example of a council that has adapted and innovated, and to share that best practice and send it out from this place would be really positive.

Using funding effectively, catching problems early and preventing people from spiralling into a crisis that requires far more expensive and intensive intervention later on is really important for children and families across communities. Children need care and support, and vulnerable families often need assistance in providing that care, so I fully support my hon. Friend's work on family hubs. I hope the Minister's response will be positive as well.

5.10 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on securing the debate. It is a great pleasure to speak for the Opposition in what has been an interesting and wide-ranging discussion. I welcome the passion that the hon. Lady has shown in her commitment to families who are struggling against the odds, as well as her celebration of the innovation and determination of councils across the country to keep families at the centre of all they do.

I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Upper Bann (David Simpson), who both focused on how faith groups can bring communities together. Our Muslim community in Batley and Spen certainly works incredibly hard in supporting families. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) for his focus on the preventive approach to early intervention and the impact that it can have. I slightly take issue with the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell)—he is no longer in his place—who said that middle-class mums do not deserve the same attention and protection. They can have the same struggles as others, such as with breastfeeding or with their postpartum mental health.

Fiona Bruce: We all have our challenges in developing healthy, wholesome relationships. Family income is no discriminator in that.

Tracy Brabin: I could not agree more. A struggling parent will struggle whatever their income.

As we have heard, the proposals for family hubs have come from Members from across the political spectrum. The mission statement from the hon. Member for Congleton is certainly commendable. It is to

“co-locate superb early years health and other services with help for parents with children across the age ranges”.

Many wish to see the hubs encompass other services, such as jobcentres and relationship advisers, along with more conventional children's centres.

The potential merits and points of discussion about family hubs are more substantial than one could hope to fit into a single short speech, so I will look at the impact of Government policies on services that would be incorporated into them. First, it is important to acknowledge that we already have a highly successful model of support for families. It is robust, has been tested and is highly popular with families from all communities. It is called Sure Start.

Unfortunately, the number of Sure Start units and children's centres have been in rapid decline in recent years. In the late '90s and the noughties, Sure Start grew to become a staple of communities across our country, providing immeasurable educational, health and social support to millions. However, the respected and independent Sutton Trust tells us that 1,000 Sure Start centres have closed since 2010. Furthermore, Action for Children states that local authority spending on early years services has fallen by more than half since 2010.

We should therefore not look at family hubs in isolation. We must make sure that they retain a clear early years focus and a strong offer to families. It is in the early years that we see the fastest development of our brains

and neurological pathways, so the right early years support can give children the best start in life and help to close the developmental gap between poorer children and their peers.

That is not to mention the serious health problems facing children, which are a growing concern. One in three primary school children in year 6 are either overweight or obese, and if the childhood obesity crisis is not tackled, half of all UK children will be obese or overweight by 2020. That problem is much worse in the most deprived areas. A quarter of five-year-olds in England suffer from tooth decay, making it the leading cause of hospital admissions for five to nine-year-olds. Around three children and young people in every classroom have a diagnosable mental health condition. No matter what the services are in local areas, it is clear that they certainly have their work cut out for them.

We believe that early years services have been cut to a shameful extent, and that the growing postcode lottery is completely unacceptable. All family hubs must keep the early years and children's centres ethos very much at their heart.

Fiona Bruce: One pressure on local authorities is that of the increasing acute needs, which is what we seek to tackle. As the Children's Commissioner highlighted, the funding disparity is great. It costs £204,000 a year to house a child in a secure children's home and £100,000 a year to house a teenager in a young offenders institution. However, behavioural problem support can be delivered in a group setting at an early stage for around £1,000 per child. We must do that early intervention. The pressures on local authorities are so huge—look at the kind of figures I quoted—that they inevitably impact on what they can do by way of earlier intervention.

Tracy Brabin: I really do appreciate that intervention. I also read that report and found those numbers incredibly startling. It is common sense, is it not? Getting it right in the early years will be cost-effective. If a child is admitted to hospital to have their teeth out due to decay, that is costly for the NHS. Bringing dental health and similar schemes into early years provision might mean less of an impact on NHS budgets.

On early years, will the Minister provide a progress update on the consultation into children's centres, and confirm whether work on that is ongoing and whether we should expect to see a published consultation? The consultation has been more than three years in the making and is on an incredibly important policy area. Will he please take this opportunity to give some transparency on the issue?

Lastly, Sir Graham, all that is left is for me to wish you, the Minister and all Members a peaceful and rewarding recess.

5.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): It is truly an honour and a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on securing this important debate, and I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) and for Henley (John Howell) and the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Upper Bann (David Simpson) for contributing.

I am grateful for this opportunity to set out the Government's position on supporting families so that no community is left behind. Social mobility is a priority for our Department, as it is across Government, and we welcome local initiatives that support families—particularly those who are disadvantaged. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton called for a Cabinet-level Minister with the responsibility to ensure that family policy is prioritised and co-ordinated. I say to her that the Government are already committed to supporting families. That is why, as she knows, we introduced the family test in 2014 and continue to support its application to policy across government.

Fiona Bruce: Will the Minister give way?

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me just make some headway. I will come back to my hon. Friend if time permits, because I have a lot to say about this subject

We share a common view about the importance of effective local support for families. That is why the Government's legislation and funding is designed to give local authorities the freedom to decide the best way to deliver their services, based on their understanding of their local needs and the character of their areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield mentioned that, for every council that is not doing well, there is a very good example of one that has done well for its families. We welcome the development of family hubs as a way to meet local need. We encourage local authorities to adopt the family hub approach, which aims to build stronger relationships and co-locate services, if they believe it would deliver improved outcomes for their areas.

We already know that many councils are moving toward that model of support, working with local statutory, voluntary—as the hon. Member for Strangford mentioned—community and private sector partners. When I was promoted to Minister, one of the first meetings I had was with Lord Farmer and the team that put together the manifesto. I have already promised my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton that I would visit a family hub in Essex and I still plan to do so.

What we are discussing today is how we can ensure that strong, effective local services provide effective support for families and children. I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the work that the Government are doing to deliver that. The strengthening families manifesto argues that Government should be working to put in place a nought-to-19 model across the country. We know others advocate for a sharper focus on younger children, proposing that children's centres focus on a nought-to-two age range. The shadow Minister talked about that early intervention.

My view is that both of those models, depending on local circumstances, could work and provide much needed support to families, just as I am sure that there are other models that can work, too. Let me be clear, it is for local authorities to determine the model that they believe will work best for them, based on their area's specific needs and on the history of local provision, local community circumstances and priorities.

Tracy Brabin: The difficulty for some councils—in Kirklees, for example—is that 50% of their budget has been cut since 2010, so they are having to slice the pie into even smaller slices. Should the pie not be bigger?

Nadhim Zahawi: We have provided £200 billion in this five-year review—this current spending round—to local government. Local government has increased spending on children services. Last year it spent £9.2 billion.

I recently visited Greater Manchester, where I met the Mayor, Andy Burnham. Greater Manchester, which includes 10 local authorities—as you, rightly, know, Sir Graham—is an excellent example of an area where powers and responsibilities have become more devolved, and the Mayor can take decisions in areas such as health. The Government's role is to engage actively with the sector to find out what works and to support local areas to make the right decisions for their communities, which might include implementing family hubs.

That is why as part of the Department for Education's social mobility action plan, "Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential", we announced an early years social mobility peer review programme, which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton mentioned. We are partnering with the Local Government Association to deliver this initiative. Peer reviews will be led by multidisciplinary teams, and will support councils to identify actions and reforms to improve local outcomes in the early years. The programme will also look at what works, including the effective models for service provision, such as family hubs and children's centres. That was something my hon. Friend called for in her speech. I think she is nodding away. I hope that she appreciates that that is an important part of this work.

I have asked my officials to ensure that the local government programme understands fully how the family hub model works and where the most effective practice is taking place. My officials would be happy to work with my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton to do that.

