

**Tuesday
9 October 2018**

**Volume 647
No. 185**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 9 October 2018

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

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

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE—The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION—The Rt Hon. Dominic Raab, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE—The Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson, MP
LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE—The Rt Hon. David Gauke, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION—The Rt Hon. Damian Hinds, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS—The Rt Hon. Esther McVey, MP
LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Penny Mordaunt, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Wright, QC, MP
MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO—The Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Rt Hon. Claire Perry, MP (Minister for Energy and Clean Growth)
Sam Gyimah, MP (Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Kelly Tolhurst, MP
Richard Harrington, MP
The Rt Hon. Lord Henley

Cabinet Office—

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE—The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—

Oliver Dowden, MP
Chloe Smith, MP

Defence—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Earl Howe §
The Rt Hon. Mark Lancaster, MP (Minister for the Armed Forces)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Tobias Ellwood, MP
Stuart Andrew, MP

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Wright, QC, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Margot James, MP (Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Lord Ashton of Hyde
Michael Ellis, MP
Tracey Crouch, MP

Education—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Damian Hinds, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Nick Gibb, MP (Minister for School Standards)
The Rt Hon. Anne Milton, MP (Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills)
Sam Gyimah, MP (Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Lord Agnew of Oulton
Nadhim Zahawi, MP

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—George Eustice, MP (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Thérèse Coffey, MP
Lord Gardiner of Kimble
David Rutley, MP §

Exiting the European Union —

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Dominic Raab, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Lord Callanan

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Robin Walker, MP
Chris Heaton-Harris, MP
Suella Braverman, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Sir Alan Duncan, MP (Minister for Europe and the Americas)
The Rt Hon. Alistair Burt, MP (Minister for the Middle East) §
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister for the Commonwealth and the UN)
The Rt Hon. Mark Field, MP (Minister for Asia and the Pacific)
Harriett Baldwin, MP (Minister for Africa) §

Health and Social Care—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Stephen Barclay, MP (Minister for Health)
Caroline Dinenage, MP (Minister for Care)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Jackie Doyle-Price, MP
Steve Brine, MP
Lord O'Shaughnessy

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Caroline Nokes, MP (Minister for Immigration)
The Rt Hon. Ben Wallace, MP (Minister for Security and Economic Crime)
The Rt Hon. Nick Hurd, MP (Minister for Policing and the Fire Service)
Baroness Williams of Trafford (Minister for Countering Extremism and Minister for Equalities) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Victoria Atkins, MP §**Housing, Communities and Local Government—**

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Kit Malthouse, MP (Minister for Housing)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Jake Berry, MP
Heather Wheeler, MP
Rishi Sunak, MP
Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §
Nigel Adams, MP §

International Development—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Penny Mordaunt, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Alistair Burt, MP §
Harriett Baldwin, MP §
The Rt Hon. Lord Bates

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Victoria Atkins, MP §
Baroness Williams of Trafford §

International Trade—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

George Hollingbery, MP (Minister for Trade Policy)

Baroness Fairhead (Minister for Trade and Export Promotion)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Graham Stuart, MP

Justice—

LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Gauke, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Rory Stewart, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Lucy Frazer, QC, MP

Edward Argar, MP

ADVOCATE GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. Lord Keen of Elie, QC

Law Officers—

ATTORNEY GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Geoffrey Cox, QC, MP

SOLICITOR GENERAL—Robert Buckland, QC, MP

ADVOCATE GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. Lord Keen of Elie, QC

Leader of the House of Commons—

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL—The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom, MP

Northern Ireland Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Shailesh Vara, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Lord Duncan of Springbank §

Scotland Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Lord Duncan of Springbank §

Transport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP

MINISTER OF STATE AND MINISTER FOR LONDON—Jo Johnson, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Jesse Norman, MP

Baroness Sugg, CBE §

Nusrat Ghani, MP §

Treasury—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP

CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

FINANCIAL SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Mel Stride, MP

EXCHEQUER SECRETARY—Robert Jenrick, MP

ECONOMIC SECRETARY—John Glen, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Julian Smith, MP

LORDS COMMISSIONERS—

Mike Freer, MP

Paul Maynard, MP

Craig Whittaker, MP

Rebecca Harris, MP

David Rutley, MP §

Nigel Adams, MP §

ASSISTANT WHIPS—

Nusrat Ghani, MP §

Iain Stewart, MP

Jo Churchill, MP

Amanda Milling, MP

Michelle Donelan, MP

Jeremy Quin, MP

Wendy Morton, MP

Mims Davies, MP §

UK Export Finance—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP
 MINISTER FOR TRADE AND EXPORT PROMOTION—Baroness Fairhead

Wales Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §

Mims Davies, MP §

Work and Pensions

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Esther McVey, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Alok Sharma, MP (Minister for Employment)

Sarah Newton, MP (Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Guy Opperman, MP

Baroness Buscombe

Justin Tomlinson, MP

Office of the Leader of the House of Lords

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND LORD PRIVY SEAL—The Rt Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Earl Howe §

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt Hon. Earl Peel GCVO, DL

LORD STEWARD—The Earl of Dalhousie

MASTER OF THE HORSE—Lord Vestey KCVO

TREASURER—Christopher Pincher, MP

COMPTROLLER—Mark Spencer, MP

VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Andrew Stephenson, MP

CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt Hon. Lord Taylor of Holbeach CBE

CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD—Earl of Courtown

BARONESSSES IN WAITING—Baroness Vere of Norbiton, Baroness Sugg CBE §, Baroness Goldie DL, Baroness Stedman-Scott DL, Baroness Manzoor CBE

LORDS IN WAITING—Viscount Younger of Leckie, The Rt Hon. Lord Young of Cookham CH

§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—The Rt Hon. Dame Caroline Spelman, MP

REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION—Bridget Phillipson, MP

REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY—Mr Charles Walker, MP

REPRESENTING THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP

CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION—Sir Edward Leigh, MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt Hon. John Bercow, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Dame Eleanor Laing, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP

PANEL OF CHAIRS

Sir David Amess, Ian Austin, Mr Adrian Bailey, Sir Henry Bellingham, Mr Clive Betts, Mr Peter Bone, Sir Graham Brady, Ms Karen Buck, Sir Christopher Chope, Sir David Crausby, Geraint Davies, Philip Davies, Ms Nadine Dorries, Mr Nigel Evans, Sir Roger Gale, Mike Gapes, The Rt Hon. Dame Cheryl Gillan, James Gray, The Rt Hon. David Hanson, Mr Philip Hollobone, Stewart Hosie, The Rt Hon. Mr George Howarth, Sir Edward Leigh, Mrs Anne Main, Steve McCabe, Siobhain McDonagh, Mrs Madeleine Moon, Albert Owen, Ian Paisley, Mark Pritchard, Mr Laurence Robertson, Andrew Rosindell, The Rt Hon. Joan Ryan, Mr Virendra Sharma, Mr Gary Streeter, Graham Stringer, Mr Charles Walker, Phil Wilson

SECRETARY—Colin Lee

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The Rt Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP, The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom, MP (Leader of the House), Stewart Hosie, MP, Valerie Vaz, MP, The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP, Sir David Natzler KCB (Clerk of the House), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Jane McCall (External Member), Dr Rima Makarem (External Member)

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—Marianne Cwynarski

ASSISTANT SECRETARY—Robert Cope

ADMINISTRATION ESTIMATE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS ESTIMATE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Dr Rima Makarem (Chair), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, Mr Clive Betts, MP, The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP, Jane McCall, Bob Scruton

SECRETARY—John-Paul Flaherty

COMMONS EXECUTIVE BOARD

Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons and Managing Director, Strategic Estates), Myfanwy Barrett (Managing Director, Corporate Services and Finance Director), John Benger (Clerk Assistant and Managing Director, Chamber and Committees), Carlos Bamford (Managing Director, In-House Services), Eric Hepburn (Director of Security for Parliament), Tracey Jessup (Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service), Sir David Natzler KCB (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service), Penny Young (Librarian and Managing Director, Research and Information, and Managing Director, Participation)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD—Sarah Petit

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—Peter Barratt

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—Saira Salimi

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Kathryn Stone

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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

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

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 647

TWENTY-SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

House of Commons

Oral Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 October 2018

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Now that the Chief Coroner has published the conclusions of the inquest, I know that the whole House will want me to say again how deeply grateful we are to PC Keith Palmer, the courageous police officer who was killed on 22 March 2017 doing the job he loved: keeping Parliament and us safe. Everyone who works here was shocked and saddened by his death, and we continue to express our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends.

As we reflect upon the findings of the inquest, we pay tribute to PC Palmer and to those whose lives were lost on Westminster bridge. We need to take all possible action to prevent a similar tragedy in the future. Carriage Gates are now kept closed and opened only to allow vehicles in or out. The Parliamentary Security Department and the Metropolitan Police continue to work hard to protect us from danger, but our co-operation is required, too. In that light, I encourage all Members to wear their security pass when on the estate. We should remember that security in Westminster is everyone's responsibility.

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON BILL [*LOARDS*] (*BY ORDER*)

Second Reading opposed and deferred until Tuesday 16 October at Four o'clock (Standing Order No. 20).

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Bailiffs

1. **Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the regulation of bailiffs. [906985]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): Mr Speaker, may I share in your remarks about PC Palmer and pay tribute to him and his work in this House?

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on debt and personal finance, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) is campaigning hard on this important issue, and she is right that bailiffs are not operating as they should in some areas. I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) and her constituents, the Rogers family, who sadly lost Jerome as a result of and following some action by bailiffs. We intend to launch a call for evidence shortly to evaluate our most recent bailiff reforms.

Yvonne Fovargue: I, too, met the family of Jerome Rogers, and I pay tribute to them for their courage in taking the campaign forward. However, Jerome's case perfectly highlights why the industry needs regulating, because his problems were just the tip of an iceberg. Citizens Advice helped 41,000 people with 90,000 bailiff issues last year—one person every three minutes. The call for evidence relates to rogue bailiffs, but this is not just about one or two wayward individuals; the whole system is rotten. Will the Minister consider the need for an independent body to regulate and police the industry properly?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Lady makes some important points. Officials in my Department recently met with Citizens Advice, StepChange, the Money Advice Trust and AdviceUK to discuss such issues. Last month, they also met the Certificated Enforcement Agents Association. I have met Peter Tutton, the head of policy at StepChange, and he made a statement similar to the hon. Lady's about the need for independent regulation. We will be putting forward a call for evidence and questions will be asked on a variety of issues.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): There will always be difficulties when debts are pursued, particularly when people may genuinely be struggling to pay them. As for the call for evidence, how will the Minister be working with local authorities, which obviously engage bailiffs to enforce council tax debt against those who may be struggling most to pay off such debt?

Lucy Frazer: As my hon. Friend highlights, council tax debt is an important area in which we must ensure that bailiffs and enforcement agents are operating appropriately, and we will be looking at the enforcement work that bailiffs do.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister call for accurate statistics as part of the review? It is difficult to get to the facts in this area, including the number of people who are suffering because of bailiffs, so will she look into that as a matter of urgency?

Lucy Frazer: Of course, evidence is extremely important. I should mention that when we reviewed the legislation earlier this year, we found that not all bailiffs act inappropriately. A large number act in accordance with the regulations that we set out, but we need to look at the small number who do not.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): But it is like the wild west at the moment, and often there is no redress when the bailiffs have made a mistake. I have one case in which a family lost their property because the bailiffs went to Treorchy instead of Treherbert. Three years later, the police will not investigate and there is no body to which the family can go to get their place back. It is surely time that we acted instead of having yet more consultation.

Lucy Frazer: I would be very interested to hear about the case that the hon. Gentleman mentions. There is regulation in relation to bailiffs. For example, they have to be appointed by the court every two years. They come to the court to get their authorisation. So measures are in place to protect people, but we are looking at the issue and we must go further.

Private Prosecutions

2. **Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** How many private prosecutions initiated by third parties (a) were brought to trial and (b) resulted in a conviction in the last five years. [906986]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the fact that prosecutions can be brought by private bodies as well public bodies. The Ministry of Justice data does not currently identify whether a prosecution is public or private.

Andrew Rosindell: Like me, the Minister will have heard reports of police allowing perpetrators of domestic violence and especially of FGM to escape justice by a reluctance to prosecute. Will the Minister please inform the House of what is being done to ensure that we do not simply push responsibility to prosecute on to already traumatised victims?

Lucy Frazer: We must of course prosecute those who are alleged to have committed the terrible crimes that my hon. Friend talks about. We have strengthened the law. Failing to protect a girl from FGM is now an offence, and we have introduced an element of coercive control in domestic violence. We in the Ministry of Justice continue to work closely with the Home Office and the Attorney General, who is responsible for the Criminal Prosecution Service, to ensure that crimes are prosecuted.

Offenders and Employment

3. **Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to help offenders find employment immediately after they leave prison. [906987]

15. **James Heappey (Wells) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to help offenders find employment immediately after they leave prison. [907003]

16. **Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to help offenders find employment immediately after they leave prison. [907004]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): In May we published the education and employment strategy, which will set each prisoner on a path to employment, with prison education and work geared towards employment on release from the outset. Since publication of the strategy, we are working with about 70 new organisations that have registered an interest in working with offenders.

Stephen Crabb: I welcome the Secretary of State's response. Given that we have a shortage of about 60,000 HGV drivers in this country—it is a good job, paying a decent wage—does my right hon. Friend think that there is an opportunity in his strategy to work with industry bodies and other Government Departments to deliver a pathway for ex-offenders to train, get their HGV licence and be able to walk into a job on day one when they walk through the prison gates?

Mr Gauke: My right hon. Friend is right to raise the point. My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) has also raised that point on the Floor of the House, and we are working on proposals to do precisely that. Getting offenders into work makes them less likely to reoffend and enables them to contribute to society. It is something that we should absolutely aspire to.

James Heappey: Despite progress in some prisons, too many prisoners still leave custody without a bank account, which is liable to increase the incidence of reoffending. As part of the ongoing review of probation

services, will the Secretary of State look at what more could be done in prisons to ensure that this most basic of facilities is held by all prisoners before they are released?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend raises an important point. It is worth pointing out that the offender banking programme ensures that prisons that release a significant number of prisoners have a relationship with a commercial bank to enable prisoners to open a basic bank account in the last six months of their sentence. A record number of accounts—6,500—were opened in 2017. He is right to highlight the matter.

Nigel Huddleston: The Right Course is a programme set up by celebrity maître d' Fred Sirieix, which helps train prisoners to run prison restaurants and therefore qualify for jobs once they have left prison. Will the Minister meet me and Fred to discuss how similar programmes can be expanded?

Mr Gauke: I will be very happy to do so. It is an important point. I am pleased to hear about the work that Fred Sirieix is undertaking, and I will be happy to meet with him.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State is correct to say that it is through employment that we often have the best chance to reduce and stop reoffending. What discussions has he had with his counterpart in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy about mainstreaming incentives to employee ex-offenders in apprenticeship and internship strategies?