An example of how we are strengthening local delivery to support families is the reducing parental conflict programme, introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions. Good quality relationships between parents are critical for setting children up for life. Recent evidence has shown that children who are exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict can experience a decline in their mental health and suffer poorer long-term outcomes. The reducing parental conflict programme, again, puts local areas at the heart of its delivery, helping them to embed parental conflict support into wider services for children and ensure evidence-based interventions are more widely available to improve children's outcomes.

The troubled families programme is an excellent example of how central Government can work with local authorities to strengthen local services, drawing on evidence of what works, but allowing for the development of local solutions. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield mentioned a similar programme that he witnessed. I was in Islington and witnessed some of the cases there, where the troubled families programme was exactly the sort of programme needed. It aims to achieve significant and sustained improvement for up to 400,000 families—it started with 100,000—with multiple high-cost problems. The programme, delivered through local authorities and their partners, advocates a whole-family integrated approach across multiple services.

The programme's focus on preventive services is already starting to show a positive impact in reducing demand on children's social care. The emerging evaluation results

show that, in families on the programme, six to 12 months after intervention, the proportion of children designated as children in need decreased by 14%, compared with the period just before the start of intervention. We know that many local areas have used programme funding to establish a family hub model, similar to that recommended by the strengthening families manifesto. Those hubs are being used to deliver their local programmes for complex families. Almost £1 billion has been committed to the programme from 2015 to 2020.

The hon. Member for Strangford talked about mental health. The Government's Green Paper, "Transforming children and young people's mental health provision", announced ambitious proposals to provide earlier support for children and young people's mental health. It recognises that secure attachment with a parent or carer is a protective factor for children and young people's mental health, and commits to commissioning further research in that area. This includes supporting healthcare professionals to understand the importance of healthy, low-stress pregnancies and healthy childhoods, and increasing the capability of midwives to support women with perinatal mental health issues. We are also partnering with Public Health England, so that health visitors can do some work on speech and language therapy at the very early stage of intervention.

We are committed to incentivising every school and college to identify a designated senior lead for mental health, fund new mental health support teams, and trial a four-week waiting time for access to specialist NHS children and young people's mental health services. The Green Paper consultation response, which we aim to publish imminently, will set out the next steps in implementing the Green Paper.

The shadow Minister asked about children's centres. I have to say that rather than doing another consultation or review, let us look at where things are really working well. Take Newcastle or Staffordshire, for example, where the local authority has taken an active role to close some of the children's centres but focus on outreach and keeping those children's services where the most disadvantaged families need that help. We have looked at the six local authorities where the most children's centres have closed. Out of the six, four are doing better in closing the development gap, one is about flat and the other is oscillating. I suggest to the shadow Minister that it is not about bricks and mortar. I do not want to make this into a party political debate.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton for securing the debate. The Government are clear about the importance of improving outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged in our communities. I entirely agree that strong local services are essential, and it is important that we continue to encourage and learn from innovations such as family hubs, and ensure that leaders have the information they require to design and deliver the services that will best address local need.

We have the ability to look strategically at the whole country—the whole of England, certainly—and to disseminate best practice. That is one of the things I passionately believe in. The Government have a key role to play in ensuring we deliver for those families. Finally, I would like to say to my hon. Friend the Member for

Congleton that I do not need to be in the Cabinet to champion families and the wellbeing of all of our families in our communities.

5.28 pm

Fiona Bruce: I thank the Minister for his response. I supplied him with a copy of my speech earlier, so I am pleased he has responded to some of the calls in it. Perhaps he can write to me on other calls to which he has not responded.

I take issue with the Minister about the family test. It has barely been applied in practice. I ask that he looks at the written questions that I have sent to every Department in the past few months, which evidence this. On the funding for children's mental health, I note his comment

about support teams being in every school, but unless they are properly trained to work with the families of the children they are helping, they will not be as effective as they need to be. I do not agree with the Minister that there is adequate co-ordination across Government on family support: it needs to be stronger. I am grateful that he is willing to be a champion of this and I look forward to him doing so in the future.

Finally, it is right that local authorities deliver these services, but national Government have the authority to rocket-boost action. That is what we are seeking, because that is not what has happened to date.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 24 July 2018

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Law Officers Department

The Attorney General (Mr Geoffrey Cox): I am today announcing the appointment of Max Hill QC as the next Director of Public Prosecutions.

Under the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, it is my duty to appoint a person to be the Director of Public Prosecutions, who shall discharge their functions under my superintendence. The Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary have been notified of this appointment.

This appointment was conducted in line with civil service guidance and the process was overseen by the First Civil Service Commissioner.

[HCWS913]

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Business Investment

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The Government are today publishing a White Paper: “National Security and Investment”.

It sets out the Government’s plans to upgrade their powers to scrutinise investments and other acquisitions on national security grounds. These proposals deliver on the commitment made by the Government in the 2017 Queen’s Speech to bring forward reforms to “ensure that critical national infrastructure is protected to safeguard national security.”

This country has a proud and hard-won reputation as one of the most open economies in the world. Our economic success stems from our belief in international trade and our support for foreign direct investment. Of course, an open approach to international investment must include appropriate safeguards to protect our national security—particularly in a world where the threats we face are evolving.

This White Paper is the product of the Government’s consultative approach to reform in this area, following on from the Green Paper published in the autumn and subsequent public consultation. The Government have reflected carefully on the feedback provided by a wide variety of stakeholders, including businesses, investors and law firms.

The Government’s existing powers to screen certain mergers for public interest reasons, including national security, derive from the Enterprise Act 2002. We need to make sure they are kept up to date in the light of economic, technological and national security changes.

In June, Parliament enacted secondary legislation to amend the thresholds in the Enterprise Act 2002 for three specific areas of the economy, military/dual-use, computing hardware and quantum technology, enabling the Government to intervene in more mergers that may raise national security concerns.

The White Paper sets out how the Government will address the risks that can arise from hostile actors acquiring ownership of, or control over, businesses or other entities and assets that have national security implications.

The Government will encourage businesses and investors to notify them ahead of transactions and other events that might give rise to national security risks. The majority of transactions raise no national security concerns and the Government expect that they could quickly rule out national security risks in many cases, allowing parties to proceed with certainty.

The Government would be able to “call-in” transactions that may give rise to national security risks to assess them more fully. This “call-in” power would be economy-wide, reflecting the Government’s need for flexibility to address national security risks wherever they arise.

To provide maximum certainty and clarity to business and investors, the Government will publish a statement of policy intent, setting out how the “call-in” power is expected to be used. A draft of this document is published today.

It is important that the Government have a variety of tools available to address risks to national security where they are identified. The remedies proposed by the Government include:

confirmation to proceed, approval subject to conditions and—in the rare circumstances where it is the only available course of action—blocking or unwinding a deal, where this has already taken place.

The Government believe that the proposed package of reforms published today strikes the right balance between maintaining the openness and attractiveness of the UK as a destination for inward investment, while also providing the Government with modernised powers they need to protect the country.

Today’s publication marks the start of a 12-week consultation, during which time we will continue to work with those with an interest in these reforms and consider the feedback received.

I am laying the White Paper before Parliament in the form of a Command Paper.

[HCWS907]

TREASURY

ECOFIN: 13 July

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Brussels on 13 July 2018. EU Finance Ministers discussed the following:

Early morning session

The Eurogroup President briefed the Council on the outcomes of the 12 July meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission provided an update on the current economic situation in the EU.

VAT: generalised reverse charge mechanism and e-publications

The Council held an exchange of views on proposals to allow member states to temporarily apply a VAT generalised reverse charge mechanism, and proposals to allow member states to apply non-standard rates of VAT to e-publications.

Current financial services legislative proposals

The Austrian presidency provided an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Presidency work programme

The Austrian presidency presented its work programme on economic and financial matters for July to December 2018. This was followed by an exchange of views.

June European Council follow-up

The Council held an exchange of views on the follow-up to the European Council of 28 and 29 June 2018.

G20 meeting

The Council approved the EU terms of reference for the G20 meeting of Finance Ministers in Buenos Aires on 21 and 22 July.

[HCWS923]

HM Government's Guarantee**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):**

In 2016, the Government guaranteed funding for UK organisations in receipt of EU funds where projects are agreed before the day the UK leaves the EU. The guarantee is designed to apply in the event that the EU does not meet its financial obligations after EU exit and provide assurance to current UK participants in EU programmes or those considering bids for EU funds prior to exit.