Mr Gauke: We work across government on this matter and are considering a number of proposals across government, including with BEIS, on how we can encourage employers in this area, including on apprenticeships. Let me make a point I have made before: employers are increasingly looking at employing ex-offenders. We should all welcome that, and I would be supportive of any constructive steps to progress this.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The biggest employer in Britain today is the Secretary of State and other Ministers, through themselves in their Departments and through the suppliers that they use. What steps has he taken to improve employment opportunities for offenders within his remit?

Mr Gauke: That is a good point. One thing we announced when I launched the education and employment strategy was the fact that the public sector—the civil service—was taking people on. We had a pilot in the north-west of England, which we are now extending to other parts of the United Kingdom. The Prison Service also takes on ex-offenders. The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight this, and the public sector has a role to play in the area, too.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): Five years ago, the Government sold off half the probation service, giving the justification that “through the gate” services would be improved. That aim has not been met by that

project, and neither have any of the other aims described at the time. Is it not time to bring probation back together?

Mr Gauke: The reoffending rate has actually fallen since then, but we recognise that issues need to be addressed. That is why earlier this year I announced a series of reforms to the probation system, including spending an additional £22 million on “through the gate” services to address this specific point.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): One problem with “through the gate” is not who delivers it, but the fact that too often the interventions start so late on in the prisoner's career. If six months is appropriate in terms of opening bank accounts—sensibly, it is—is it not sensible that resettlement interviews and work should be started at least at that time, if not earlier, rather than at 12 weeks or so, as we currently have it?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Justice, raises an interesting point. The point I make to him is that we need to make sure that this system is working. There is scope for improvement, and, as I say, we have announced additional expenditure in this area, but he is right to say that this is not about who does it, but how it is done. There are steps we can take to improve it.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Prison officers play a vital role in equipping offenders for their release, including by helping them prepare for work or education on the outside. In his speech to the Tory party conference, the Justice Secretary committed to recruiting more prison officers to fill the huge gap created by his Government's austerity cuts. So can he guarantee that by the end of this Parliament there will be the same number of frontline officers in our prisons as there were in 2010?

Mr Gauke: What I can guarantee is that we are increasing the numbers—they have gone up by 3,500 in the past two years. That is enabling us to implement a key worker strategy, so that prison officers have the ability to spend more time with prisoners and can build that personal relationship, providing the support and advice necessary. That is an important step forward and I am pleased we are able to do it.

Probation Services

4. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): If he will take steps to return all probation services to the public sector. [906988]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): We do not believe this is an ideological divide between the private and public sectors. We are looking at the relationship between the community rehabilitation companies and the national probation service, in terms of their geographical spread and how they work together. However, we are finding across the country that having the public sector focus on the highest risk prisoners and the private sector and other, non-profit actors focusing on delivering for the lowest risk offenders is delivering innovation, from Cumbria right the way down to London.

Alex Cunningham: In the Committee on the Bill that created the service we have today, many weeks were spent trying to convince the Government that their privatisation experiment with the probation service would fail, and it has. The exception might be the only not-for-profit public sector CRC, which covers the Tees Valley, part of which I represent. It has been singled out in Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation reports as delivering best practice. What will the Minister do to ensure that the Tees Valley CRC is not subsumed into another privatised contract, to learn from it, and to return the probation service to the public sector?

Rory Stewart: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's local CRC, which is a good example of how CRCs can work. Durham CRC is a good example of the local authority and the previous probation trust working together. It has met 85% of its targets and is a well-performing CRC. There are also good examples to be followed elsewhere in the country, including in Cumbria, where the CRC is working with rural communities, and in London, where the CRC has improved dramatically and done some very good work with Grenfell survivors. I certainly pay tribute to the work done in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that one key to aiding the rehabilitation of offenders is to ensure that probation officers have manageable case loads, so that they can give sufficient time and energy to each case?

Rory Stewart: A manageable case load is of course absolutely central, as is the flexibility to make sure that when a probation officer has a high-risk offender—a criminal who is more challenging to deal with—they have smaller numbers of offenders to deal with and can adjust their case load according to the risk posed by the individual and the complexity of the case.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What assessment has the Minister made of NHS and non-NHS-provided drug-curing services? The drug problems seem to be getting worse, rather than better, in so many of our prisons.

Rory Stewart: This is a serious issue, not only in England but in the devolved Administrations such as Scotland, where I saw very high levels of methadone prescription. I am happy to sit down with the hon. Lady to discuss the subject in more detail.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): What assurances can the Minister provide that the services provided by community rehabilitation companies are robustly monitored?

Rory Stewart: The best guarantee that these companies are performing is the action of Parliament and of the chief inspector of probation, to whom I pay tribute for her series of hard-hitting reports, most recently on domestic violence. As the Secretary of State has pointed out, we have seen a 2% reduction in reoffending. That has been driven by these companies and is to be welcomed, but there is of course much more to be done to protect the public.

Sentences: Reoffending Reduction

5. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of sentences of less than three months in reducing reoffending. [906989]

18. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of sentences of less than three months in reducing reoffending. [907006]

19. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of sentences of less than three months in reducing reoffending. [907007]

21. **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of sentences of less than 12 months in reducing reoffending. [907009]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): As I have said recently, there is persuasive evidence that short custodial sentences do not work in terms of rehabilitation. In certain circumstances, community sentences are more effective in the reduction of reoffending and therefore keeping the public safe. The reoffending rate of offenders who serve fewer than 12 months is around 65%, but earlier research has shown the reoffending rate for similar offenders who receive a community penalty to be lower. We will look at what more we can do to emphasise that short custodial sentences should be viewed as a last resort.

Chris Elmore: The Secretary of State may be aware that the rate of women reoffending and being recalled to prison is higher than that of men, with three out of every five women offenders being recalled or re-prosecuted and sent back to prison. There is now a real need to implement the female offender strategy and ensure that women are given as much support as they can be given. There is also a real need for the Secretary of State to take action on short-term offences and look into other ways to sentence women, because the current approach simply is not working.

Mr Gauke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. He referred to the female offender strategy; as he will be aware, its focus is on alternatives to custody, particularly for minor offences. There are particular issues for females offenders in respect of the nature of the offences and the issues that female offenders face, so it is right that we implement the new strategy.

Jeff Smith: Over the past five years, the use of community sentences has declined, and it has declined fastest for theft and drugs offences. Does the Secretary of State think that prison is the best place for people with drug addictions and shoplifting convictions? If not, how is he going to reverse that trend?

Mr Gauke: Often, it is not the right place, which is why my hon. Friend the Prisons Minister and I have been clear that we need to consider alternatives to custody and explore what more we can do with community sentences. In some cases, the issue is getting to the heart

of the problem, which often might be drug dependency and so on. Some encouraging pilots are ongoing in respect of community sentence treatment requirements. Those are some of the steps that we are taking. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for our approach.

Vicky Foxcroft: Short-term sentences are catastrophic for reoffending rates, and if the Government are serious about reducing both crime and our prison population they must recognise the importance of early intervention. With the Home Office now pursuing a public health approach to violent crime, will the Minister tell us how he is engaging with this strategy?

Mr Gauke: We are very much engaging with the strategy, and it is a strategy that I support. We are ensuring that we work across government to intervene as early as we can and that we have strong alternatives to custody that are not soft options but are effective. I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the work that we are doing on community sentence treatment requirements as a way in which we can work across government to address some of these issues. For some people, prison is the right place, but for many of the petty offenders, there are more effective things we can do, and I welcome her support for the approach we are taking.

Ellie Reeves: The Justice Committee report on transforming rehabilitation recommended a presumption against short sentences. Statistics show that the reoffending rate for women prisoners currently stands at 61% for those serving sentences of less than 12 months, yet, since 2010, community sentences for women have nearly halved. Will the Secretary of State therefore fully commit to the Committee's recommendations and implement a presumption against sentences of less than 12 months?

Mr Gauke: We are looking at various options in this context. I know that Scotland introduced a presumption against three months. I think it is fair to say that that did not make much of a difference, and it has now been extended to 12 months, and we are looking at the evidence from that. I hope it is very clear to the House that, when it comes to reducing reoffending and to rehabilitation, we do question the effectiveness of short sentences.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Would not the effectiveness of all custodial sentences be increased if we reduced the number of prisoners who were released on a Friday night when no public services are available for them, often leaving them to fall into the hands of the local drug dealer and go straight back into a life of crime?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend is right to raise that concern. There are different ways in which one can address that matter. More support could be provided. For example, there could be release on a temporary licence a few days before the final release so that many of the public services can be accessed. Whether we look at release on a particular day or at other ways of addressing that matter, I completely understand his point. We need to make sure that when people are released, they are in a strong position to access accommodation and a job and to be able to maintain their family links; that is what we want to do.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The figures from the Ministry of Justice consistently show that the longer people spend in prison the less likely they are to reoffend. When the Secretary of State says that he wants to see the end of short-term sentences, does he agree with me that those people should be sent to prison for longer, or does he agree with the Opposition that those criminals should not be sent to prison at all?

Mr Gauke: I had a feeling that the consensus was not going to last much longer. The reality is that for petty offenders who tend to be prolific and tend to be repeat offenders, the evidence shows that non-custodial sentences are more effective at reducing reoffending than custodial sentences and that is the approach that we want to take.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Would not reoffending rates for those on short-term prison sentences go down if life was made as uncomfortable as possible for them while they were in jail? Instead of spending all day in their overcrowded prison cell either on their mobile phone or going through the satellite TV channels, should they not be out breaking rocks in a quarry or picking up litter in the rain?

Mr Gauke: People are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment. The purpose of prison should be about ensuring that when people are released, they are less likely to reoffend. I do not think that my hon. Friend is setting out an effective approach.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I support the idea that short custodial sentences often serve little purpose in reducing reoffending, but does the Secretary of State agree that to convince the public of this—to take them on this journey—they need to see both transparency of sentencing and that any discounts on tariffs are rewards, rather than the rule?

Mr Gauke: It is important that there are incentives—both carrots and sticks—in the prison system. Good behaviour in prison should be rewarded, just as bad behaviour should be punished. That is the approach that we need to take.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): My party agrees with the Secretary of State regarding the evidence on the inappropriateness of many short-term prison sentences, but community sentences need to be properly resourced to ensure that they work as an appropriate alternative. Will the Government increase funding to local authorities for the delivery of effective community sentences alongside any presumption?

Mr Gauke: We need to make sure that the alternatives to custody are effective—that they are not soft options, but that they do enable people to turn their lives around—and that the public have confidence that this is the proper course of action to take. That is our ambition.

Sport and Recidivism

6. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential role of sport in reducing recidivism. [906991]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I recognise the value of sport and physical activity for the physical and mental health benefits they bring, and for the role that they can play in encouraging positive behaviours among offenders. That is one of the main reasons that the Ministry of Justice commissioned Professor Rosie Meek's review of sport in prisons, which published its recommendations this summer and to which I have responded.

John Lamont: The impact that sport can have is highlighted by the incredible story of John McAvoy, who discovered a talent for endurance sport while in prison serving a long sentence, and who is now a world record holder and a professional triathlete. Although not every offender will go on to complete an Ironman, sport can greatly reduce reoffending rates. What consideration has been given to improving the opportunity for offenders to participate in sport while in prison, and to encourage people such as John McAvoy to share his experience by speaking to offenders?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. John McAvoy's story is an important one, and he helped to play an important role in promoting sport in our custodial estate. On my recent visit to HMYOI Wetherby, its impressive governor Andrew Dickinson set out the work that he is doing with local sports clubs such as Leeds Rhinos to provide important role models in that institution. Sport and programmes such as these can help to develop attitudes and skills such as discipline and teamwork that are valuable in making a success of life outside custody and in reducing reoffending.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): With more over-60s in our prisons than under-21s, and claims that provision for women and girls is being underdeveloped, will the Minister outline whether he believes that a holistic approach for sports programmes throughout prisons is a realistic approach to prevent reoffending?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the ageing population in our prisons. The approach that we have adopted—which was set out in Professor Rosie Meek's report—is designed to provide sport and physical education opportunities for all those in our custodial institutions, regardless of gender or age.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Yesterday I attended the launch at Chester cathedral of an impressive display of artwork by prisoners, the production of which had clearly helped many in their journeys towards personal wholeness. In what other ways can the Ministry of Justice produce an environment that is conducive to good mental health?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend raises an important point; she has done a lot of work in this area and more broadly around mental health. Sport can play a significant role in addressing mental health issues in prison, but so too can arts, education and others approaches, as she highlights. If she feels that it would be useful, I would be happy to meet her to discuss further her visit and what she took away from it.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I am glad that the Minister prefers sport to chain gangs, but can he tell the House when the use of sport for prisoner rehabilitation will be the norm, rather than the exception?

Edward Argar: The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight again the importance of sport. The report published by Professor Meek in the summer, of which we have accepted 53 of the 54 recommendations, sets out a clear direction of travel—that is, alongside education and developing skills, and provisions for mental and physical health, sport plays a key role for prisoners in the rehabilitative process.¹

Violence in Prisons

7. Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): What comparative assessment he has made of levels of violence in public and private prisons. [906992]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): The influx of drugs has had an impact on violence levels in both public and private prisons, which is why we are investing in body scanners, improved searching techniques and phone blocking technology. In 2017, four of the top five assault rates in local prisons and category C prisons were in public prisons.

Liz Saville Roberts: It remains the case that the prisons with the highest number of assaults are all private. In the first quarter of 2018, the top five most violent prisons were privately run. Will the Minister commit to an independent review of violence in private prisons and to a moratorium on any new private prisons in the meantime?

Mr Gauke: No, the reality is that there are issues with violence in both public and private sector prisons. Certainly, the numbers that I have suggest that there is a significant issue in public sector prisons such as Liverpool, Exeter and Bedford, where there have been urgent notifications. We should not take an ideological approach. There are very good private sector prisons, and there are some very good public sector prisons, and it is right that there is a diversity of prisons in our system.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the prison officers in both public and private prisons who, by and large, do an exceptional job in very, very difficult circumstances? Does he agree that we should on every occasion do what we can to encourage them and raise their status as an important part of the whole process of judicial sentencing?

Mr Gauke: My right hon. Friend is right to make that point, and I happily pay tribute to the work that prison officers do in this country—a point that I made in my party conference speech in Birmingham last week. The work that they do in protecting the public and rehabilitating prisoners should be valued by us all. It is not often very public, because it is, by definition, behind locked doors, but they do excellent work and we should recognise that.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): There is a worrying level of violence, and increasing violence, in both state-run and privately run prisons. Does the Secretary of State agree with Phil Taylor, a former governor of Wormwood Scrubs, who said:

“What we've got here is a reduction in prison staff by over 10,000, and the government lauding the fact that they replaced it with three and a half thousand inexperienced staff who lack confidence and ability to deal with the things that they are confronted with on a daily basis”?

1. [Official Report, 22 October 2018, Vol. 648, c. 3MC.]