The Government are continuing to work towards a deal with the EU and under the terms of the implementation period the UK will continue to participate in the programmes financed by the current EU budget until their closure. As a consequence, the Treasury is extending the Government's guarantee of EU funding to underwrite the UK's allocation for structural and investment fund projects under this EU budget period to 2020. The Treasury is also guaranteeing funding in the event of a no deal for UK organisations which bid directly to the European Commission so that they can continue competing for, and securing, funding until the end of 2020. This ensures that UK organisations, such as charities, businesses and universities, will continue to receive funding over a project's lifetime if they successfully bid into EU-funded programmes before December 2020. In addition to this guarantee, the Government will establish a UK shared prosperity fund. The fund will tackle inequalities between communities by raising productivity, especially in those parts of our country whose economies are furthest behind. A departmental minute providing full details of the liabilities associated with this announcement has been laid in the House of Commons.

[HCWS926]

DEFENCE**A Better Defence Estate**

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): In November 2016, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) published its estate optimisation strategy "A Better Defence Estate" outlining how MOD will deliver an estate that is optimised to support defence capabilities, outputs and communities both now and in the future. This update provides progress against the strategy.

Delivering the strategy remains a priority for the MOD, and the commitment to invest £4 billion to create a smaller, more modern and capability-focused

estate between now and 2040 remains. A major defence-level initiative, the "Defence Estate Optimisation" programme, has been mobilised to deliver this strategy, combining military and infrastructure expertise to transform the places where our armed forces live, work and train. The programme has already delivered nine disposals: Hullavington airfield, Chalgrove airfield, Somerset barracks, MOD facilities at Swansea airport, Moat House, Rylston Road ARC (London), Newtownards airfield, Cophorne barracks and Lodge Hill. The MOD continues to develop integrated plans for sites intended for disposal and redevelopment for those sites that will see an increase in military units. Good progress has been made with a significant amount of work on the myriad studies required to enable a programme of this size and complexity. The first half of 2018 saw the major tranche of capacity studies and reviews of re-provision site constraints being completed. Feasibility and assessment studies have been completed for over 40 sites in which the MOD will be investing.

The MOD can also confirm the intention to cease RAF use of RAF Linton-on-Ouse (North Yorkshire) in 2020. RAF Linton-on-Ouse is the base of the Tucano training aircraft, as the RAF plans to retire this aircraft, the site will no longer be needed. Instead, we will be able to concentrate basic and advanced fast-jet training at RAF Valley from 2019.

The MOD will close RAF Scampton (Lincolnshire) in 2022, relocating the RAF aerobatics team (RAFAT) and others to locations more fit for purpose. The disposal of the site would offer better value for money and, crucially, better military capability by relocating the units based there.

Given the scale of the strategy and the fact that it will be delivered over 25 years, plans continue to be refined to best support operational capability and Parliament will continue to be updated regularly on our plans.

The Department continues to engage with relevant stakeholders, including devolved Administrations and local planning authorities, to ensure sites released under the strategy are redeveloped in a way that benefits both defence and surrounding communities. The MOD remains committed to making the right decisions to provide effective support to defence capabilities and best value for money for the taxpayer.

[HCWS922]

Education Support Fund**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence**

(Mr Tobias Ellwood): The education support fund (ESF) was introduced in 2011 as a Ministry of Defence (MOD) fund to supplement the provisions made by the relevant educational authorities across the UK to mitigate the adverse effects of family mobility and parental absence on the children of service personnel. This supplement was considered necessary given the increased operational tempo at the time and the planned drawdown from Germany. The ESF was due to conclude at the end of the 2017-18 financial year.

The armed forces covenant is a promise by the nation that those who serve and have served and their families are not disadvantaged as a result of their service. The provision of educational support for the children of

service personnel is primarily the responsibility of the relevant educational authorities and I am grateful to colleagues in the Department for Education for their continued support for the covenant through both the service pupil premium and individual projects, including the £2.8 million recently announced to support the expansion of the Army in the Salisbury plain area. I am also grateful to colleagues in the Welsh Government for creating a £200,000 fund, which I hope can be extended, this year to support service children in Wales.

In the light of the ongoing drawdown from Germany and to provide time for the educational authorities across the UK to bring in longer-term provision for service children as necessary, I am pleased to announce that I have asked the MOD to extend the ESF, on a limited basis, for two years. The fund will consist of £3 million this year and £2 million in 2019-20.

[HCWS908]

Departmental Update

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I am today announcing the Government's decision on pay rises for the armed forces.

The Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) has made its recommendation for the 2018-19 pay award of 2.9%. We are accepting the spirit of this recommendation with a 2% increase to pay (implemented in September salaries, backdated to 1 April 2018) and, in addition, a 0.9% nonconsolidated one-off payment (implemented later in the year, also backdated to 1 April 2018).

Today's pay award will deliver an annual increase to starting salaries of £520 for an officer and £370 for a newly trained soldier, sailor or airman or woman. This is in addition to the non-contributory pension and access to incremental pay progression.

The AFPRB has also made recommendations on rises and changes to other targeted forms of remuneration, and on increases to food and accommodation charges, which have been accepted. Where applicable, these rate changes will also be backdated to 1 April 2018.

The Government are committed to world-class public services and ensuring that public sector workers are fairly paid for the vitally important work that they do. It is thanks to our balanced approach to public finances—getting debt falling as a share of our economy, while investing in our vital services and keeping taxes low—that we are today able to announce a fair and deserved pay rise for the armed forces, their biggest increase since 2010.

We ended the 1% average pay policy in September 2017, because we recognised more flexibility is now required to deliver world-class public services including in return for improvements to public sector productivity.

We value the role of the independent pay review bodies and thank them for their work in considering pay awards. In reaching a final position for 2018-19 public sector pay awards, we have balanced a need to recognise the value and dedication of our hard-working public servants while ensuring that our public services remain affordable in the long term, to contribute to our objective of reducing public sector debt. We have also sought to ensure that pay awards are fair and consistent

across public sector workforces, reflect existing pay and benefit packages, in addition to recruitment and retention levels.

It is vital that we consider all pay awards in the light of wider pressures on public spending. Public sector pay needs to be fair both for public sector workers and the taxpayer. Around a quarter of all public spending is spent on pay and we need to ensure that our public services remain affordable for the future.

It is also vital that our world-class public services continue modernising to meet rising demand for the incredible services they provide, which improve our lives and keep us safe.

[HCWS909]

Jordanian Armed Forces: Provision of Equipment

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I have today laid before the House a departmental minute describing the provision of equipment and infrastructure worth £13.3 million to the Jordanian armed forces over the period 2015-17 that was not previously notified to Parliament.

The provision of equipment was treated as a grant in kind. Following correspondence from the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee in 2016, Departments which previously treated these payments as gifts undertook to notify the House of Commons of any such grant in kind of a value exceeding £300,000 and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from making the grant until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

The granting of this equipment and infrastructure supported the Jordanian defence and borders programme and is fundamental to the aims of the UK Government's strategy for Jordan. Delivery of targeted areas of equipment and infrastructure support is an integral part of the approach in order to assist Jordan in developing the capability to protect its borders. In this case, the equipment and infrastructure provided ranged from armoured 4x4 vehicles, IT, personal equipment (including protective clothing) to administration, accommodation, training and logistics buildings.

The activity was in support of the National Security Council objectives and was funded through the conflict, security and stability fund administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence.

The Ministry of Defence has conducted a detailed examination of the errors made and has taken robust measures to ensure that an oversight such as this does not occur again.

[HCWS910]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Full-time Social Action Review

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): In March 2017, DCMS commissioned Steve Holliday to chair an

independent review of full-time social action. Steve Holliday and the panel worked with a wide range of stakeholders including young people to consider what the voluntary sector, industry and the Government can do to support full-time volunteering. In January 2018, they published their report. I am very grateful to Steve Holliday and the panel for their work.

Today I am pleased to announce the publication of the Government response to the full-time social action review. The full report and the Government response can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-full-time-social-action-review>.

[HCWS921]

EDUCATION

Schools

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): Today I am announcing details of school revenue funding for 2019-20, through three of the four blocks of the dedicated schools grant: the schools block, the high needs block, and the central school services block. Funding allocations for the early years block will be published later in the year, as usual.

School funding is at a record high, and schools have already benefited from the introduction of the national funding formula in April 2018. This is an historic reform, which means that, for the first time, resources are being distributed based on the individual needs and characteristics of every school in the country. The formula allocates every local authority more money for every pupil, in every school, in both 2018-19 and 2019-20, compared to their 2017-18 baselines.

The additional investment of £1.3 billion for schools and high needs across 2018-19 and 2019-20 announced last year, on top of the schools budget set at spending review 2015, means that per-pupil funding is being maintained in real terms between 2017-18 and 2019-20. In 2020 per-pupil funding will be more than 50% higher than it was in 2000, in real terms.

I can confirm that we will deliver our planned updates to the formula in 2019-20. This includes:

- increasing the minimum per-pupil funding level to £4,800 for secondary schools, and to £3,500 for primary schools;
- increasing the funding floor so that all schools will attract at least a 1% per pupil gain against their 2017-18 baselines;
- and enabling underfunded schools to gain a further 3% per pupil, on top of the 3% they gained in 2018-19—this means that next year, underfunded schools will be attracting up to 6% more, per pupil, compared to 2017-18.

I am also confirming some small, technical changes to the schools block formula, which are set out in the accompanying policy document. In particular, we have introduced a new approach for allocating funding to local authorities to support schools with significant in-year growth in pupil numbers. This means that local authorities will be funded according to actual levels of pupil number growth, rather than on the basis of historic spending.

In the high needs formula, the funding floor will also increase to 1% per head and the gains cap will allow increases of up to 6% per head compared to 2017-18, up from 3% in 2018-19. The accompanying policy document

sets out some further small changes to the way high needs funding is allocated, including changes to the arrangements for funding places at special free schools.

The primary and secondary units of funding for local authorities that we are publishing today will be used to set schools' final allocations on the basis of updated pupil numbers data in the autumn. As we did alongside the launch of the national funding formula last year, in the interests of transparency and to help authorities and schools plan ahead, we are also publishing the notional school-level allocations which have been used to calculate those units of funding. Details of these arrangements have been published on gov.uk.

We recognise that the introduction of the national funding formula has represented a significant change to the way schools are funded. To provide stability for authorities and schools through the transition, we have previously confirmed that in 2018-19 and 2019-20 each local authority will continue to set a local formula, in consultation with local schools. These local formulae determine individual schools' budgets in their areas.

We recognise that some areas use this local flexibility to tailor their local formula, for instance because of local changes in characteristics, rapid growth in pupil numbers or to invest more in pupils with additional needs. This year, however, we have seen considerable movement in local formulae towards the national funding formula: 73 local authorities have moved every one of their factor values in their local formulae closer to the national funding formula, with 41 already—in the formula's first year of introduction—mirroring it almost exactly, and 112 local authorities have brought in a minimum per-pupil funding factor, following its introduction in the national funding formula.

We are pleased to see this significant progress across the system in moving towards the national funding formula in its first year. In the light of this progress, and in order to continue to support a smooth transition, I am confirming that local authorities will continue to determine local formulae in 2020-21.

After too many years in which the funding system has placed our schools on an unfair playing field, this Government have finally made the historic move towards fair funding. Alongside the increased investment we are making in schools, this will underpin further improvements in standards and help create a world-class education system, and build a system that allows every child to achieve their potential, no matter their background.

Today the Secretary of State has also confirmed the 2018 teachers' pay award. To ensure that this is fully affordable to schools, we will be providing a teachers' pay grant of £187 million in 2018-19 and £321 million to all schools in England in 2019-20. This will cover, in full, the difference between this award and the cost of the 1% award that schools would have anticipated under the previous public sector pay cap. The grant will provide additional support to all maintained schools and academies, over and above the core funding that they receive through the national funding formula.

[HCWS911]

Teachers

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): We want to ensure that we can recruit and retain brilliant teachers. To ensure that teaching remains an

attractive and fulfilling profession, we are delivering a fully funded pay rise for classroom teachers and those in leadership positions.

The School Teachers Review Body (STRB) has recommended a 3.5% uplift to the minima and maxima of all pay ranges and allowances in the national pay framework for the pay award due to be implemented from September 2018. I have decided to accept in full the STRB's recommendation for a 3.5% uplift to the minima and maxima of the main pay range, building on last year's 2% uplift to the main pay range. This will both raise starting salaries significantly and increase the competitiveness of the early career pay framework. We are also announcing a substantial uplift to pay ranges for leaders and higher-paid teachers: the minima and maxima of the upper pay range will be uplifted by 2% and on the leadership pay range by 1.5%.

As a result, classroom teachers will see the biggest benefit with starting salaries increasing between £803 and £1,004, and those at the top of the main pay range will be eligible for increases between £1,184 and £1,366. Schools will continue to determine how their staff are paid and thanks to the flexible performance-based pay system we have introduced schools are still able to choose to give teachers or leaders a higher pay rise where this is appropriate to their particular local context and budget.

We will be supporting schools in England to implement the award with an investment of £508 million through a new teachers' pay grant of £187 million in 2018-19 and £321 million in 2019-20 from the existing Department for Education budget. This will cover, in full, the difference between this award and the cost of the 1% award that schools would have anticipated under the previous public sector pay cap. The grant will provide additional support to all maintained schools and academies, over and above the core funding that they receive through the national funding formula. We will publish further details on the distribution of this grant when the pay award is confirmed.

The Government are committed to world class public services and ensuring that public sector workers are fairly paid for the vitally important work that they do. It is thanks to our balanced approach to public finances—getting debt falling as a share of our economy, while investing in our vital services and keeping taxes low—that we are today able to announce this fair and deserved pay rise for teachers, their biggest increase since 2010-11.

We ended the 1% average pay policy in September 2017, because we recognised more flexibility is now required to deliver world-class public services including in return for improvements to public sector productivity.

We value the role of the independent pay review bodies and thank them for their work in considering pay awards. In reaching a final position for 2018-19 public sector pay awards, we have balanced a need to recognise the value and dedication of our hard-working public servants while ensuring that our public services remain affordable in the long term, to contribute to our objective of reducing public sector debt. We have also sought to ensure that pay awards are fair and consistent across public sector workforces, and reflect existing pay and benefit packages, in addition to recruitment and retention levels.

It is vital that we consider all pay awards in the light of wider pressures on public spending. Public sector pay needs to be fair both for public sector workers and

the taxpayer. Around a quarter of all public spending is spent on pay and we need to ensure that our public services remain affordable for the future.

It is also vital that our world-class public services continue modernising to meet rising demand for the incredible services they provide, which improve our lives and keep us safe.

I will deposit in the Libraries of both Houses a full list of the recommendations and my proposed approach for all pay and allowance ranges.

My officials will write to all of the statutory consultees of the STRB to invite them to contribute to a consultation on the Government's response to these recommendations and on a revised school teachers' pay and conditions document and pay order. The consultation will last for six weeks.

My detailed response contains further information on these matters.

[HCWS912]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Departmental Update

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I am responding on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the 46th report of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB). The report has been laid before Parliament today (Cm 9670) and a copy is available online. I am grateful to the chair and members of the DDRB for their report.

I am today announcing pay rises for doctors and dentists working across the NHS.

This is a pay rise that recognises the value and dedication of hard-working doctors and dentists, targeting pay as recommended by the DDRB, and taking into account affordability and the prioritising of patient care.

Supporting the NHS workforce to deliver excellent care is a top priority. Following this one-year pay rise, we want to open up a wider conversation on pay and improvements. This is the start of a process whereby we will seek to agree multi-year deals in return for contract reforms for consultant and GPs. We want to make the NHS the best employer in the world.

In June this year nurses were awarded a multi-year award as part of a pay and contract reform deal and it is only right that pay rises are targeted at the lowest paid workers.