Mr Gauke: It is the case that in the past two years we have increased the prison officer population, and we will continue to do so. That enables us to implement changes, as we have key workers—a point that I made a little earlier—and a relationship is built up between prison officers and prisoners. Alongside additional measures that we have taken to stop, for example, drugs getting in, and the announcement that we have made on PAVA, all of that is designed to assist prison officers in doing a very, very important job.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): The prison officers in my constituency continue to be worried about the lack of a deterrent to prevent prisoners from assaulting them. Will the Minister reassure the House that far harsher sentences should be handed down to those who dare to assault our prison officers? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Gauke: Indeed, and as my hon. Friend knows there is a new law that does precisely that. We were very happy to support the private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on that front. We are increasing legislative ability, and we want to make sure that we work closely with the police to ensure that prosecutions are brought. It is the case, as I have mentioned, that we are giving prison officers a new tool, with access to PAVA.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The prisons Minister theatrically announced to the press this summer that he would resign if the 10 prisons he had identified did not improve on his watch. I have been looking at the prisons that he chose. It turns out that, of the 10 prisons he identified, only three are in the bottom category of the four prison performance categories. It gets still stranger when we see that there are 15 prisons in that worst performing category. I am sure that the Minister is sincere in his desire to improve prison standards, so instead of cherry-picking prisons for a media stunt, will he agree today that if all the 15 worst performing prisons identified by his own Ministry do not improve on his watch, he will quit?

Mr Gauke: The prisons Minister has set out a plan for 10 prisons that we are going to focus on. If the hon. Gentleman wants an explanation as to why we have chosen those specific 10 prisons, I am happy to meet him, and I know the prisons Minister would be happy to meet him. This is an area where we believe it is necessary to take action, and we have a plan to reduce violence in those prisons. If it works, we can look to extend it elsewhere. The fact is that we are gripping this issue. We are putting measures in place to address it, and we will deliver.

Mobile Phones in Prison

8. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to prevent the use of mobile phones in prisons. [906993]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): There are basically four ways in which we can detect mobile telephones coming into prisons: we can get them at the gate, coming over the wall, in use on the landings and in the cells. We are addressing it in all those ways. We are increasing searching at the gates. We are putting up grilles and netting to stop phones coming

over the walls. We are putting dedicated search teams into cells, and we are using equipment to detect phones in use.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank the Minister for that helpful reply. He obviously is aware that illegal mobile phones in cells are currently being used for drug trafficking, intimidating witnesses and other criminal activity. Can he make it 100% crystal clear that under no circumstances will he or the Secretary of State ever go down the route of allowing prisoners to have legal mobiles in their cells?

Rory Stewart: We are absolutely clear that a mobile telephone, and particularly a smartphone, in a prison is a form of weapon. It allows a prisoner to jump the prison walls, effectively; they can transfer money, record videos and intimidate witnesses. We are encouraging prisoners to continue to use regulated landlines in prisons to contact their families. We are investing in in-cell telephony, because keeping family relationships will reduce reoffending by 37%, but a mobile telephone is a weapon, and we will find them and remove them.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the Minister for that answer. The Justice Committee was told at a recent session that prison governors do not have sufficient flexibility to purchase the equipment they need—particularly the right scanning equipment—and that if they had more flexibility over their budgets, they might be able to invest in that equipment or other things that they feel their prison needs. What is the Minister's response to that?

Rory Stewart: Thanks to a private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), which we have been proud to support, new technology is available that should not force governors to have to come up with a bespoke solution prison by prison, but will allow us nationally to have much better technology to identify these phones, listen to them and ultimately seize them.

Employment and Education: Reoffending Reduction

9. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What assessment he has made of the role of employment and education in reducing rates of reoffending. [906995]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): Prison education is key to achieving better outcomes for offenders and has been proven to reduce reoffending by approximately 9% and increase P45 employment by 1.8%. We are empowering governors, who will be given the budget and controls to tailor education provision in their prisons, to both better engage their prisoners and meet their specific learning and employment needs. On 17 September, we launched a new innovative commissioning portal, which will give governors direct access to a huge range of learning and skills providers, including local educators and employers.

James Cartlidge: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Does he agree that in some cases, self-employment—for example, as a sole trader—may be appropriate? Can he set out whether those new support measures will include mentoring for offenders who want to start a business when they leave prison?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend raises an important point. A lot of ex-offenders who go on to work currently do so in self-employment, and that will continue to be the case, so encouragement and support down that route has to be part of what we do to encourage employment.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that most veterans make a successful transition from the armed forces into civilian life, but inevitably some will end up in the criminal justice system. Will he say what work is taking place to support veterans with employment and training, not only to reduce reoffending but, frankly, to ensure that they do not end up living on the streets?

Mr Gauke: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. He will know that there is a strong voluntary sector that provides a huge amount of support. I pay tribute to the work that many of those charities do. We work closely with them because it is particularly important, for those who have served their country, that we do not let them down subsequently.

Court System

10. **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to modernise the court system. [906996]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): We are taking a large number of measures to ensure that our court system is brought up to date in the 21st century. For example, we are allowing people to make applications online, with over 50% of divorce petitions now submitted online. We are making better use of technology, so that in some cases vulnerable witnesses can give pre-recorded evidence. We are also allowing those with small claims, up to £10,000, to start their claim online, defend it online and in some cases settle before the case comes to court.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will my hon. and learned Friend consider establishing a financial services tribunal to provide a low-cost dispute resolution mechanism to ensure justice for small and medium-sized businesses when they have a dispute with their bank?

Lucy Frazer: I was pleased to meet my hon. Friend, together with Heather Buchanan from the all-party group on fair business banking and finance. The APPG has produced a thorough report on this very issue, which I have read with interest. As he identifies, it is important that small businesses can bring claims against the banks when they need to do so. I have spoken to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who is carefully considering the APPG report, together with—when it comes out—the Financial Conduct Authority's consultation on expanding the role of Financial Ombudsman Service, and who will consider Simon Walker's independent review of complaints. I know that he is keen to set out the Government's position as soon as possible after that.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Given the findings of the Lammy review, which showed that those from black and ethnic minority backgrounds face discrimination in the criminal justice system, what progress

has the Department made in ensuring that juries and judges better reflect the communities that they are there to serve?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Lady makes an important point, because everyone who takes part in our justice system, as in politics, should reflect the society that it represents. That is not only juries; it is the professions that are there to support the judiciary on the bench. It is important that we look at the position in relation to juries.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Following the decision to close courts in Bicester and Banbury, will the Minister agree to meet me and a group of local magistrates to discuss the provision of a mobile court locally, such as people have in Kent?

Lucy Frazer: My hon. Friend has campaigned hard on the closure of her court. I am always happy to meet with her. She made a lot of submissions to me during the consultation on the closure and put in a fair report. I am happy to meet her, and I know that she is very keen on alternative provision.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): We hear a lot from the Government about this so-called court modernisation programme, but many people believe that it is simply a smoke-screen to cut the number of courts and reduce the provision of legal representation for those in court. Will the Minister agree to the Law Society's call for an independent economic review of the long-term viability of the criminal legal aid system?

Lucy Frazer: We do make a lot of court reform because we are spending £1 billion to bring our court system up to date. In relation to legal aid, we have an ongoing review that will report at the end of the year, and we will be evaluating our court reform programme.

Court Experience for Victims and Witnesses

11. **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve the court experience for victims and witnesses. [906997]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): On 10 September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I published the first ever cross-Government victims strategy, reflecting the Government's clear commitment to further support victims of crime. Central to the strategy are commitments to strengthen the victims code and develop legislation to underpin it, to continue ongoing work to improve the court environment, as the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), has already set out, to increase the use of digitisation, to increase facilities for the use of video links, to improve provision for pre-recorded cross-examination for vulnerable witnesses and to raise awareness of the importance of the victim's personal statement and opportunities for how it can be used.

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to the Minister for that comprehensive answer. I know from some of my constituents about the stress, strain and emotional toll

of having to repeatedly face those who have hurt them or their loved ones. What steps is his Department taking to support victims who find themselves having to repeatedly give victim impact statements?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend takes a close interest in this area. I can entirely understand the impact on a victim of having to relive a crime multiple times. That is why the victim's personal statement is hugely important. One of the measures that we are putting in place is the use of body-worn cameras to record the statement, which should help to reduce the number of times it needs to be made. Underpinning the strategy is the aim of reducing the number of people a victim has to interact with. If my hon. Friend wishes to highlight a specific case, I would be happy to meet him.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): What steps will the Minister be putting in place to support litigants in person, particularly those employees who have to take their employer to court to seek damages for personal injury at work under the raising of the small claims limit in the Civil Liability Bill?

Edward Argar: With regard to litigants in person—I am conscious that you might wish me to keep this answer short, Mr Speaker—we already spend well over £6 million supporting them, and we continue to look carefully at how they can continue to be supported.

Law Centres

12. **Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab):** What his Department's policy is on law centres. [906999]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): My Department greatly appreciates the great work that law centres are doing across the country. We support law centres with grant funding and through legal aid contracts. In April, I met Julie Bishop, the director of the Law Centres Network, and I was pleased to share a panel with LawWorks at our party conference last week. My officials are engaging actively with law centres as part of the review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

Mr Sharma: I declare an interest, having been an employee of the Hillingdon legal resource centre and the Ealing law centre before entering Parliament. Since the Government's disastrous cuts to legal aid, many law centres have been forced to close, leaving advice deserts in parts of the country. Will the Government commit to new funding for solicitors and paralegals to work in law centres in those parts of the country that have the greatest unmet legal needs?

Lucy Frazer: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the work he did in his community before becoming a Member of Parliament. I should also declare that I did voluntary work in a law centre for a very brief period as part of my work as a barrister. We must encourage people to volunteer to do that work, because it is greatly appreciated. As part of the LASPO review, we are looking at how we provide advice to those who need it most, and the work that law centres do is a key part of that advice. We will be reporting on that by the end of the year.

Burglary and Custodial Sentences

13. **Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con):** What recent estimate he has made of the proportion of people convicted of burglary offences for the first time who received custodial sentences; and if he will make a statement. [907001]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): Burglary is a particularly disgusting crime, especially domestic burglary—it is not just the loss of someone's possessions, but the terrible intrusion on their privacy and the humiliation of having someone in their home. The majority of first-time offenders do receive a conviction—73% of domestic burglars receive a prison sentence.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Minister for that response and particularly welcome his condemnation of burglary, which, as he rightly says, is a very serious offence. I therefore urge him to ensure that the sentence fits the crime, so that potential reoffenders are deterred from doing it again.

Rory Stewart: The maximum sentence for aggravated burglary is currently a life sentence. The maximum sentence for burglary is 14 years. The sentence length given by judges, and reflected by the Sentencing Council, has increased over the past 10 years. That is as it should be, because domestic burglary is a particularly disgusting and uncivilised crime, and society should be making a symbolic statement against it.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are running over time, but I feel the parliamentary day would be incomplete if we did not hear from the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), so we shall.

School Exclusion

17. **Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on breaking the link between school exclusion and prison. [907005]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): My right hon. Friend is right to highlight this issue: 23% of those given short custodial sentences were previously excluded from school. I have not personally met the Secretary of State for Education to discuss this matter, but I have corresponded with the Minister with responsibility for schools on exactly this issue. I regularly meet the Under-Secretary of State for the Department for Education about linked issues, and my officials and I are engaged with the Department for Education on its exclusions review.

Robert Halfon: Thank you, Mr Speaker. An increasing number of pupils are being excluded from our schools, and 60% of our prisoners were excluded when in our education system. What action is the Ministry of Justice taking to work with the Department for Education to provide serious support to those who have experienced exclusion and are at risk of offending?

Edward Argar: As I briefly mentioned, my officials and I have already engaged with the Department for Education's exclusions review, submitting an analysis by the Ministry of Justice on the correlation between offenders and exclusions. Key to tackling this issue is joined-up working across government and agencies. I heard about this issue on a recent visit to Hackney youth offending team. I will continue to work closely with Ministers and other Departments to develop measures to support the exclusions review when it reports.

Mr Speaker: We have heard it from Harlow, so I think we should hear it from Glasgow.

20. [907008] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to come in on this question. Scotland aims to be the world's first trauma-aware nation by considering the link between adverse childhood experience and future offending, so will the Minister look at the work being done in Scotland to break the cycle of offending and imprisonment of some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society?

Edward Argar: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I am always happy to look at the devolved nations for examples of best practice from which we might learn. She is right to highlight the links in this area, which is one reason why, in the victims strategy, we allocated moneys to support children who have witnessed domestic abuse in their past—to help to break that cycle and give them a chance of recovery.

Topical Questions

T1. [907010] **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): Following a successful pilot, we have made the decision to equip every prison officer in the public sector adult male estate with PAVA spray. PAVA can help to prevent serious harm to staff and prisoners alike, as well as being a tool to persuade prisoners in the act of violence to stop. All officers will receive specialist training before being allowed to carry the spray, and it will be delivered only where key worker training has already been rolled out. Key working will allow officers to build more positive relationships with prisoners, support their rehabilitation and manage difficult behaviour.

Sarah Jones: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), for meeting me and the family of Jerome Rogers before the summer recess. Jerome took his own life after aggressive bailiff threats and intimidation. Does the Secretary of State not find it astonishing that charities giving advice about debt, such as Citizens Advice, are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, yet bailiffs, with infinitely more power, are not? Will he confirm that this will form part of the consultation?

Mr Gauke: As my hon. and learned Friend mentioned a moment ago, we will conduct a call for evidence shortly. That will be an opportunity to look at all these issues. I express my condolences to the family of the hon. Lady's constituent.

T6. [907015] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What progress has been made towards introducing a presumption against short-term prison sentences, which will both help to support victims and reduce reoffending?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): As the Secretary of State has made clear, we feel very strongly that we should look and act on the evidence that a short-term prison sentence is more likely to lead to reoffending than a community sentence, and that therefore, in a sense, it endangers the public. The point of a sentence of any kind must be primarily to prevent offending happening in the future. For that reason, we will look very carefully at emphasising community sentences.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): It defies belief that a spouse convicted of attempting to murder their partner can have any financial claim on their assets as part of a divorce settlement. Does the Minister agree with that principle and will she meet me to look into changing the law to ensure that there is no financial entitlement in all but the most exceptional of those cases?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): The shadow Minister makes a very important point, and the issue has also been highlighted by *The Guardian*. The Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 says that the conduct of the parties in a divorce can be taken into account in the distribution of assets and, if it would be inequitable, to disregard it. I am very happy to discuss the issue with her and to meet her to do so.

T7. [907016] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What steps are the Government taking to ensure that when two parties take the decision to divorce, the legal process does not exacerbate conflict?

Lucy Frazer: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Once parties have made a decision to get divorced, the law should make it straightforward for them to do so, making it less acrimonious, which makes it better for children. For that reason, on 15 September we launched our reducing family conflict consultation on no-fault divorce.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): People are still having to wait an average of 42 weeks to get a hearing before the immigration and asylum first-tier tribunal, which is a long time to be in immigration limbo. What steps are the Government taking to reduce that time and what do they regard as an unacceptable waiting time target?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight that waiting times for tribunals could be reduced. We are recruiting new members of the tribunals; in February and March, we appointed 226 new medical members of the social security tribunal. I am also meeting, and have met twice, my counterpart in the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that we can get those waiting times down.

T8. [907017] **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): One problem that we have faced in Harlow with unauthorised encampments is the cat-and-mouse scenario that when camps are evicted they can just move further down

the road. What can my hon. and learned Friend do to strengthen the law and end the problem of unauthorised encampments once and for all?

Lucy Frazer: As I represent a rural constituency, I completely understand my right hon. Friend's point. The Government have recently consulted on the powers available to local authorities to deal with such problems and we are now looking at how we might strengthen the powers of local authorities and landowners.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The Prime Minister told her party conference that austerity is over, but if that were true, everyone in the justice sector would be breathing a huge sigh of relief. Tory cuts have unleashed an unprecedented crisis in our prisons and wider justice system. Justice faces the deepest cuts of any Department, totalling 40%, with £800 million in cuts between April 2018 and 2020 alone. Those cuts risk pushing justice from deep crisis into full-blown emergency, so will the Secretary of State confirm that that £800 million of cuts will not go ahead? If not, will he agree with me that the Prime Minister's words were nothing more than yet another Tory con trick?

Mr Gauke: What I can confirm is that we are continuing to recruit more prison officers and to invest in court reform. As the hon. Gentleman mentions party conferences, I have to point out to him that as the shadow Lord Chancellor, when somebody suggested an illegal general strike, the hon. Gentleman—[*Interruption.*] Well, he denied that he joined in a standing ovation, but he did say that he stood up and clapped.

Richard Burgon: To bring things back down to earth, the people who clean and tidy the Secretary of State's office—perhaps even when he is in it—have been demanding a real living wage of £10 an hour. Those Ministry of Justice cleaners are sick and tired of being treated like dirt, and his security guards, who keep the Ministry of Justice safe, are in the same boat. I wrote to the Secretary of State demanding that he sort this out, but he used outsourcing as his excuse for inaction. Instead of repeating his excuses to me today, will he address the Ministry of Justice staff watching us today and tell them why he thinks that they are not worth £10 an hour?

Mr Gauke: We are the Government who introduced the national living wage, which increased in April by 4.4%. We were able to do that because we are running a strong economy. That would not happen if the hon. Gentleman got his hands on this country.

T9. [907019] **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What steps are being taken to reduce the waiting time for personal independence payment and employment and support allowance appeals?

Lucy Frazer: I referred earlier to the steps we are taking in the MOJ in relation to medical members to reduce social security PIP and ESA appeals, but we are also introducing 250 more judges across tribunals. I welcome the very recent appointment of Grant Harvey Bird in September as a salaried judge for the first-tier tribunal in Gloucestershire.

T2. [907011] **Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Last year, my constituency had the third highest rate in the country of complaints against bailiffs. Since 2014-15, Citizens Advice has seen a 74% increase in people seeking help with how to complain about bailiffs. Will the Minister commit to exploring the need for an effective mechanism, as well as the independent regulator, for registering complaints against bailiffs?

Lucy Frazer: As I mentioned, we are looking into this, and we will, I hope, very shortly launch our call for evidence, which will look at a number of issues.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): People in Chelmsford are concerned about levels of violence in the prison, and they want to know that prison officers are safe. Will pepper spray help?

Rory Stewart: This morning, we announced that officers will be able to carry pepper spray on their belts. This is to be used as a last resort, in the same way as a baton would be. It means that if, for example, a prisoner was in the process of stamping on another prisoner's head, an officer could intervene safely from a distance to resolve the incident and potentially save lives. It is only one measure, along with a dozen other measures that we have to take to improve safety in prisons, but it is an important measure to protect the people who protect us.

T3. [907012] **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Over the conference recess, the inspectorate of probation published a report on the Merseyside community rehabilitation company. The report observes that the approach to reviewing risk of harm is limited, putting vulnerable people in danger. Have Ministers read the report, and what will the Department be doing to ensure that vulnerable people in Liverpool are given the protection that they need?

Rory Stewart: We take the report very seriously, as we take all reports, including the recent report on domestic violence. It is absolutely right to say that we need to improve the risk assessment, the programme plans and the frequency of meeting. We are doing a consultation at the moment, to which we invite the hon. Lady to make a submission, on exactly what we can do to tighten up procedures for the CRCs. They have reduced reoffending by 2%, but there is much more that we can do on the quality of delivery.¹

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Given that, yet again, the recruitment round of High Court judges has fallen short, and given that many distinguished retired judges are kept busy as arbitrators and wish to continue working, is it not time to look again at whether the arbitrary judicial retirement age of 70 is out of line with modern practice?

Mr Gauke: This is an issue that we continue to look at. I think it is a finely balanced matter, and we continue to look at the evidence. The argument is sometimes made that if we increase the retirement age, we will increase the age at which people apply to become judges. We will continue to look at the matter.

1. [Official Report, 22 October 2018, Vol. 648, c. 3MC.]

T4. [907013] **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Recent research published by the Law Society found that people who did not receive early advice were 20% less likely to have had their issue resolved than those who did. Will the Minister commit to reintroducing legal aid for early advice?

Lucy Frazer: I read that advice from the Law Society with interest. I recently met the Law Society and a number of solicitors that it brought with it to discuss the issues that face the profession, in relation not only to legal advice but to the age of the profession. As I have mentioned, we are doing a legal aid review, which will report at the end of the year.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Ministers in the Department are aware of the deep concerns of one of my constituents, who has been impacted by a very long wait for a second post-mortem following the loss of her brother. This has also impacted on other people, up and down the country. Will the Minister agree to meet me to see what more can be done to address the concerns of my constituent and her fellow RoadPeace campaigners?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I am very happy to give the assurance that I will meet my hon. Friend.

T5. [907014] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Given the criticisms contained in the report produced recently by Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation, what assurances can the Minister give that all community rehabilitation companies' contracts will stipulate that the probation officer qualification is absolutely necessary for the safe supervision of cases in which domestic violence is a factor?

Rory Stewart: As I have said, we have looked very seriously at the inspectorate's domestic violence report. It is worth bearing in mind that this has been a problem in many probation services across the world, and that it was, in fact, a problem before the CRCs were introduced. We are looking closely at the question of qualification during the current consultation, which will run for a further six months.¹

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I know that the Lord Chancellor takes the role of the rule of law in this country very seriously, but can he reassure me that the Government will always stand up for it, and would resist—and certainly would not stand up and clap—any suggestions that it should be broken?

Mr Gauke: I can certainly give that assurance, and I must say that it is extraordinary for the shadow Lord Chancellor to condone mass law-breaking.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Last month prison officers took unprecedented action by staging a day of protest outside prisons, including HM Prison Liverpool in Walton. Has the Minister spoken to the Prison Officers Association since then, and what has changed since its members took their unprecedented action?

Rory Stewart: That action was very regrettable. As the hon. Gentleman knows, prison officers are not entitled to strike legally, because it endangers prisoners and other prison officers. I met the chairman of the POA on the morning of the action—two hours later—and we had a number of discussions, which focused particularly on safety. We believe that working constructively, and not engaging in illegal strike action, is much better for prisons and prison officers.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): If the Minister is sincere when he insists that the decision to build new private prisons is not ideological but based on evidence, why is he trying to bury the evidence by refusing to release the official report on public-versus-private procurement for the two new prisons, despite freedom of information requests from the Prison Officers Association and parliamentary questions that remain unanswered?

Rory Stewart: If it is okay, I would like to meet the hon. Lady to understand in more detail exactly which request is being discussed. I am very happy to talk about it in person.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Given the very lucrative public contracts given to Atos and Capita, and the fact that they are clearly failing—71% of assessments for personal independence payments are overturned in the upper courts—what discussions has the Justice Secretary had with his counterpart in the Department for Work and Pensions about the imposition of a fining system? Atos and Capita are not only blocking up the courts, but treating disabled people appallingly.

Mr Gauke: I have regular conversations with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about a range of matters, including this one. We continue to do everything we can to ensure that the system is working properly.

1. [Official Report, 22 October 2018, Vol. 648, c. 4MC.]

Food Labelling and Allergy-Related Deaths

3.43 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action he is taking to improve the quality of UK food labelling to prevent further allergy-related deaths.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley)
rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the Minister to respond, I should make it clear that I have waived the sub judice resolution to allow reference to the inquest into the death of Mrs Celia Marsh. However, I ask right hon. and hon. Members to exercise caution in referring to that case—if they are minded to do so at all—in order to avoid any possible prejudice to those proceedings.

David Rutley: First, I want to say how deeply upsetting the deaths of Celia Marsh and Natasha Ednan-Laperouse are and that my heart goes out to the families, friends and loved ones affected by those tragedies. This House will appreciate that investigations into Celia Marsh's death are ongoing and it would be inappropriate for Ministers to make further comment on this particular incident at this stage. However, Members should be in no doubt about how seriously we take these issues. It is essential that all UK consumers have complete trust in the food they are eating.

Current food labelling law is set out in the EU's food information to consumers legislation. This legislation includes a list of 14 allergens, including milk and sesame, which are legally considered to be mandatory information that must be available to consumers. The regulations currently allow for some flexibility at a national level as to how this information is provided on food that is not pre-packed and food which is "pre-packed for direct sale". The former includes products such as loose cookies or sandwiches which are prepared and wrapped directly for the consumer. The latter category—"pre-packed for direct sale"—includes products such as freshly prepared sandwiches made on site, as compared with packaged food such as a chocolate bar or ready meal that we might find in a supermarket.

I must make it absolutely clear that, under the current regulations, information must be made available to the consumer in all cases. However, whereas packaged food must include all allergens in bold in the ingredients list, information about non pre-packed food, such as pre-packed food for direct sale, can be made available by any means the operator chooses, including the use of clear signs indicating that the customer should speak to a member of staff who will provide the information orally.

As the Secretary of State announced at the start of this year, we have been looking at developing new approaches to food labelling to ensure that consumers have the information they need. The death of Natasha has shone a harsh spotlight on the issue of allergen labelling in particular and whether the current framework is still suitable. Natasha's parents have made a powerful case for change, and I am sure the whole House will join

me in paying tribute to the tremendous grace and strength they have shown in these particularly challenging circumstances.

The Secretary of State has asked the Department for urgent advice on how we can strengthen the current allergen labelling framework. That review is under way, and DEFRA is working closely with the Food Standards Agency and the Department for Health and Social Care. This morning we received the coroner's report into Natasha's death and we will study it very carefully as part of that review. Tomorrow, DEFRA will be holding talks with the devolved Administrations to see what approach they may wish to take, as this is a devolved matter.

We take this issue very seriously. I assure Members that we are working at pace to review the current rules and will set out our proposed way forward as soon as possible.

Melanie Onn: I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for allowing this urgent question. The Minister is absolutely right: it is the tragic cases of 15-year-old Natasha Ednan-Laperouse and Celia Marsh that have thrown into sharp focus the common practices used by high-street convenience food providers to avoid doing all in their power to ensure their customers are safe. The Minister says the Government are taking this very seriously, but if that were the case surely the Secretary of State would be here to respond to the urgent question.

For years, this situation has been defended by the Government, who have said that tighter definition around, for example, regulation 5 of the food information regulations would be damaging to small business. But when did the Minister last review food label standards, and, given that regulations are supposed to be the bare minimum expected of companies, what have the Government done to make clear their expectations of food providers? The Minister referred to the expectation that, where there is signage, staff would be asked by customers whether there were any products with allergens, but how does he know whether those staff have been properly trained? Does he still think that signposting is sufficient as notice of potential allergy risks?

Have the Minister or the Secretary of State ever told larger companies that the expectations of Government are higher for them, given their vast customer base and extensive resources? Pret now says that it will include full ingredient labelling on all products—so they can do this when they want to. Must it always take a tragedy to effect meaningful change from this Government? Has the Secretary of State ever put this case across when in meetings with representatives of the sector?

Earlier in the year the Secretary of State spoke of "gold standard" food labelling but failed to mention allergies. Do he or his Department regret putting off a review of food labelling until after Brexit? If the Department introduces new legislation as recommended by the coroner in this inquest, will he also be ensuring that the Food Standards Agency is adequately resourced to make preventive checks in advance of another fatal incident occurring? Finally, does the Minister agree that, with food allergies seemingly on the rise, improved labelling, regulations around labelling and broader education about food allergies need to be put to the top of his "to do" list?

David Rutley: I thank the hon. Lady for her points, which she has raised with great sincerity and conviction, as always. I am sure that food is an important priority for the businesses in her constituency; it certainly is for many of us as well. She made an important point about discussions with small businesses. The Food Standards Agency, with whom I have been speaking this afternoon, is responsible for policy, and our local authorities work hard to take forward enforcement. In those conversations, it is clear that we are taking forward campaigns to improve awareness among consumers and businesses.

The hon. Lady also made important points about the steps that Pret a Manger is taking. It has set out what it is going to be doing initially, and it will—like the rest of us, particularly officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—be studying the coroner's report carefully, as it sets out some challenging conclusions. Pret will want to consider how it will approach its business in the light of those conclusions. I hope that I have set out clearly that it is a priority that we take action here, and as I have said, this is something the Secretary of State talked about in January, saying that we wanted to move this forward. Clearly, because of these tragic cases, that work needs to be accelerated with real pace.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): These are tragic cases, and it is clear that the law needs to be updated. Will my hon. Friend tell us how quickly he expects the law to be changed in this regard? Will he also say more about what the Government are doing to provide guidance to retailers, to ensure that this type of tragedy does not happen again?

David Rutley: I thank my hon. Friend for his questions. As I have said, we are taking this review forward at pace, and it is now being accelerated so that we can take forward a review of food standards and food labelling at real pace.

The other thing that we have been doing—clearly, in the light of these cases, we need to do more—is to make consumers and businesses aware of the options available, particularly to consumers. It is worth highlighting that we need to find ways of communicating to 16 to 24-year-olds, who are very vulnerable, the ways in which they can find the important information that they need when making food choices.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Clearly, the recent news of these two deaths caused by allergic reactions to Pret a Manger products has been absolutely tragic; I would like to echo the Minister's earlier comments and say that all our thoughts are with the families and friends of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse and Celia Marsh. These cases have demonstrated just how serious food allergies can be and the fatal consequences that can ensue. That is why proper, rigorous food labelling is paramount to our food safety standards. It was welcome that the Prime Minister called last week for a review of food labelling laws; that is something that I agree with and support. The Minister mentioned the review earlier, but when can we expect further information on when it will be completed and what it is likely to contain?

I appreciate that it is early days, following these events, but as we have seen, food labelling is a serious public health matter. To that end, what discussions have

DEFRA Ministers and officials had with their colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care? We welcome the fact that Pret a Manger and other retailers such as Greggs have said that they will review how they label their food. Pret is now saying that it will list all the ingredients, including allergens, in its freshly made products, but we need this to happen right across the board. This is absolutely vital for people with life-threatening food allergies. Full ingredients lists should not just be a “nice to have”. For some people, they really are the difference between life and death. Food producers, suppliers and retailers have a public health duty to ensure that every food item is properly labelled.

Tomorrow, we will be discussing the Government's Agriculture Bill, which will mean that the Environment Secretary will be in charge of our nation's food production for the first time in decades. The Bill also provides a unique opportunity to put in place strong laws around food that could include the full labelling of all ingredients, allergens in particular. As we have heard, the Food Standards Agency states that food products containing the 14 main ingredients likely to cause an allergic reaction must be labelled as such and that manufacturers must then make it clear whether products contain those allergens. However, under EU law, as the Minister mentioned earlier, that can be done orally—it does not have to be written down—so customers will have to go out of their way to ask staff if allergens are not listed on a label.