Including the announcement of today's pay award, from October 2018 a consultant who started in 2013 will have seen a 16.5% increase in their basic pay, rising to a salary of £87,665 from £75,249. Today's pay award is worth:

- Between £1,150 and £1,550 for consultants
- Between £1,140 and £2,120 for specialty doctors
- Between £1,600 and £2,630 for associate specialists
- Between £532 and £924 for junior doctors
- Around £1,052 for a salaried GP with a median taxable income of £52,600.

GPs face a significant challenge in numbers and we need to recruit large numbers over a short period, meaning any pay rise needs to be balanced against our

aim for a growing number of practitioners. The 2018-19 pay award is worth £2,000 per year to a GP contractor with a median taxable income of £100,000.

The Government's response to the DDRB's recommendations takes account of:

Affordability in 2018-19 in the context of a spending review that budgeted for 1% average basic pay awards

The importance of prioritising patient care, and the long-term funding settlement which increases NHS funding by an average 3.4% per year from 2019-20, and which will see the NHS receive £20.5 billion a year in real terms by 2023

The three-year contract reform agreement on the Agenda for Change pay contract for 1 million non-medical staff, which delivered significant reforms as part of 3% pay investment per year, including progression pay reforms that end automatic annual increments; and

the case for contract reform for some of the DDRB's remit groups, in particular for consultants and GPs.

The Government's response is as follows:

Consultants

I am committing to negotiations on a multi-year agreement incorporating contract reform for consultants to begin from 2019-20.

From 1 October 2018:

A 1.5% increase to basic pay

The value of both national and local clinical excellence awards (CEAs) to be frozen

0.5% of pay bill to be targeted on the new system of performance pay to increase the amount available for performance pay awards from 2019-20. Employers will be able to choose to use the 0.25% of funding available in 2018-19 as transitional funding to manage the costs of running the required CEA round this year or to invest it additionally should they choose to do so.

Doctors and dentists in training

As agreed in the May 2016 ACAS agreement, we will discuss changes to the pay structure as part of the 2018 review of the contract, re-investing any existing funding freed up as transition costs reduce.

From 1 October 2018:

A 2% increase in basic pay and the value of the flexible pay premia

Introduction of a flexible pay premium for doctors on training programmes in histopathology of the same value as that currently provided for doctors on training programmes in emergency medicine and psychiatry.

Specialty doctors (new grade 2008) and associate specialists (closed grade)

I take note of the DDRB comments about the particular issues of morale in relation to this group that led to its pay recommendation and its observation on the need for a review of the salary structure for these grades as part of a wider review of their role, their career structure and the developmental support available to them. It is intended that this will follow the agreement of reformed arrangements for consultants.

From 1 October 2018:

Increase basic pay by 3%

General dental practitioners

From 1 April 2018 (backdated):

Increase expenses by 3%

From 1 October 2018:

Increase dental income and staff costs by 2%

General medical practitioners

I intend to ask NHS England to take a multi-year approach to the GP contract negotiations with investment in primary care linked to improvements in primary care services.

From 1 April 2018 (backdated):

Add a further 1% to the value of the GP remuneration and practice staff expenses through the GP contract, supplementing the 1% already paid from April 2018 and making a 2% uplift in all. This will enable practices to increase the pay of practice staff.

From 1 October 2018:

The recommended minimum and maximum pay scales for salaried GPs will be uplifted by 2%

The GP trainer grant and GP appraiser fees will be increased by 3% and we will apply the same approach to clinical educators' pay; GP and dental educators.

From 1 April 2019:

The potential for up to an additional 1%, on top of the 2% already paid to be added to the baseline, to be paid from 2019-20 conditional on contract reform, through a multi-year agreement from 2019-20. This would be in addition to the funding envelope for the contract negotiation for 2019-20 onwards. This would be reflected in respect of GP remuneration, practice staff expenses and the recommended minimum and maximum pay scales for salaried GPs.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-07-24/HCWS917/>

[HCWS917]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Update

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): The Government have carefully considered the Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) recommendations for police pay 2018-19. These recommendations are not being accepted in full.

The Government are announcing today that the 2018-19 pay award for the police will award police officers an increase of 2% consolidated from 1 September 2018. This also includes the recommended 2% increase in London weighting and 2% increase in dog handlers' allowance.

Officers who have not reached the top of their pay band will also receive incremental progression pay worth at least 2%, depending on satisfactory performance.

The PRRB issued early recommendations on police apprentice pay ahead of its main report. The Government are accepting PRRB recommendations on this issue, in that forces should appoint apprentice constables on a starting salary of between £18,000 and pay point 1, with understandings that:

individual forces are able to choose to use a starting salary between £18,000 and pay point 1;

the pay expectations of apprentices will not be undermined by later changes to the arrangements; and

the NPCC will develop further proposals for apprentice pay and career progression beyond the first year.

The Government are committed to world-class public services and ensuring that public sector workers are fairly paid for the vitally important work that they do. It is thanks to our balanced approach to public finances—getting debt falling as a share of our economy, while

investing in our vital services and keeping taxes low. We ended the 1% average pay policy in September 2017, because we recognised more flexibility is now required to deliver world-class public services, including in return for improvements to public sector productivity.

We value the role of the independent pay review bodies and thank them for their work in considering pay awards. In reaching a final position for 2018-19 public sector pay awards, we have balanced a need to recognise the value and dedication of our hard-working public servants while ensuring that our public services remain affordable in the long term, to contribute to our objective of reducing public sector debt. We have also sought to ensure that pay awards are fair and consistent across public sector workforces, and reflect existing pay and benefit packages, in addition to recruitment and retention levels.

It is vital that we consider all pay awards in the light of wider pressures on public spending. Public sector pay needs to be fair both for public sector workers and the taxpayer. Around a quarter of all public spending is spent on pay and we need to ensure that our public services remain affordable for the future.

It is also vital that our world-class public services continue modernising to meet rising demand for the incredible services they provide, which improve our lives and keep us safe.

The Police Remuneration Review Body report has been laid before Parliament and copies are available in the Vote Office and on gov.uk.

[HCWS914]

Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

The Minister for Security and Economic Crime (Mr Ben Wallace): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying before Parliament the 2016-17 annual report of the appointed person under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. The appointed person is an independent person who scrutinises the use of the search and seizure powers that support the measures in the Act to seize and forfeit cash used for criminal purposes and to seize and sell property in settlement of confiscation orders.

The report gives the appointed person's opinion as to the circumstances and manner in which the search and seizure powers conferred by the Act are being exercised. I am pleased that the appointed person, Mr Douglas Bain, has expressed satisfaction with the operation of the powers and has found that there is nothing to suggest that the procedures are not being followed in accordance with the Act. Mr Bain has made two recommendations this year. The Government will give due consideration to Mr Bain's recommendations.

From 1 April 2016 to the end of March 2017, over £134 million in cash was seized by law enforcement agencies in England and Wales under powers in the Act. The seizures are subject to further investigation, and the cash is subject to further judicially approved detention, before forfeiture in the magistrates court. These powers are a valuable tool in the fight against crime and the report shows that the way they are used has been, and will continue to be, monitored closely.

Copies of the report will be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS919]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Fixing our broken housing market is one of the Government's top domestic priorities. The number of new homes built increased to 217,350—a 15% increase on the previous year—but we know there is much more to do. As one step towards this the Government are publishing today the new national planning policy framework, the Government response to the draft revised national planning policy framework and associated supplementary material. Consultation on the draft framework ran from 5 March to 10 May and the Government are grateful to all who responded—and in the light of comments received the Government have made important changes to this framework.

The new framework is fundamental to strengthening communities and to delivering the homes communities need. It sets out a comprehensive approach to ensuring the right homes are built in the right places and of the right quality, at the same time as protecting our precious natural environment.

Critically, progress must not be at the expense of quality or design. Houses must be right for communities. So the planning reforms in the new framework should result in homes that are locally led, well designed, and of a consistent and high-quality standard. Visual tools and design guides and codes promoted by the new framework will help create distinctive places. The framework makes clear that developments should be visually attractive and add to the overall quality of the area. To reinforce the message on design, it also states that planning permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area.