I am pleased that the Minister referred to that anomaly but, as requested by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), does the Minister believe that it is time to mandate that all allergens must be set out clearly in written format? Will he provide the House with a cast-iron guarantee that there will be no attempt to water down any current food labelling laws after Brexit? For example, in US law only eight major allergens have to be listed, as opposed to the FSA's 14, and any trade deal with the US cannot come at the price of watered-down food safety standards. We clearly need urgent action to ensure that British food labelling is as good as it possibly can be to ensure that such tragic cases never happen again.

David Rutley: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions. She makes penetrating points, as always. As the father of a daughter with allergy problems, I assure her that I take such things incredibly seriously. I have recently come to this post—we have worked together on issues such as the ivory ban—and she can rest assured that I will be taking this matter up with the utmost seriousness and will tackle it as a matter of urgency.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): When will we make it a requirement to label halal and kosher products as such to better inform consumers who may or may not wish to buy such products?

David Rutley: I will come back to my hon. Friend with further thoughts when we can meet to discuss that matter further.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Natasha Ednan-Laperouse was my constituent. When I met her father early last year, he relived the hour he spent trying to save her life on the British Airways flight from Heathrow

to Nice. No parent should have to go through such an appalling experience. I say gently to the Minister that I think he is the wrong person giving the wrong response today. Pret and the other food outlets have passed the buck to the Government, and the Government should not pass matters of policy to the Food Standards Agency. Will he at least say when the review will report back and whether he will issue unofficial guidelines to food outlets in the meantime about listing ingredients and contamination? Finally, will he co-ordinate with his colleagues in Government on consumer safety? Local authorities are now so denuded of funds that trading standards and other agencies are unable to enforce the law even as it is.

David Rutley: I am sitting next to a Health and Social Care Minister, so I can assure the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) that we will be working closely and carefully across Government. He makes an important point about the tragic circumstances in which Natasha's parents found themselves, and this situation is testament to them and the way that they have conducted themselves. The Secretary of State has written to them and is keen to meet them to discuss their concerns and how to move things forward. The report will be swift, but we received the coroner's report only today and it sets out some challenging conclusions to which we need to respond properly.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I am sure that every one of us who is a parent will have found the account of what Natasha's parents had to go through harrowing and awful. I am therefore delighted that the Minister is responding as he is. Does he agree that a new law to recognise their daughter would be a fitting tribute to their bravery and dedication?

David Rutley: Absolutely. As a parent, one can barely consider what they must have gone through during those hours on the flight and afterwards.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Speaking as one who always has to carry two epipens, I think that the Government need to take a wider view. Please could the review also include restaurant food, and will the Minister talk to his colleagues in the Department of Health about better training for medics and paramedics and more research into this growing crisis?

David Rutley: Yes, it does need to be wide. Yes, we need to involve other areas such as training for paramedics. We need to make sure that there is much better information and training. It is very serious, and I will make sure that that happens.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): I very much echo the condolences offered from the Dispatch Box, and warmly welcome the review that my hon. Friend the Minister has outlined today. However, in my constituency there are dozens of small food producers, many of whom produce food for direct sale at markets around Somerset and the wider south-west. While my hon. Friend will want to strengthen the regulations for large retailers, may I encourage him to apply some common sense in the way in which we apply them to small producers selling locally?

David Rutley: Common sense, yes, but the priority has to be food safety. UK consumers need to feel safe when they consume food, wherever it may be, and we need to find mechanisms to ensure that, whether food manufacturers and retailers are small or large, they get information across to consumers. It needs to be proportionate, but it needs to be effective as well.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I am sure that the hearts of the whole House went out to Natasha's family as they relived at the coroner's inquest her tragic and avoidable death. Natasha was a careful consumer who was not given the information that she needed from Pret a Manger to keep herself safe. Does her death not show that the current food labelling regulations are not fit for purpose? Will the Minister ensure that no amount of special pleading, loopholes and laxity on the part of the food industry deters him from his, I am sure, definite intent to tighten the labelling regulations, strengthen trading standards enforcement and increase the money that goes from his Department to the public analysts so that food in shops can be tested?

David Rutley: As I have said on several occasions in responding to this urgent question, there is no question but that we need to strengthen the regulations. We need to get to grips with the coroner's report. I echo the hon. Lady's point that there should be no wriggling off the hook here. It is important that Pret a Manger and other companies look at that report and its implications and work out how they are going to respond.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is 30 years since my father was diagnosed as a coeliac—a condition that I know is shared by at least one person on the Treasury Bench this afternoon. In that time, we have gone from having to walk round a supermarket with a book, hoping that ingredients had not changed since it was published, to being able to rely on the labelling on a product to know whether it is suitable for him.

What further progress does the Minister think that the Government could make in looking at technological solutions that allow consumers to use smart phones and apps to get a full list of ingredients, not just the ones that might be on a label?

David Rutley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We need to look at all means possible to provide the information. It is pivotal that we respond to the needs particularly of 16 to 24-year-olds, who are beginning to make independent choices about their food. Let us find ways of making that information available. Technology will be important, especially for that generation.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Most of those who suffer from food allergies rely on medicines to manage their reactions, but the data sheets for the medicines themselves are often incomplete. A constituent explained to me last week that medicines for handling anaphylactic reactions can often include lactose and soya without having that on the data sheet. So as well as looking to his own departmental responsibilities, will he speak to his colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that when people rely on medicines, they know that they can use them safely?

David Rutley: That is another important point, and I will make sure officials factor it into their review; we need to work closely with colleagues from the Department of Health and Social Care to make sure it is factored into the approach we take forward.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): As well as more careful food labelling, will my hon. Friend look at fake labelling? I do not know whether he has seen today's *Daily Mail*, which suggests that the claims made by Pret a Manger of supplying fresh bread are far from the case and that the bread is actually frozen for a year and comes from France. It is important that consumers are not deceived—they pay a lot of money for these products. Will he therefore look at fake labelling and make sure that it does not happen?

David Rutley: We should be proud of the standard of our food in the UK; we are world-renowned for it. My right hon. Friend makes an important point: retailers and manufacturers need to be transparent about the quality of their food. We want it to be of the highest level. We need to be clear as to where the product—in this case, bread—is sourced from and how it is then prepared for consumption. All these things need to be much more transparent for the consumer—he is absolutely right.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Pret is not a small corner shop, but a large industrial producer of food. It baked into that baguette a known allergen and then proceeded to sell it without labelling it, using a loophole meant for small corner shops. The Minister should be outraged about that. I welcome the fact he has said he will strengthen the law, but what is he going to do to strengthen enforcement and the capacity of trading standards and the FSA to enforce the rules? Enforcement is as important as getting the rules right.

David Rutley: Yes, we need to get the rules right, we need to enforce and we need to ensure that business steps up to the plate. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that Pret is not a corner shop, but a major player in the food sector. I hope Members of this House will read the coroner's report, because it is incredibly challenging and Pret needs to step up to the plate and see what the reports are—[*Interruption.*] She asks from a sedentary position what the Department is doing. As I have said, we are going to be strengthening the allergen labelling framework. That review is under way, but I hope she will understand when I say that we do need to take into account what the coroner's report has said and we received it only this morning.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I absolutely share the sentiments that have been expressed this afternoon, but in advance of being able to change the law is there any scope for an industry-led approach, working with Government, to see things improve sooner?

David Rutley: It is important that we take forward this review to ensure that this is done robustly, but it is crucial that businesses step forward and address any concerns that consumers have. It is good business practice and businesses should be doing it.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Surely the Government should step out of their complacent attitude to regulation and strengthen enforcement, too. Instead

of seeing regulation as something to be avoided and red tape as a dirty word, surely it is about time the Minister and his Department stepped up to the plate and did the things that need to be done to protect the consumer.

David Rutley: And we are; I have said on numerous occasions that we will be strengthening the allergen labelling framework. We are committed to doing that—

Ms Angela Eagle: When?

David Rutley: As soon as possible, because we do not want to see any more of these cases that we have so tragically heard about in recent days; we need to take the steps to do that in an organised way.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The investigation into Natasha's death showed that she died a tragic and avoidable death, one that could have been prevented by better food labelling. I welcome the fact that the Minister is looking at this issue with great speed. Can he give any indication about the timeframe, because others remain at risk during this period?

David Rutley: I cannot give any further indication, other than that we will be working at pace and taking the report forward as soon as possible. As Members have said—and I feel the same way—we want to make sure that all consumers are safe. I re-emphasise, though, that the coroner's report has only just been received and we need to take it into account in the final conclusions.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Food labelling concerns put pressure on the NHS as people check for allergies. Knowing about an allergy can be a matter of life or death. What are the Government doing to approve and promote fast and reliable tests to diagnose allergies and help to save lives?

David Rutley: We need to work closely with the hospitals, and I will work closely on this with my colleagues in the Department. Interesting feedback mechanisms are being piloted in the north-east, where hospitals are providing feedback to local authorities on allergies and how best to respond to them. That sort of best practice needs to be taken forward.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): For how long does the Minister think that large conglomerates have been taking advantage of this loophole, in the form of looser regulation of food prepared on the premises, which is meant to protect small businesses? What message will he send out to those conglomerates to stop taking advantage of it prior to the publication of his review?

David Rutley: When the initial regulations were established, stakeholders were involved in framing them, and those stakeholders included organisations involved with allergy work. There are some situations, especially those involving younger people who may not be familiar with packaging, in which people can have a conversation with an individual across the counter so that they can understand what allergens might be in a particular product. I have had those conversations myself. That is a mechanism and we need to make sure that it is properly enforced. As I have said a couple of times at

the Dispatch Box, it is really important that businesses look into how they can increase consumer confidence in their work. We will take forward at pace the review of the regulations, in order to play our part, too.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I add my condolences to those expressed for the family and friends of the two victims.

In January, on being notified by the coroner that Celia Marsh had died at the Royal United Hospital in Bath, Bath and North East Somerset Council notified Pret A Manger, but it appears that the council did not notify the FSA, which was notified by Pret A Manger six weeks later—a long delay. What public responsibility does Bath and North East Somerset Council trading standards have to regulate and enforce food safety in our city?

David Rutley: I am not able to give a complete update on the situation in respect of Celia Marsh's death because the investigations are still ongoing. On the hon. Lady's point about enforcement in her local area, I will gladly meet her and we can decide how to take the matter forward.

Dangerous Waste and Body Parts Disposal: NHS

4.13 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to make a statement on the accumulation of hundreds of tonnes of dangerous waste.

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): As I set out in the written statement published this morning, on 31 July the Environment Agency notified central Government of an issue concerning clinical waste disposal. The primary concern was that too much waste was being held by a contractor, Healthcare Environment Services, in a number of waste storage and treatment sites. This included waste collected from hospitals and other public services. Although the waste was stored securely, it was not being disposed of within the correct regulatory timescales.

The Department of Health and Social Care, the NHS, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Environment Agency and the Cabinet Office have worked together to resolve the issues. Our priority throughout has been to ensure that proper measures were put in place to enable trusts to continue to operate as normal. A major part of the contingency plans concerned commercially sensitive contractual discussions with HES and other providers.

Following the Environment Agency's partial suspension of HES's Normanton site, which came into force on 3 October 2018, NHS Improvement wrote to HES to raise its concerns. NHSI gave HES an opportunity to set out how it was complying with its legal and contractual obligations; HES failed to provide that assurance. As a result, 15 NHS trusts served contract termination notices on Sunday 7 October. As part of our contingency arrangements, we ran a tender process with the clinical waste sector before awarding a new contract to Mitie. As contracts with HES were terminated over the weekend, Mitie stepped in and, from Monday morning, provided continuing waste collection and incineration across all of these organisations.

In September, officials from the Department of Health and Social Care visited each of the major trauma centres affected and confirmed that waste was being stored correctly and that contingency plans were in place.

In addition, visits have been undertaken to each of the sites by the Environment Agency this weekend and this week, alongside earlier visits. The Environment Agency is continuing its enforcement action against HES. This includes ensuring that excess waste is cleared from non-compliant sites. The Government are working with the Environment Agency and the NHS to ensure that lessons are learned, and we are reviewing how contracts will be awarded in the future. I have updated the House on this situation today as new contracts were implemented on Sunday following the conclusion of this commercially sensitive process. Our priority throughout has been to ensure that measures were put in place so that the NHS could continue operating as normal. No gap in service provision has been reported and we are working to ensure that that remains the case.

Jonathan Ashworth: This is an absolutely horrific scandal. A private contractor has failed in its responsibilities to a quite staggering degree. Three hundred and fifty tonnes of waste, including human body parts, amputated limbs, infectious fluid and substances of cancer, was left effectively stockpiled and not safely disposed of; it is an absolute scandal. How on earth did we get to this? If the Environment Agency first raised concerns in March, if Ministers were formally informed in July, and if Cobra was convened and chaired by the Health Secretary last month—by the way, I really think that the Health Secretary should be answering questions at the Dispatch Box today—why was the decision taken not to inform Parliament and the public sooner? Given that concerns were raised in March, why did the NHS not intervene earlier? In fact, concerns were raised with NHS England last year, so can the Minister tell us what monitoring, if any, of the HES contract was put in place by the Department and Ministers?

The Minister referred to 15 trusts having terminated their contracts. The *Health Service Journal* reported that up to 50 trusts were affected. Will he clarify what the status is of the contracts with the remaining 35 trusts? Where Mitie has taken over the contracts, what regulation and oversight of Mitie and its subcontractors is now in place? Is he confident that there are enough incinerators across the country to dispose of waste in a timely manner?

Let me turn now to the public health implications. At the Normanton site, we were told that waste is now in refrigerators, but where was it before if not in refrigerators? Hospitals are now using temporary containers, but questions have been raised about the public safety implications of those containers. Can the Minister give us an absolute guarantee that those containers are safe and that there is no public health risk?

We are picking up the pieces, yet again, of another disastrous procurement of an outsourced contract by a private firm going wrong. What plans are now in place to ensure that something like this never happens again?

Stephen Barclay: Let me pick up on the various points that the hon. Gentleman has raised. On when Parliament was told, as I said in my statement, the partial suspension notice was served on the company on 3 October and new contracts were put in place over the weekend. This is, therefore, the first opportunity, following what had been commercially sensitive negotiations, to notify the House. It is also right to remind Members that the key strategic objective throughout has been to maintain operations at NHS hospitals to ensure that clinical waste is being collected. That strategic objective has been maintained at all times.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of other questions, including whether there is enough incinerator capacity in the system. The answer to that is, yes there is. There are 24 incinerators. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimates that there is more than 30,000 tonnes of spare capacity in the system, and that there is significant capacity over and above that required by HES to perform its contract, so I can be very clear to the House that, moving forward, there is sufficient incinerator capacity.

The hon. Gentleman used some inflammatory language. It is worth reminding the House that just 1.1% of this clinical waste is anatomical, so some of the media headlines are slightly out of step with reality. The partial

suspension that has been served on Normanton is solely in respect of the incinerator; it does not apply to the other sites under HES contractual arrangements with the trust.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the waste was being secured safely. The answer is yes; the Environment Agency has been inspecting the situation. The issue is the overstorage of waste, not that the waste is not being stored in a safe manner. *[Interruption.]* Well, that is the legal remit of the Environment Agency, which is an independent body. It is right that the law is applied; the hon. Gentleman may not like to apply the law, but this is the legal process. Officials from the Department of Health have been to the major trauma sites to see the contingency plans at first hand, and the storage and capacity is in place at those sites.

The reality is that there was a contractual arrangement with a supplier that stored the waste correctly, but stored too much of it. The Environment Agency is enforcing against that. We have put in place contingency plans within the trusts and set up alternative provision in the form of a contract with Mitie. The key strategic objective of ensuring that NHS operations continue has been secured.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I thank the Minister for the prompt action that he has taken since being notified of this situation. Will he reassure people in the community and in community settings that this issue will not affect their safety?

Stephen Barclay: The Chair of the Health Committee raises an important point regarding residents in the areas where the sites are located, and I see the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) in her place. The Environment Agency has confirmed that the waste is being stored safely; it is the amount of waste that is the issue. Many of our constituents are waiting for operations on these sites and will want reassurance that those operations can continue in a timely fashion. That has been a key focus of the Department, and I pay tribute to the work of officials in the NHS, the Department of Health, DEFRA and the Environment Agency, who have ensured that that strategic objective has been maintained.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): This situation does indeed sound graphic and horrific. Equally, I recognise that much of this waste will be cytotoxic, including drugs and syringes. We are talking about materials that are contaminated with faeces, infectious material and blood. We are discussing five sites across England. HES also has two sites in Scotland, both of which have been checked and do not have overstorage.

We hear that HES was served with 13 warning notices and two compliance notices over the past year. If that information was not accelerated up to the Department of Health, should it have been? HES says that it has been reporting its issue with incineration to regulators for quite a long time, yet the Minister says that there is no issue of capacity, so could not the Department have responded by directing HES to all this extra incineration capacity that apparently exists? As more local authorities are going towards zero-waste and incinerating material that would have been in landfill, the pressure will increase. There is probably ageing infrastructure and a need to expand, so do the Government plan a waste incineration strategy?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that HES has sites in Scotland; I think there are four. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has been conducting regular site inspections and we are looking closely at the situation there—not least regarding the movement of waste from one site to another. However, she is correct that we are not aware of any specific issues at those sites.

The primary purpose of enforcement notices has been to encourage the company back into compliance. That has been the focus of the Environment Agency. The reason for the partial suspension in Normanton has been the unwillingness of the company to respond. Some notices are for what might be seen as relatively minor issues such as documentation, but obviously some relate to the overstorage on these sites.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am pleased that new contracts have been signed and enforcement action has been taken—and quickly—but what is really important are the lessons learned, so will the Minister expand on that? While this is a sensitive matter—understandably, it evokes all kinds of concerns for the public—will the Minister assure us that there has been no risk to patients at any time or indeed to the wider public from this most concerning of issues?

Stephen Barclay: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question, and I am happy to give her constituents an assurance that there has been no risk to patients at any point during this time. As for lessons learned, clearly we will need to look at some of the lessons, particularly what triggers a breach of contract. A series of contracts were held by a wide number of trusts with the supplier, and it is important that we look at what the notification periods are, what the monitoring and enforcement processes are, and what powers there are under the terms of the contract to ensure that the company is acting as it should.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): We still do not have the basic facts about what medical waste is being held at the Normanton site, how far over the environmental limits it currently is, and what the timetable is for compliance. Perhaps the Minister would share that information with us. Does he not accept that it is a basic principle that, when dealing with any kind of public health or environmental health risk or incident, proper, full, factual information is provided to the public and the community at the earliest possible opportunity? You do not hide behind contractual negotiations. Does he accept that there is nothing in the contract negotiations that would have prevented him or the Health Secretary from providing some basic facts about those risks much, much earlier than today?

Stephen Barclay: On the split to which the right hon. Lady referred between clinical waste and other waste at the Normanton site—she rightly focused on that for her constituents—just under a third of the flow of waste to the site is clinical. Just over two thirds, in my understanding, is non-clinical. It is not the case that all the waste on the Normanton site is clinical waste. As I have mentioned, some media reports about what the term “clinical waste” constitutes are slightly different from the reality.

As for notification, I set that out in my written ministerial statement and in my comments today. The key focus is on maintaining the continuity of operations and service within the NHS trusts so that we are not in a position where clinical waste cannot be cleared from them. That is the focus, and that is why, given the commercial negotiations and the contingency arrangements that have been put in place, we came to the House today, and not at an earlier point.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): In the end, the system has worked. There has been no back-up of clinical waste in hospitals—it has just been overstored in these sites. However, it is worrying, if it is true, that 13 warning notices and two compliance notices were issued to the company. Does the Minister think that he should be alerted earlier by the Environment Agency if this sort of thing happens in future?

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend makes a valid point about the lessons to be learned from this. Part of what I would expect to look at as we move forward are questions about when the NHS was first made aware of this and what powers are available to enforce at an earlier stage. As I have mentioned, enforcement notices cover a spectrum of risk. Some of those risks are more technical in nature than others, so while there have been 13 notices, their enforcement encompasses a range of severity.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): According to its most recent accounts, HES made a gross profit of over £15 million last year. What financial penalty will it suffer because of its gross incompetence?

Stephen Barclay: The first financial penalty it has suffered is the prompt action we took over the weekend, with 15 NHS trusts cancelling those contracts and moving across. There is a clear financial penalty in that loss of business. As for fines, that is a matter of legal process, through the Environment Agency, in the normal way. That is not an NHS matter. The focus for the NHS is on maintaining continuity of service.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): The Minister will be aware that my constituents want to be assured that their operations in Redditch and Worcester will be able to continue as normal. Can he give them that assurance?

Stephen Barclay: Yes, I can.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Government like to talk tough on waste criminals, but here we have waste criminals storing 350 tonnes of clinical waste illegally—five times the amount to be compliant—at their site in Normanton, and despite the Minister being told about this on 31 July, neither the local MP nor constituents were informed. Cobra was informed. A criminal investigation is now under way into the company. Can he ensure that not a single acute hospital trust will lose one penny piece as a result of this criminal negligence?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Lady raises several points. On the 350 tonnes of waste, I clarified the flow of that waste in my comments to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and I said that not all of it is clinical. I was not personally told on 31 July. I set out in my written statement when the NHS and then Ministers were told.

[Stephen Barclay]

The question about whether there is any cost to NHS trusts is a very valid one for all constituency MPs who wish to understand the situation. The contingency cost—for example, from the additional capacity being put in place at trusts—will be borne centrally by the NHS family, and the cost of processing clinical waste will be borne by NHS trusts, as it has been to date.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the action the Minister has taken to terminate the contracts with this company, given its clear breaches and failure to deliver what it said it would. In his statement, he referred to the capacity for clinical waste incineration. Can he give us further detail about how he satisfied himself that there is capacity in each region? Clearly, these are specialist facilities, and having to transport waste could have a knock-on effect.

Stephen Barclay: I should clarify that it is not me personally who has terminated these contracts. These contracts with HES are held by the trusts themselves, and therefore it is a decision taken by those trusts.

As I said earlier, there is significant additional capacity within the incinerator landscape to process the waste generated by this contract, and therefore the suggestion in some quarters that this is an issue of a lack of capacity is simply not valid. To be clear, HES produces 595 tonnes of waste a month that goes to incineration, and the NHS identified 2,269 tonnes of incineration capacity, so reports that there is a lack of capacity in the market are not valid.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I learned from the *Health Service Journal* that Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust was one of those affected. It is totally unacceptable that clearly one of Ministers' objectives was to cover things up for as long as possible to save their own blushes because of the failure of a Government contractor. Members of this House should not learn of such events from the media. We should hear it from Ministers via the Dispatch Box or the relevant Select Committee—or there is such a thing as email.

Ministers have announced that £1 million of contingency funding is to be made available to support trusts affected. Will that be met from existing departmental budgets, or will money be allocated by the Treasury? Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), surely it should be the failing contractor that coughs up £1 million, if not more. It should not come from taxpayers.

Stephen Barclay: We all learn things on a regular basis from the *HSJ*, but it seems misplaced to suggest that the hon. Gentleman should have been told about this when we were ensuring continuity of service and putting in place alternative arrangements to ensure that operations could continue at Barking and other hospitals. I have already addressed that point.

As I said, some of the cost—the contingency cost—will be absorbed centrally. The normal cost of clearing clinical waste was borne by the trusts before and will continue to be borne by the trusts.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I welcome the fact that there has been no gap in service provision and no public health risk and that the Minister has confirmed that nobody's operation has been delayed because of this build-up of clinical waste, but it is still concerning that the contract was not properly delivered. How long has he given the site to return to compliance and what action is he taking to supervise the remaining contracts?

Stephen Barclay: The key issue for performance under the contracts is what, contractually, the legal requirements on HES are and whether those contractual terms have been breached. Part of the lessons learned is to look at whether contractual enforcement powers are sufficient. In terms of moving forward in respect of the other HES sites, that will depend on the contracts that the supplier has and whether it is in breach of those contracts or of enforcement action from the Environment Agency. To date, the Environment Agency has served one partial suspension, on the Normanton site. As I referred to, the Environment Agency was at the other site over the weekend. This is an area of significant scrutiny, but it will be for the Environment Agency to determine whether the company is not in compliance with its permits.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): So far, the Minister appears to have been far more interested in contractual arrangements than in public accountability. Can he explain how come Cobra has met and this House has not been informed of it? This House should be informed about Cobra meetings as soon as possible after they are finished.

Stephen Barclay: I am not sure about the exact protocols for when Cobra should and should not be reported, but given that it usually deals with highly confidential matters, I would have thought that not every issue should necessarily be reported in the first instance. We have been focused not on contractual niceties, but on ensuring that the NHS continues to deliver first-class services. As I referred to earlier, this is the first opportunity we have had following the conference recess to notify the House, following the contractual arrangements being made.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the backlog of waste will be dealt with speedily, in accordance with the requirements of the law and with appropriate supervision?

Stephen Barclay: I very much share my hon. Friend's desire for the backlog to be cleared as speedily as possible. As I referred to a moment ago, this is an area of scrutiny for the Environment Agency, and it is important that the company complies with its legal requirements and ensures that the level of waste is in line with its permits as soon as possible.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Hospitals such as Scunthorpe general cannot run effectively without the safe and secure disposal of clinical waste, which is exactly why it is important that the Minister has made the comments that he has today. Northern Lincolnshire and Goole trust quite properly put in place local contingencies, because obviously it could not rely on things being sorted out. It now looks as though

contingencies are sorted nationally, so can he be very clear that local trusts will not face a penny more of extra costs as a result?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman raises a fair point, and I want to be clear about the distinction. Additional cost arising from the contingency arrangement—for example, putting in place extra storage on the trust's sites—will not be an additional cost on the trust. I hope that that will reassure him, although I do not want to suggest to him that there will be no financial impact on trusts, because the requirement to clear clinical waste sits with the trust. That is why the trusts themselves had contracts with the supplier. The ongoing arrangements are likely to mean some increased cost, as the new supplier comes on board. That will fall to the trust, but not the contingency element.

Government Overseas Aid Commitment: Private Investment

4.39 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her plans to use private investment to make up part of the Government's commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on overseas development aid.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): Combined global investment flows into developing nations are currently \$1.4 trillion, leaving a funding gap of over \$2.5 trillion to deliver the global goals. With 12 years left on those goals, we are currently 80 years adrift on nutrition, 100 years adrift on education and 200 years adrift on ending extreme poverty. If we want to deliver those goals, we have to let others help, including the private sector.

We know that we have had good returns from our investments in developing nations—CDC manages an average annual return in sterling of 7%—so investing in developing nations could offer investors and pension holders a greater return on savings. We have £8 trillion under investment in the City of London. If 1% of that were redirected to Africa, that would lever \$110 billion. Compare that with the total aid spend of \$50 billion currently going into Africa. I believe that the public would be interested in their savings and pension funds helping this agenda to deliver the global goals. Imagine an app that allowed someone to select which particular goals they wanted their savings or pension fund to help.

We have the tools to do this. At the United Nations General Assembly a few weeks ago, we unveiled the World Benchmarking Alliance, which will grade companies' performance against the global goals. We have the expertise to do this, in the City of London, in the Department for International Development, with our partners, and also through our world-beating impact investment organisations. We therefore want to explore doing this.

Today, I have announced a national conversation with financial institutions, with savers, with pensioners and with the wider public. We will announce the results at a UK-Africa investment conference next year. This is the only way we will deliver the global goals. Over the past two years, we have also worked with our partners to shift the dial on international aid rules, allowing our aid budget to help the private sector invest in sustainable development more than ever before. I will continue to work with our partners at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to ensure that the aid rules incentivise donors to lever in private sector investment where it is needed.

In future years, as the amount of funding coming back into our own development financial instruments—publicly owned financial instruments—increases, we should be open to using the profits to count towards the 0.7%. I am exploring the scope to reinvest those funds with the Development Assistance Committee to maximise the value of our investments. We remain committed to 0.7%—it was this Government who introduced it—but as we do so, we should ensure that the British public get a triple return on their generosity and compassion; a stronger personal return to them, a stronger Britain, and a more prosperous and secure world.

Kate Osamor: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question and the Secretary of State for being here. This country's commitment to spend 0.7 % of our national income on overseas aid is a clear expression of how deeply the UK public care about eradicating poverty overseas. The public are therefore right to feel betrayed by the Secretary of State's speech today, in which she has suggested that global poverty can be utilised as a lucrative investment opportunity. It is deeply concerning to learn of her plans to redefine aid through today's media reports.

As the rules that govern aid spending are set at an international level by the OECD, can the Secretary of State tell us what precise rules she wants to change? In the absence of any detail, we can only speculate on how she believes these new investments will help the world's poorest. Her claim that private investment is a win-win is not based on the evidence. We all know that there are both winners and losers from foreign investment in the global south. Her vision will leave the most vulnerable people at the mercy of global markets.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that her approach will mean major development issues that are not considered profitable will no longer get the funding they need? The press report that this private investment will replace public contributions to the UK's aid budget. Will she confirm whether this is indeed her plan? I think the public deserve to know.

Penny Mordaunt: I gave a lengthy speech this morning and there is plenty of detail in there. *[Interruption.]* It is online, so the hon. Lady can read it.

Let me be very clear about the rule changes we would explore. Currently, when we capitalise an investment instrument, we count it as official development assistance. When we make the investment, we do not. We are very happy with that—we have argued for it—and that is what happens now. In future years, however, once we have capitalised those instruments, we may wish to change the way we do it. *[Interruption.]* It is not double-counting; it is allowing the returns we make on those investments to be used more flexibly. We are very happy and it suits us at the moment to do this. The issue is that if we then reinvest those funds in development, they do not count towards the 0.7%, and if we take them out, to spend on the NHS or another domestic priority, it counts negatively. What we are arguing for is exploring, at this stage, changing the rules to allow us to do that.