Equally, building more homes should not be at the expense of the natural environment—there is a balance to be struck between enabling development while also protecting the natural environment. Therefore the new framework also increases protections to ensure we leave our environment in a better condition than we inherited it. Specifically, it increases protection for irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland, and ancient and veteran trees so that any development that impacts these habitats would have to be “wholly exceptional”. It also gives greater clarity to the strong protections for the green belt. It makes clear areas should examine fully all other reasonable options before green belt boundaries can be changed. It also makes clear that authorities should plan for improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining green belt land. The framework goes further to clarify the importance of local wildlife sites in plan making and enhancing the existing environment.

The framework also provides local areas with more flexibility to make the most effective use of the land they have. This includes providing communities with a clear understanding of their local housing need through a new standard methodology. It supports first-time buyers and people in the private rented sector by introducing

a new exception site policy and provides greater certainty for local authorities in the decision making and planning appeals processes. It introduces new protections for churches, community pubs and music venues that play such a vital role in communities and can support the local economy. And to ensure communities get the homes they have been promised, the framework provides greater clarity on the contributions that developers are expected to make, because they have a key role in delivery. A new housing delivery test will also measure delivery of homes, with consequences for under-delivery.

These are just some of the 85 reforms from the housing White Paper and the Budget, implemented in the new national planning policy framework. Together with other reforms and support the Government now look to developers, working with local planning authorities, communities and their representatives, and central Government, to meet the challenges of fixing our broken housing market.

[HCWS925]

Local Government Finance

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Today, my Department has published the “2019-20 Local Government Finance Settlement: technical consultation” as well as an “Invitation to Local Authorities in England to pilot 75% Business Rates Retention in 2019-20”.

The technical consultation reiterates this Government’s intention for the 2019-20 settlement to confirm the final year of the 2016-17 multi-year settlement accepted by 97% of authorities, and to implement council tax referendum principles as announced at the final 2018-19 settlement last year.

Looking to the longer term, the 2019 spending review will confirm funding from 2020-21. The Government are working towards significant reform in the local government finance system in 2020-21, including an updated, more robust and transparent distribution methodology to set baseline funding levels, and resetting business rates baselines.

This Government are committed to rewarding councils for supporting local firms and local jobs. The business rate retention system ensures that local authorities directly benefit from the proceeds of economic growth—with more funding to support local frontline services. All councils, including those which are currently less prosperous, have the opportunity to gain from this system.

The current 50% business rates retention scheme and piloting programme is yielding strong results. Local authorities estimate that in 2018-19 they will keep around £2.4 billion in business rates growth. Our continued reforms to this system will continue to give local authorities even greater control of their finances, but, to ensure a successful implementation, this Government are committed to testing aspects of the proposed new system.

This 2019-20 prospectus invites all local authorities (except for those with ongoing pilots in devolution deal areas and London) to apply to pilot 75% business rates retention in 2019-20.

From 2020-21 we are aiming to roll in additional grants, with a target of reaching 75% retention based on the current 2019-20 values of these grants. These

pilots will help us test the retention system at this level. Given the limited time before 2020-21, when we aim to roll out increased business rates retention to all local authorities, there are fewer issues we can usefully test in pilots. It is therefore likely that this pilot programme will be smaller than in 2018-19.

Separately, the Government can confirm that local authorities in areas with a previously agreed devolution deal will continue to pilot 100% business rates retention in 2019-20. Separate conversations will happen with London authorities to decide arrangements following their 100% pilot this year.

Finally, I have noted the strength of feeling in local government around the issue of ‘negative reserve support grant’ and this technical consultation sets out the Government’s preferred approach to resolving the issue in 2019-20.

This preferred approach recognises the commitment made by the Government during the implementation of the business rate retention scheme in 2013-14, that tariff and top-ups would be fixed until the system was reset.

This commitment was made so that local authorities would benefit directly from supporting local business growth and the Government’s preferred approach does not reverse this commitment. In practice this will mean that the Government meet the cost of negative reserve support grant through forgone business rates.

I am placing a copy of the “2019-20 Local Government Finance Settlement: technical consultation” and the “Invitation to Local Authorities in England to pilot 75% Business Rates Retention in 2019-20” in the House Library.

[HCWS928]

Local Growth

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Today the Government are announcing a package of reforms to help all places throughout the UK to prepare for the opportunities leaving the European Union will bring. The Business Secretary and I are publishing a policy paper on strengthened local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). This publication sets out how we will work with LEPs on their role and responsibilities, leadership and organisational capacity, accountability and performance. A copy of the local enterprise partnership policy paper can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strengthened-local-enterprise-partnerships>

We have also confirmed that Government will be working with all mayoral combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships to develop local industrial strategies. We will take a phased approach, and the next wave of places we will work closely with are the North East, Tees Valley, West of England, Leicester and Leicestershire, Cheshire and Warrington and Heart of the South West. Government will aim to agree local industrial strategies across England by early 2020. We will be publishing a further statement on local industrial strategies to guide locally-led work. This will be published over the summer. We will also discuss with devolved administrations and other stakeholders how local industrial strategies could work in the devolved Administrations.

Alongside these announcements, I can today set out our progress on designing the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). Our manifesto committed to establishing a UK shared prosperity fund to reduce inequalities between communities across our four nations, once we have left the European Union and EU structural funds. This progress statement provides an update on our proposals to develop a UK shared prosperity fund:

The objective of the UKSPF. The UKSPF will tackle inequalities between communities by raising productivity, especially in those parts of our country whose economies are furthest behind. The UKSPF will achieve this objective by strengthening the foundations of productivity as set out in our modern industrial strategy to support people to benefit from economic prosperity.

A simplified, integrated fund. EU structural funds have been difficult to access, and EU regulations have stopped places co-ordinating investments across the foundations of productivity. Simplified administration for the fund will ensure that investments are targeted effectively to align with the challenges faced by places across the country and supported by strong evidence about what works at the local level.

UKSPF in the devolved nations. The UKSPF will operate across the UK. The Government will of course respect the devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and will engage the devolved administrations to ensure the fund works for places across the UK.

A national framework in England that works for local priorities. Local areas in England are being asked to prepare local industrial strategies to prioritise long-term opportunities and challenges to increasing local productivity. This prioritisation will help local areas decide on their approach to maximising the long-term impact of the UKSPF once details of its operation and priorities are announced following the spending review.

Consulting the public. We intend to consult on the UKSPF this year, as we committed to do in our industrial strategy.

Furthermore, in 2016 the Government guaranteed funding for UK organisations in receipt of EU funds where projects are agreed before the day the UK leaves the EU. The Government have today announced an extension to this guarantee, which will underwrite the UK's allocation for structural and investment fund projects under this EU budget period to 2020 in the event of no deal. This ensures that UK organisations, such as charities, businesses and universities, will continue to receive funding over a project's lifetime if they successfully bid into EU-funded programmes before December 2020.

[HCWS927]

JUSTICE

HM Courts & Tribunals Service

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): I am today announcing the outcome of five separate consultations published on 18 January 2018 relating to the future of eight courts within HM courts and tribunals estate [HCWS412].

More than 700 responses to these consultations were received and each was considered carefully against the overarching principles governing estates reform as set out in the 2015 consultation document, "Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal estate in England and Wales". These principles are arranged in three themes: ensuring access to justice; delivering value for money; and enabling efficiency in the longer term.

As a result, I have decided that the following courts should close:

- Banbury magistrates and county court and Maidenhead magistrates court
- Chorley magistrates court and Fleetwood magistrates court
- Northallerton magistrates court, and
- Wandsworth county court, and Blackfriars Crown court.

I have concluded that the proposal to close Cambridge magistrates court should be withdrawn. This proposal received the largest number of responses to the consultation and the decision to consult was a finely balanced one, not least because this is a court in a strategic centre serving a large surrounding area. There is excess court capacity in the area but, following new information regarding the likely proceeds of disposal and consideration of the cost of re-provision, I have concluded the value-for-money case for closure has not been made. HMCTS will continue to explore further ways to manage under-utilisation of existing buildings in the region and across the country as part of its wider estates strategy.