In addition, we have to accept that, even with the combined total of our budget and those of other nations, we will not deliver the global goals unless we let the private sector do more. Currently, the £8 trillion in the City could be put to better use and may actually deliver higher returns for pension funds. They will do a huge amount of good in the developing world.

The hon. Lady asks me for examples. CDC, which I understand she wishes to abolish, is the oldest development financial institution in the world. Last year, it made investments of over £1 billion, which created 735,000 jobs. We need to create 18 million jobs every year until 2035 just to keep up with population growth in Africa, and that is what we need to do to eradicate extreme poverty. If the hon. Lady has a better suggestion on how to raise \$2.5 trillion I would be very interested to hear it.

I am here not to make us feel good about spending aid money; I am here to eradicate extreme poverty. We cannot do that without business and we cannot do that without the private sector. Dogma has no place in this debate.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If we are to avoid a growing army of underemployed, desperate and angry young people, we need 600 million new jobs over the next decade. Does the Secretary of State imagine that that can be provided without an enormous mobilisation of private sector investment in the developing world?

Penny Mordaunt: My right hon. Friend is right. We are entering into the final decade and the last push towards the global goals. We have to be realistic. If we are going to achieve them, and I want to achieve them, we have to let other people help.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is disappointing that this has had to be an urgent question and not a statement and that it has been made while the International Development Committee is travelling, which is why I am standing here and not my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law).

It is also disappointing in terms of the impact of this announcement. For many years, despite everything else going on, there has been cross-party consensus and huge public support for the delivery of the 0.7% target through public funds. The UK is supposed to be a world leader in this area. This kind of back-peddling and backsliding, and finding different ways to leverage the 0.7%, actually risks undermining that global leadership, which I thought was supposed to be a Government priority in the face of Brexit.

Does the Secretary of State accept that meeting the global goals is in our interests of building a safer, more sustainable and secure world? They are not things that just happen elsewhere in poor countries overseas; they are for everybody's benefit. Why not be more ambitious and use this money to go beyond the 0.7 % target, which is what the Scottish National party proposed in our White Paper on independence? Will she confirm that she is committed to retaining that target in one shape or form? The Government are already double counting money spent to defence, and this is simply more of the same. If there is going to be an app that lets us choose how money is spent, when can I go on to it and choose to have my tax money spent on not Trident but on aid instead?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those questions, but I think he is a little confused about what the 0.7% is. It is not possible to count private investment towards that figure, so a pension fund down the road cannot count towards that 0.7%, but public funds can. The Development Assistance Committee measures many things, including private sector investment, but the 0.7% is public money.

If a future Government wished to, they could spend more than 0.7%, and we are committed to spend at least that amount of money. They could do so by counting the returns that were made. At the moment, we are spending more than 0.7% because we cannot do anything other than that with these funds—they do not count towards the 0.7%. We need to get the balance right between our commitments in this agenda, which are world leading—we introduced them and we believe in

them—and the demands we make of the British taxpayer. If in future years we can meet 0.7% without having to ask the British taxpayer for more money, that is an option we should explore.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): As the UK leaves the EU, does my right hon. Friend agree that it remains in our national interest to continue to tackle these global challenges, including migration, humanitarian crises, peace work and security, but that we also need to maximise the effectiveness of our overseas aid?

Penny Mordaunt: My right hon. Friend is right. We have the opportunity to look in future years at what we might do with the £1.5 billion that we channel into the EU. I have set out very clearly that we would like to continue to work with our European partners. If that is done through the EU, we would have to ensure that they do not discriminate against British non-governmental organisations, and I have outlined both before the Select Committee and in my speech today how we would protect British NGOs and their beneficiaries in such circumstances.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State stand by the unnamed briefing to newspapers done today on her behalf, which stated that

“when investors step in, the taxpayer can step back”?

Does she think there is any interpretation of such a statement other than that she intends to resile from this country's honourable commitment to spend 0.7% on development?

Penny Mordaunt: I and my staff—both my political staff and my DFID staff—did not brief that. What I can say is that if we can lift people out of poverty, which we need the private sector to do, as they are the ones who can create jobs and close that enormous funding gap on the global goals, I hope that in future years we will be able to spend less money on these things, because there will not be the need. But that lies many years ahead. There will always be a need for humanitarian aid, but we have made huge progress over the past few decades in lifting people out of poverty, and I want us to finish the job in Africa.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I welcome the comments from the Secretary of State on her commitment to the 0.7% target. Will she reassure the House that it remains a mission of this House and this Government to tackle the global challenges of climate change, humanitarian crises and economic development?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely can. That is why I am saying to the House, to the City and to our fellow donor nations that we have to start leveraging in others to help us with this agenda. If we really want to develop the global goals—we have been talking about the billions to trillions agenda for a very long time—we need to start delivering on it. Today, I have set out how we will start to do that.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): What steps is the Secretary of State taking to allow Parliament properly to scrutinise private investments in developing countries to ensure that they have a positive development impact on poorer countries?

Penny Mordaunt: I hope that the hon. Lady will welcome the announcement that was made at the UN General Assembly and that I reiterated in my speech today. For the first time, we have a tool that allows us to see how companies are graded against the delivery of the global goals—to see what they are doing socially and environmentally to ensure that the global goals are met. The benchmarking alliance unveiled at UNGA will be a huge tool not just for Parliaments and investors, but for the public, who, I think, care very much about how their savings and pensions are invested.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): My right hon. Friend is surely right to focus on the need to increase private sector investment in developing countries. However big the aid budget is, it will be dwarfed by private sector trade and investment flows, which are essential. Does she agree that aid is particularly important where private sector investment fails—for instance, in the development of new drugs that are essential to beat diseases such as tuberculosis?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely agree. The more we can help others to lean in and assist with job creation, the more we can do on areas that only we can deal with, particularly health and humanitarian matters.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I am not sure whether this was the Secretary of State's intention, but most of the press coverage about her speech this morning seemed to suggest that it was a leadership bid. On the subject of CDC—which, as I understand it, lost £73 million last year—can she confirm that she understands the concerns about CDC's investment in things such as shopping centres, which may not deliver the best bang for our buck in terms of aid?

Penny Mordaunt: As I mentioned, CDC has a long history. It has been around for 70 years, and over that time it has done many things. One of my right hon. Friends, a former Secretary of State, got CDC to change how it focused its investments. It is focused now on the poorest countries, and on Africa in particular, which is where the heavy lifting is still to be done. CDC still has some legacy investments in places such as Latin America and so forth, but it is primarily concerned with Africa. We need to dispel some of the myths about investing in such countries. We get good and very competitive returns on those investments, and I urge financial institutions and investors to look at the opportunities that exist in Africa and Asia.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State on her speech today. Can she confirm that she believes, as I do, that it is right and proper for our aid budget to support our national interest?

Penny Mordaunt: I set a new, higher spending bar for the Department, because in addition to spending money well, we have a duty to ensure that it could not be spent better. That means ensuring that we are doing the right thing within the development world and doing the best we can with that budget to improve health and education, but we also need to look across to our domestic priorities. If we are as explicit as we can be about the benefits to the British public of what we are doing in aid—for example, research that we have done has led to new treatments that are being used today on our NHS wards—I think the public will be pleased with that.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The global goals seek to end poverty, violence and hunger in all their forms in this country as well as overseas. The figure of 0.7% of gross national income on development assistance should be a floor, not a ceiling. Although I have some sympathy with the accounting issues that the Secretary of State is dealing with in terms of the reinvestment of any profits, I seek a guarantee from her that any investments that we make with that budget—either through the World Bank or the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank—are climate-neutral and environmentally friendly. I also say to her that not a single pension trustee in the country will invest overseas if they think that their investment is going to displace Government investment.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her understanding of the issue of how we account for ODA. I can reassure her: this is the Government who introduced the 0.7%, and I have been an aid worker and believe in aid spending. I think that if we do not spend money on development, we pile costs on to other areas of public spending such as defence. I can also reassure the hon. Lady that the speech that I made today—I urge her to read it, if she has not already done so—makes it clear that we want to do more. Indeed, we must do more, because otherwise we will not deliver the global goals. So I can give the hon. Lady that guarantee. She is absolutely right: the public want to know where their investments are going. They want to know the environmental issues, and they want to know the social issues.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the aid budget should be used to encourage investment from new sources, which includes helping the British public to invest in companies that will invest in the global goals? Does she agree that in the light of the serious and desperately troubling climate change and global warming issues raised this week, it is more important than ever for us to adopt this funding model, because otherwise we will never address the carbon issues that we face?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I think that only one in five high-net-worth individuals invests in ethical businesses, and businesses that will help us to deliver the global goals. We must do more if we are to deliver those goals, and we want to explore how we can help that to happen.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): This morning, I searched in vain for any content in the Secretary of State's leadership bid—I mean, her speech. The only content that I found was the statement that she was going to start a national conversation. Her party has only just successfully lobbied the OECD to change the rules to allow the billions invested in CDC to be counted as aid upfront, and now she says that she wants another change. May I, for the purpose of clarity, ask whether, if the Government have invested £1 in CDC and it recirculates two or three times, she counts that once as £1 from the Treasury, or counts it three, four, five, six times and pats herself on the back while reducing the 0.7%? Will she commit herself to the 0.7% as a floor and not a cap?

Penny Mordaunt: Let me reiterate that it is this Government who introduced the 0.7%. *[Interruption.]* We introduced it, and we have kept it. I am sure that

Opposition Members have not read the speech that I made today—if they had, they would know that the thrust of it was about leveraging more in.

What we are trying to do has nothing to do with some doctrine of the purity of aid, or what we should do with public money. It is about changing people's lives and about saving lives, and this is about our ability to deliver what is needed for us to do that. Because we are capitalising those investment vehicles, we are currently choosing to deal with ODA in one way. We argued for that, and we have agreement to do that. *[Interruption.]* What I am saying is that in future years, if we want to do more of this—if we want to make our aid budget more sustainable—we should explore these options now. We should do that in consultation with the people whose money we are spending, the British taxpayers, and in consultation with the organisations that are investing their savings and pensions. Otherwise, folks, we are not going to deliver the global goals, which is what we are here to do.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on injecting a big, cold dose of common sense and reality into how international aid might best be delivered. The poor, starving child in Africa who lives in a tin shack and whose parents do not have work does not really care whether it is the private sector or the public sector that delivers that aid, but if the involvement of the private sector means that that child is fed, his family housed and his parents employed, then bring it on.

Penny Mordaunt: I agree with my hon. Friend and stand ready to receive other advice from the Opposition Benches about how we might close the £2.5 trillion funding gap—the shadow Home Secretary is not allowed to help with the maths. If we can deliver that through private investment, we can deliver the global goals. We must stop this dogma in the aid sector that anything done by the private sector is a bad thing; it is the only way we can actually deliver the goals.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I remain committed to the 0.7% figure, but I have no issue if that is made up of taxpayers' money and a rate of return from taxpayers' money, so long as the sum total is 0.7%. But may I ask the Secretary of State for reassurance that decisions will be made not on what gives the greatest investment return, but on what will give the greatest humanitarian outcome?

Penny Mordaunt: Absolutely, and businesses are very interested in this agenda. They are interested in seeing how they can embed the global goals into their company reporting; there is huge demand for that, and for advice and support to enable them to do that. The possibilities are truly incredible, and we should support our entrepreneurs and those philanthropists who also want to donate, because they are another part of this issue with the potential that impact investing has. They want to do some good in this world, and we should support them to do that.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The Prime Minister's cuddly, compassionate Conservative pitch has not even lasted the first day back: not only have we just had a totally unnecessary and gratuitous attack on the shadow

Home Secretary from the International Development Secretary, but it is clear from the briefing that her speech this morning was a pitch to the right wing of the Conservative party as part of her leadership ambitions. The pitch is simple: we are going to roll in the private sector and roll back the state. That is what she has announced today, isn't it?

Penny Mordaunt: I will circulate my speech to hon. Members.

Hon. Members must understand that ODA, the 0.7%, cannot be private funds; it can only be public funds—whether money Governments have put in or returns potentially from those funds in those publicly owned investment vehicles. The hon. Gentleman accuses me of playing to the gallery; I am sorry, but I think Opposition Members are doing that. I have not heard an Opposition Member stand up and defend good British business that wants to use its resources to help alleviate and eradicate poverty. We are behind that agenda, and I urge Opposition Members to get with it, too.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As the Secretary of State will know, hundreds of millions of people around the world have been brought out of extreme poverty by global trade and investment, so it is bizarre to hear it attacked today. Does she agree that proper aid policies, teamed up with sustainable investment and good trade, are the very thing that will deliver a vision for the future for many third-world countries, rather than a vision of Venezuela?

Penny Mordaunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. We have talked about distant investors and pension funds, but this is also about British entrepreneurs. I had a meeting with an entrepreneur this afternoon; he is a young gentleman who is setting up factories to produce clothing around the world. He is taking women who have been living on the streets and giving them a job, and giving them healthcare, education and childcare. He is doing amazing things. Business can be a huge force for good. We now have tools to monitor what business is doing and what progress businesses are making, and we ought to get behind them and let them help.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I chair the all-party group on Africa, which has been at the forefront of promoting greater good trade and investment links with Africa as being in all our interests. However, that must complement, not replace, our aid commitment. In treating pensions investments as aid, the Secretary of State is sending a signal that our pensioners should be dependent on returns on charitable donations and that trade with Africa is a question of charity. Is she really saying that we will be monitoring these new funding investments through company reporting, rather than making the investment fund managers accountable to this House?

Penny Mordaunt: No, I am sorry, but the hon. Lady is confusing two things. There are private funds completely separate from Government, including pension funds and other financial instruments, investing in Africa, and that is what we want them to do—*[Interruption.]* Well, we do not do enough of it. There is £8 trillion in the City that could be levered to that cause, so we do not do enough of that. The hon. Lady is confusing that with something else—namely, public funds and publicly

owned investment vehicles such as CDC, the India Infrastructure Fund and the Private Infrastructure Development Group. Their profits, which are wholly public funds, have the potential to be used for years hence to count towards our aid.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend welcome the fact that, as we leave the EU, we will be able to have additional control over the £1.5 billion within our international aid budget that we currently channel through the EU? Does she think that we could use that money to achieve the global development goals?

Penny Mordaunt: We have all sorts of choices ahead of us as we take back control of that money. I have outlined today that I think we should be doing more investment to create the jobs and livelihoods that these nations need to lift themselves out of poverty and to bring a return to the UK, so that we can make the work that we do more sustainable and, if we choose, increase it.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): There is a legal duty under the International Development Act 2002 to ensure that aid spending is spent on poverty reduction overseas. There is also a responsibility on investors to maximise returns for their pension holders and shareholders. Those are probably contradictory priorities. Does the Secretary of State recognise that, if she is talking about this investment in terms of aid rather than of investment, she is going to have to change that legislation? Alternatively, is she talking about something entirely different from what we currently understand aid spending to be?

Penny Mordaunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave a moment ago. These are two different things, and I think many Opposition Members are confusing them. One reason why we are in the 0.7% club is that we do not mark our own homework; someone else does. That should provide some reassurance to people that we are not doing something that we are saying we are.