In January, we also published for consultation "Fit for the future: transforming the Court and Tribunal Estate", setting out our proposed approach to the future management of the HMCTS estate in the context of the wider modernisation programme. We have received many detailed responses to these proposals and these are still under consideration.

A response to this consultation will be published in due course. But, given the local interest in the eight courts and the need for certainty for those who use them, I felt it would not be right to delay our response to these proposals until we were ready to respond to the strategy consultation.

All savings and money raised through disposals as a result of these closures will be invested to support the HMCTS reform programme backed by both the Government and the senior judiciary. This programme will help to provide a more accessible and efficient justice for all those who use it.

[HCWS920]

Departmental Update

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): I am today announcing pay rises for prison officers. The Prison Service Pay Review Body has made its recommendation for the 2018-19 pay award and we are accepting the spirit of its recommendation.

Today's pay award is worth 2.75% for all prison officers, of which 2% is consolidated and 0.75% non-consolidated. Some staff on modernised fair and sustainable contracts will also receive performance-related progression pay. The pay award is worth on average £1,220 for staff on fair and sustainable contracts.

The Government are committed to world-class public services and ensuring that public sector workers are fairly paid for the vitally important work that they do. It is thanks to our balanced approach to public finances—getting debt falling as a share of our economy, while investing in our vital services and keeping taxes low—that we are today able to announce a fair and deserved pay rise for prison officers.

We ended the 1% average pay policy in September 2017, because we recognised more flexibility is now required to deliver world-class public services, including in return for improvements to public sector productivity.

We value the role of the independent pay review bodies and thank them for their work in considering pay awards. In reaching a final position for 2018-19 public sector pay awards, we have balanced a need to recognise the value and dedication of our hard-working public servants while ensuring that our public services remain affordable in the long term, to contribute to our objective of reducing public sector debt. We have also sought to ensure that pay awards are fair and consistent across public sector workforces, and reflect existing pay and benefit packages, in addition to recruitment and retention levels.

It is vital that we consider all pay awards in the light of wider pressures on public spending. Public sector pay needs to be fair both for public sector workers and the taxpayer. Around a quarter of all public spending is spent on pay and we need to ensure that our public services remain affordable for the future.

It is also vital that our world-class public services continue modernising to meet rising demand for the incredible services they provide, which improve our lives and keep us safe.

The report has been laid before Parliament today. I am grateful to the chair and members of the PRB for their report.

[HCWS915]

PRIME MINISTER

Machinery of Government

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am making this statement to bring to the attention of the House a machinery of government change.

It is essential that in navigating the UK's exit from the European Union, the Government are organised in the most effective way. To that end I am making some changes to the division of functions between the Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU) and the Cabinet Office.

DExEU will continue to lead on all of the Government's preparations for Brexit: domestic preparations in both a deal and a no deal scenario, all of the necessary legislation, and preparations for the negotiations to implement the detail of the future framework. To support this, DExEU will recruit some new staff, and a number of Cabinet Office officials co-ordinating work on preparedness will move to DExEU while maintaining close ties with both Departments.

I will lead the negotiations with the European Union, with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union deputising on my behalf. Both of us will be supported by the Cabinet Office Europe Unit and with this in mind the Europe Unit will have overall responsibility for the preparation and conduct of the negotiations, drawing upon support from DExEU and other Departments as required. A number of staff will transfer from DExEU to the Cabinet Office to deliver that.

There will be no net reduction in staff numbers at DExEU given the recruitment exercise described above.

[HCWS924]

TRANSPORT

Crossrail

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): It has been another productive year for the Crossrail project with a number of key milestones achieved and progress made across all areas. The programme is now 93% complete and is entering the critical testing and commissioning stage.

In May as part of the second stage of the Crossrail opening strategy, TfL Rail took over operation of the former Heathrow Connect service to Heathrow airport as well as some local services between Paddington and Hayes & Harlington. This builds on the introduction of new Class 345 trains on the Liverpool Street to Shenfield route in June 2017. Fifteen of the new trains are now in regular service.

All core track work was completed last summer, which enabled the first Elizabeth line train to make its maiden voyage through the central tunnels in February this year. The new Abbey Wood station opened to existing rail passengers, and the construction and fit-out of the other new Elizabeth line stations continues to progress with the installation of lifts and escalators and completion of architectural finishes. The Department for Transport and Transport for London (TfL)—the joint sponsors of the project—continue to work with Crossrail Ltd to ensure operational readiness in advance of the opening of the Elizabeth Line.

As reported in the update to Parliament last year, cost pressures have increased across the project. Both the Department and TfL remain committed to the successful delivery of this project and have agreed an overall funding envelope for delivery of the project of £15.4 billion. This will enable the completion of the project at a cost lower than planned under the last Labour Government. The anticipated cost of the project was previously estimated at £15.9 billion in 2007 and increased to £17.8 billion in 2009, before the coalition Government took steps to bring down the costs following the June 2010 comprehensive spending review.

The additional funding is being provided to both Crossrail Ltd and Network Rail.

Some £300 million is being made available to Crossrail Ltd, with the Department for Transport and TfL contributing £150 million each.

Around £290 million is being provided for completion of the programme of works on the national rail network, and is being funded by the Department for Transport and Network Rail.

It remains the case that over 60% of the project's funding has been provided by Londoners and London businesses.

Further details on Crossrail Ltd's funding and finances in the period to 29 May 2018 are set out in the table below.

This year, the Crossrail project's health and safety indicators have remained industry leading, with a strong performance demonstrated throughout the year with all the key indicators exceeding the corporate objectives for the year 2017-18.

Network Rail have also delivered a significant programme of Crossrail related surface works, successfully connecting the existing rail network with the Elizabeth line tunnels at Pudding Mill Lane, Plumstead and Westbourne Park. They have also completed the largest and most complex signalling upgrade ever undertaken by Network Rail on the approach into Paddington on one of the busiest stretches of railway in the country.

There have been planned changes in the leadership and governance of the project as we approach the final stages of delivery. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew Wolstenholme for his work in progressing the programme and acting as a champion for Crossrail during his time as chief executive. He has been succeeded by Simon Wright as chief executive and programme director. Crossrail Ltd's board has been restructured to keep the management of the programme efficient and cost effective while maintaining the people and structure necessary to deliver the railway through to full opening. As part of this, both the Department and TfL have appointed new non-executive directors to the Crossrail board to provide increased scrutiny and assist in the transition of the project as it enters its final stages.

As with all projects of this nature, there have been a number of engineering and technical challenges that have already been surmounted in order to build the first new railway for a generation, and there will continue to be challenges right up until the final completion of the project.

The new railway will transform travel in, to, and across London, with the positive economic benefits being felt across the country. Its legacy will continue to support many thousands of jobs, over 1,000 apprenticeships and a supply chain that is spread across the length and breadth of the UK.

During the passage of the Crossrail Bill through Parliament, a commitment was given that an annual statement would be published until the completion of the construction of Crossrail, setting out information about the project's funding and finances.

The relevant information is as follows:

Total funding amounts provided to Crossrail Limited by the Department for Transport and TfL in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2018).	£11,713,723,131
Expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Ltd in relation to the construction of Crossrail in the period (30 May 2017 to 29 May 2018) (excluding recoverable VAT on Land and Property purchases).	£1,619,238,000
Total expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Ltd in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2018) (excluding recoverable VAT on Land and Property purchases).	£12,506,215,837
The amounts realised by the disposal of any land or property for the purposes of the construction of Crossrail by the Secretary of State, TfL or Crossrail Ltd in the period covered by the statement.	£18,462,238

The numbers above are drawn from Crossrail Ltd's books of account and have been prepared on a consistent basis with the update provided last year. The figure for expenditure incurred includes moneys already paid out in relevant period, including committed land and property expenditure where this has not yet been paid. It does not include future expenditure on construction contracts that have been awarded.

[HCWS918]

Petitions

Tuesday 24 July 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of Erewash constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by *Maggie Throup.*]

[P002226]

The petition of residents of Stoke North,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc. . .]

[P002227]

The petition of South Derbyshire constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement

the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by *Mrs Heather Wheeler.*]

[P002229]

The petition of residents of Chippenham constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by *Michelle Donelan.*]

[P002255]

The petition of residents of Great Yarmouth constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by *Peter Aldous.*]

[P002257]

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Wera Hobhouse.]

[P002258]

The petition of residents of North West Durham constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc. . /

[P002259]

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of Bristol South,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc. . /

[P002261]

Zero emissions target

The petition of residents of Macclesfield,

Declares that the United Kingdom should maintain its lead in investment and job creation in clean industries, cut waste, improving air quality, and inspiring the next generation of engineers and scientists; further that the United Kingdom should work to restore natural habitats; and finally that Her Majesty’s Government should take steps to mitigate the impact of climate change in the developing world, where more extreme weather is already having an impact.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Prime Minister to give priority to set a UK net zero emissions target, enshrined in law, ahead of the year 2050.

And the petitioners remain, etc. . /

[P002260]

OBSERVATIONS

EDUCATION

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of South West Surrey,

Declares that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidelines and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Official Report, 26 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 3P.]

[P002163]

Petitions in the same terms were presented by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) [P002164]; the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) [P002165]; the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) [P002166]; the right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) [P002168]; the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith)

[P002169]; the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) [P002170]; the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) [P002171]; the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) [P002172]; the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) [P002174]; the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) [P002175]; the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) [P002176]; the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) [P002177]; residents of North Somerset constituency [P002178]; the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) [P002179]; the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) [P002180]; the hon. Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) [P002181]; the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) [P002182]; the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk) [P002183]; the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) [P002185]; the hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan) [P002186]; the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) [P002189]; the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) [P002190]; the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) [P002191]; the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) [P002192]; the hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) [P002193]; the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) [P002195]; the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) [P002196]; residents of Wolverhampton South East constituency [P002197]; the right hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett) [P002198]; the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) [P002199]; the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) [P002200]; the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) [P002201]; the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) [P002202]; the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) [P002203]; the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton) [P002204]; the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) [P002205]; the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) [P002206]; the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) [P002207]; the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) [P002208]; the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) [P002209]; the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) [P002210]; the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) [P002213]; residents of Havant constituency [P002214]; the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) [P002215]; the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) [P002222]; the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) [P002224]; the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) [P002233]; the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) [P002220]; the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) [P002234]; the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) [P002237]; the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) [P002225]; residents of Charnwood [P002243]; the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) [P002245]; the residents of South West Norfolk [P002246]; the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) [P002244]; residents of Morecambe and Lunesdale [P002247]; residents of the United Kingdom [P002254]; the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) [P002232]; residents of Meon Valley constituency [P002239]; the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill)

[P002241]; the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) [P002228]; the residents of North West Durham constituency [P002259]; the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) [P002258]; the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) [P002226]; residents of Stoke North [P002227]; the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson) [P002253]; the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) [P002255]; the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) [P002257]; and the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler) [P002229].

Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):

The consultation “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” closed on 2 July 2018. The relevant documents can be found at:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-a/>.

As well as the call for evidence, the consultation includes draft versions of two guidance documents on the current arrangements for home education. These are intended to replace the Department for Education’s current non-statutory guidance for local authorities, which is to be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>.

The Department discussed home education with stakeholders in the normal course of business up to the launch of the consultation on 10 April.

All responses to the consultation will be considered before publishing the finalised guidance documents. At no point has the Department stated an intention to publish them as final versions without revision in the light of responses received to the consultation.

Representations on whether the contents of the two draft guidance documents breach Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to private and family life) or the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (as embodied into UK law in the Data Protection Act 2018), will be taken into account as we consider responses to the consultation.

The documents in their draft form contain no reference to remedies for behaviour by local authorities. This is because no special provision for this is necessary in respect of home education. The Education Act 1996 already contains general provisions for this purpose relating to local authorities. However, the Department will consider whether the finalised versions of the guidance documents should contain specific information on this.

This Department does not recognise the suggestion that consultation has been flawed or inadequate. Several thousand responses, the majority of which have come from home educating families, have been received, as well as a substantial petition, and there has been considerable opportunity for detailed comment and input from such families. Following the consultation and consideration of the responses, the two guidance documents will be published in the autumn of 2018 in their revised and finalised form. In addition, a formal Government response document analysing responses to the call for evidence, and setting out next steps, will also be published in the autumn of 2018.

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 24 July 2018

DEFENCE

Defence Industry and Shipbuilding

The following is an extract from the Opposition day debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding on 11 July 2018.

Mr Ellwood: Returning to ships and the role of the maritime sector, we should remind ourselves of the significant changes to the Royal Navy fleet. We have two incredible aircraft carriers coming into service, a new generation of Dreadnought-class submarines, the Type 45 destroyers—the most advanced in the world—and the new Type 26 global combat ships. We also have the Type 31e frigates—e for export—which have deliberately been designed with a modular concept. Depending on the export need, which could be interdiction, surface support or humanitarian purposes, its parts can be interchanged simply to adapt to the local requirement. This is an exciting time, and all the ships will be built in the United Kingdom.

[Official Report, 11 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 1042.]

Letter of correction from Tobias Ellwood:

An error has been identified in my response to the debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding.

The correct response should have been:

Mr Ellwood: Returning to ships and the role of the maritime sector, we should remind ourselves of the significant changes to the Royal Navy fleet. We have two incredible aircraft carriers coming into service, a new generation of Dreadnought-class submarines, the Type 45 destroyers—the most advanced in the world—and the new Type 26 global combat ships. We also have the Type 31e frigates—e for export—which have deliberately been designed with a modular concept. Depending on the export need, which could be interdiction, surface support or humanitarian purposes, its parts can be interchanged simply to adapt to the local requirement. This is an exciting time, and all the **UK** ships will be built in the United Kingdom.

The following is an extract from the Opposition day debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding on 11 July 2018.

Mr Ellwood: Our new shipbuilding strategy sets out exactly how we can achieve such a marine sector. We will continue to build Royal Navy **ships** only in the UK while encouraging international collaboration in harnessing open competition for other naval ships. Our new framework will ensure that the impact of UK prosperity will be considered as part of our procurement decisions.

[Official Report, 11 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 1044.]

Letter of correction from Tobias Ellwood:

An error has been identified in my response to the debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding.

The correct response should have been:

Mr Ellwood: Our new shipbuilding strategy sets out exactly how we can achieve such a marine sector. We will continue to build Royal Navy **warships** only in the UK while encouraging international collaboration in harnessing open competition for other naval ships. Our new framework will ensure that the impact of UK prosperity will be considered as part of our procurement decisions.

The following is an extract from the Opposition day debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding on 11 July 2018.

Mr Ellwood: Thirdly, we want to focus on building exports, where there is an opportunity, as the Type 31 will be the first **frigate for export since the 1970s**. We know that more sales can cut costs in procurement over time and give us the potential to buy even more cutting-edge ships.

[Official Report, 11 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 1045.]

Letter of correction from Tobias Ellwood:

An error has been identified in my response to the debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding.

The correct response should have been:

Mr Ellwood: Thirdly, we want to focus on building exports, where there is an opportunity, as the Type 31 will be the first **frigate built with exports in mind**. We know that more sales can cut costs in procurement over time and give us the potential to buy even more cutting-edge ships.

The following is an extract from the Opposition day debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding on 11 July 2018.

Sir Roger Gale: I may have misunderstood the Minister, and I know it is not the custom to ask a question to which one does not know the answer, but I think he said that Royal Naval ships were confined to aircraft carriers, frigates and destroyers. Would that not also apply to any replacement amphibious craft that we might need?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—that would be considered royal naval class, so not manned by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

It is important that, as we move forward, we look closely at value for taxpayers' money.

[Official Report, 11 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 1045-46.]

Letter of correction from Tobias Ellwood:

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) during the debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding.

The correct response should have been:

Mr Ellwood: That would be considered royal naval class, so not manned by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

It is important that, as we move forward, we look closely at value for taxpayers' money.

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Tuesday 31 July 2018**

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