There is a difference when it comes to what a private company, entirely separate from Government, chooses to do—and what we are trying to encourage them to do: do some good in the world by investing in the developing nations that need investment and get a great return on their investment. There is a separate issue about what we do with public funds, which count towards the ODA spend. We are not talking about using private funds to replace that.

In terms of the Development Assistance Committee rules, we are talking about looking at how we count ODA, and about ensuring that when we get returns back we have more flexibility on what we do with them. We could spend more money on development or we could retain our 0.7% commitment and spend some of those returns on the national health service.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful to the Secretary of State. I appreciate that it is sometimes convenient, not least within Government Departments, for Ministers to use shorthand, but for the avoidance of doubt and for the benefit of those attending to our proceedings who are not within the curtilage of the Chamber, I should point out that ODA refers not to an unpleasant smell but to overseas development assistance.

EU Exit Negotiations

5.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Dominic Raab): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will update the House on the progress in the negotiations to leave the EU and on the Government's planning for no deal. Since I last updated the House, our negotiations with the EU have continued and intensified, and we were engaging constructively with our EU counterparts over the recess break. Let me take the main areas of the negotiations in turn.

On the withdrawal agreement, while there remain some differences, we are closing in on workable solutions to all the key outstanding issues, building on the progress made during the summer on issues such as data and information, the treatment of ongoing police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters, and ongoing Union judicial and administrative procedures after the date of exit. We have also been discussing our proposals on the linkage needed between the withdrawal agreement and the future relationship, and the EU is engaging constructively.

On the Northern Ireland protocol, we remain committed to the undertakings we made in the joint report back in December to agree a backstop in case there is a delay between the end of the implementation period and the entry into force of the treaty on our future relationship. That was agreed to avoid any risk of a return to a hard border in the intervening period, but we will not accept anything that threatens the constitutional or economic integrity of the United Kingdom. Creating any form of customs border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, which is what the EU had proposed, would put that at risk and that is unacceptable. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, it is not something that she, nor any British Prime Minister, could agree to. We are engaging with the EU on our alternative proposals that preserve the integrity of the UK. They will be in line with the commitments we made back in December, including the commitment that no new regulatory barriers should be created between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK unless the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly agree.

On the future relationship, we continue to make progress on, for example, both the internal and external security arrangements for future co-operation, although there is still some way to go. As the House will know, the Prime Minister presented our proposals on the economic partnership to EU leaders at the informal Salzburg summit. We understand that the EU has raised some concerns, particularly around the distinction between goods and services under the common rulebook and with respect to the facilitated customs arrangement. We continue to engage constructively with the EU, and we continue to press our case. The UK's White Paper proposals are the best way of ensuring that there is continued frictionless trade in goods after Britain leaves the EU while fulfilling the joint commitment to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and respecting the referendum.

The negotiations were always bound to be tough in the final stretch. That is all the more reason why we should hold our nerve and stay resolute and focused, and I remain confident that we will reach a deal this autumn because that is still in the best interests of the

United Kingdom and the European Union. It is the best way of protecting trade between Britain and the EU—trade which underpins jobs across the continent. It is the best way of ensuring that we continue to co-operate seamlessly on security matters and to tackle crime and terrorism to keep UK and EU citizens safe. It is also the best way to avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland that would adversely affect communities living there or separating Northern Ireland from Great Britain, which we will not countenance. To achieve those aims, the UK has brought forward serious and credible proposals. We continue to engage with the EU to press our case and to better understand the nature of their concerns. Equally, it is time for the EU to match the ambition and pragmatism that we have shown.

While we intensify our negotiations to secure the deal we want and expect, we are also expediting preparations for no deal in case the EU does not match the ambition and pragmatism that we have shown. As the Prime Minister stated on 21 September after the Salzburg summit, the Government have made it clear that we will unilaterally protect the rights of EU citizens in the UK in the event of no deal. To the 3 million here, we say, "You are our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues. We want you to stay." We will set out the details as soon as is practical, and we now urge the EU and all its member states to step up and give UK citizens on the continent the same reassurances. It is time, on both sides, to provide all our citizens with that comfort and confidence.

Since I last updated the House in September, we have published 52 more technical notices in two further batches. They inform people, businesses and other key stakeholders of the steps they need to take if we do not reach a deal with the EU. They cover a wide range of sectors, building on other work that has taken place across Government over the past two years to prepare the UK for Brexit irrespective of the outcome of negotiations. They acknowledge that there are risks to a no deal scenario, but they also demonstrate the steps we will take to avoid, mitigate and manage any potential short-term risks and disruption. Overall, we have now published 77 technical notices, which form part of the sensible, proportionate measures we are taking to prepare the country for every eventuality.

Our most recent batch of technical notices were published on 24 September; they are set out in a written ministerial statement today. There are 24, and they range from aviation—the advice for airlines on the impact of no deal and the actions for them to consider to maintain services on the day we leave the EU—through to car insurance and the arrangements to ensure that green cards will be available free of charge from insurance companies to enable UK drivers to continue to drive on the continent. The publication of the technical notices enables further engagement as part of our no deal planning. For example, our earlier technical notice on VAT set out the VAT changes that companies will need to prepare when importing or exporting goods from the EU, when supplying services to the EU, or when interacting with EU VAT IT systems. It was welcomed by the British Chamber of Commerce, and we are grateful to them and all of our stakeholders for their constructive ongoing engagement on that necessary planning.

More broadly, on 17 September I met with the British Chamber of Commerce, the CBI, the Institute of Directors, the EEF and the Federation of Small Businesses, as part of the Government's business advisory group, to make sure that we are explaining our negotiating proposals and no deal planning, and listening to UK businesses of all sizes and across all sectors. We will keep providing people and businesses with the advice that they need as we negotiate our exit from the European Union.

We also keep working with the devolved Administrations on all aspects of our planning for exit. I attended the Joint Ministerial Committee on 13 September. It has now met 12 times, and our last meeting was a valuable opportunity to give the devolved Administrations a full update on the negotiations, as well as to discuss the necessary no deal planning. We continue to listen very carefully to all their views. Mr Speaker, that is the way, with a concerted effort on all fronts, that we have put ourselves in the best position to make the very best of Brexit, and I commend this statement to the House.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. It is always good to see him in his place, but may I politely point out that it would have been much better if this statement had come from the Prime Minister? It is no good hiding behind the badging of the Salzburg summit as informal. It was the Prime Minister who pushed for Brexit to be on the agenda at Salzburg; it was the Prime Minister who was there to lead the negotiations, and it was the Prime Minister who failed to secure a breakthrough. So it should be the Prime Minister, not the Secretary of State, in Parliament this afternoon explaining what went wrong.

After all, while the Prime Minister was negotiating in Salzburg, the Secretary of State was busy writing gimmicky letters to me about Labour policy. The image of the Secretary of State writing gimmicky letters on the very day of the Salzburg negotiations speaks absolutely for itself. It would also have been better if today's statement contained details of substantive progress. Instead, it is like groundhog day. We get the same old story. The Secretary of State pretends that everything is going according to plan; it is just a question of dotting the i's and crossing the t's; everything will be all right in the end; and if it isn't, we just crash out with no deal, stockpile food and medicines and declare that to be a great success.

I know that the Brexit Secretary will be tempted in reply to me to do what he usually does—to read out his pre-prepared attack lines about me and the Labour party. Can I urge him to resist that temptation and respond to the very serious questions to which this House and the country deserve answers? First, this Secretary of State repeatedly assured Parliament, including from that Dispatch Box, that a deal would be reached by the October Council—his words. Well, that is next week. The statement contains no such assurance today, so can he, first, update the House on when he now expects a deal to be put before Parliament?

Secondly, it is all very well the Secretary of State saying that we are

“closing in on workable solutions”

and listing the areas of agreement reached months ago, but we have been here before—many times—and that overlooks the fact that the remaining bit is the hard bit of

agreeing the backstop in Northern Ireland. A solemn commitment to a legally binding backstop in Northern Ireland in all circumstances was made last December. Ten months later, all we are hearing is that the Government will publish updated proposals on the backstop at some unspecified date. There are nine days to go, so when will that be? There is no answer in today's statement and we need an answer. Can the Secretary of State take the opportunity now to scotch rumours that the Government are not even intending to publish a backstop proposal by next week? *[Interruption.]* I am being repeatedly asked what I would do. I would happily swap sides at any stage, and a lot more progress would be made in the negotiations. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I have had reason to say to you before, Mr Spencer, that I am quite worried about you. I always regarded you as a rather laid back, gentlemanly farmer, but you seem to have mutated into something altogether more vociferous and aggressive. I cannot believe it is what you are eating. Calm yourself, man!

Keir Starmer: On the backstop, it is being reported that the Government are now willing to accept an indefinite UK-wide customs union as part of the Northern Ireland backstop offer—of course, it will not actually be using the words “customs union”. So can the Secretary of State set the record straight: is a customs union now the Government policy, at least for the Northern Ireland backstop—yes or no?

Thirdly, the Secretary of State repeatedly told Parliament that the final deal this House votes on would include a “clear blueprint” for the future relationship with the EU. In recent days, the Government have been emphasising just how precise this will be, yet it is nowhere to be seen. The Chequers proposals have been widely rejected by the EU and by MPs from across this House, and there is growing concern now that the Government are heading for no deal, as recent warnings from businesses, including Toyota and BMW, underline. If it is not no deal, will it be a vague deal asking us to jump blindfolded into the unknown? Labour will not support that. So will he take this opportunity to rule out a vague or blind Brexit?

For all the warm words, the reality is this: the Government have had 18 months yet they have not even concluded the terms of the withdrawal agreement and they have barely started negotiating the details of the future relationship with the EU. A responsible Government would realise the fix they are in. Instead, this Government simply repeat the mantra, “It's Chequers or no deal.” It is not so much “nothing has changed” as “nothing can change”. This is not a necessity; this is a political choice, and it is deeply irresponsible. No Government have the right to plunge the country into chaos as a result of their own failure. Time is running out, but there is still time to change course, and I urge the Secretary of State to do so.

Dominic Raab: I thank the shadow Brexit Secretary—for his opening remarks at least. He asked a number of questions. First, let me say that the Prime Minister would not normally update the House on an informal summit; that was not the practice under the previous Labour Governments, as he probably well knows. He asked me about the October Council. We have always been clear that we would aim for the October Council but there would be leeway that it might slip into November—we are still clear on that. The October Council next week will be an important milestone. We

[Dominic Raab]

expect that to be a moment where we will make some progress. Of course, as I have said already in my remarks, we need the EU to match the ambition and the pragmatism that we have shown.

The shadow Secretary of State asked whether we were signing up to an indefinite customs union for Northern Ireland; no, that is categorically not correct.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): So what are you doing?

Dominic Raab: Had the hon. Gentleman been paying attention, he would have heard me set that out clearly in my statement.

The shadow Secretary of State talked about investment into this country, so I was surprised that he did not welcome Rolls-Royce's recent decision to increase its investment in the UK or Unilever's decision to maintain its dual UK-Dutch structure.

The shadow Secretary of State referred to my letter asking him some of the most basic questions on Labour's policy on the substance. He has almost become the prince of process: he argues about protocol and procedure but cannot answer a single question on the substance. In reality, we got some answers at the Labour party conference. We had the shadow Secretary of State saying that Labour would whip a vote against any deal outside the customs union that the United Kingdom strikes with the 27 EU member states. Let us be clear: if all 28 Governments agree on a deal that works for the UK and for the EU, the Labour Front-Bench team, at least, would vote against it—they would try to veto it.

Worse still, the leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn)—I am glad that he is present to answer for this—has opened the door to a second referendum. That is a thinly veiled ruse to reverse Brexit altogether. It is now clear to every voter that the Labour leadership team have trashed their promise at the general election to deliver on Brexit; they have allowed political opportunism to consume what is in the national interests; and they have demonstrated, yet again, that they are just not fit to govern.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): Our opening offer from the Chequers meeting is that we will join part of the single market, so long as we do not comply with all its rules as they are at the moment, and that we will join the customs union, so long as we are allowed to have an exception that allows us to put holes through the tariff wall with our own third-party agreements with other countries. The other EU leaders have been signalling for months that that is unacceptable, and so far it has not got us very far.

As our chief negotiator, will the Secretary of State assure me that he now expects that, as with all international organisations, the EU will indeed move a little nearer to our position, just as we move a little nearer to its position as a matter of compromise? Will he reject as quite ridiculous the arguments from some quarters that we can resolve this serious international dispute by tearing up Chequers and moving even further away from the EU's minimum requirements for anybody to have an open trading relationship with the continent?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his comments. Our proposals deliberately deliver on not only the referendum result but the manifesto commitment that all Conservatives stood on at the general election, which was to exit the customs union but secure the best possible trading relationship and preserve the integrity of the whole United Kingdom. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, we have clearly set out the ambition and pragmatism of our proposals and it is now quite right to expect the EU to move in our direction. If the EU does match that ambition and pragmatism, I am confident that we can still reach a deal.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the advance sight of his statement—both the advance copy of today's statement, which I received a few hours ago, and the statement that he made on 4 September, which was basically an advance copy of today's statement, because very little seems to have changed since then.

It was nice to spend some time listening to Ministers from a united, competent Government who very much have the citizens of their nations at heart and to listen to political disagreements being heard and debated in a respectful and consensual manner—but then I had to leave the Scottish National party conference early to come down here, and everything has changed.

We still do not know what the Government intend to propose to the European Union in respect of Northern Ireland. We know the litany of what they are not going to do—it has to be thrown over every time to keep the Democratic Unionist party on side—but we do not know what is being proposed on Northern Ireland. We are running out of time and need answers very quickly indeed.

There was a brief update on the EU's response to the trade package in the Chequers proposal. The EU did not raise concerns about it, it said that it will not be acceptable to its member states. It is not going to happen. Chequers has been bounced. The Government should take it off the table and try again.

May I gently correct the Secretary of State and say that the single, simplest and easiest way to achieve everything that the Government say that they want to achieve through Brexit is to stay in the customs union? We welcome the progress and the commitments that have been made on citizens' rights, but the rights of those citizens would never have been under threat had it not been for the unilateral decision to come out of the single market. If they are that worried about the rights of future generations of citizens, they should stay in the single market. Why cannot we do that? It is because of an unnecessary, dogmatic, unilateral decision that was taken by the Prime Minister almost before the negotiations had even started. From day one, the approach has been dictated by hardliners who, if they are lucky, constitute one in five of the parliamentary Conservative party; they could not manage one in 10 of the membership of the present House of Commons. Those Members would happily go for a hard no deal Brexit, although they say that that is not what they want—I am talking about those who are serried, appropriately enough, to the far right of the Secretary of State right now. An entire dogmatic approach is still being driven by a tiny minority of this House. We could almost say that the tail is being allowed to wag the dogma.

What assessment have the Government made of the cost to every business in the UK of complying with the avalanche of technical advice that they are now being expected to follow? Has any assessment been made of that, and, if it has, will we be allowed to see it this time? Will the Secretary of State confirm that, whatever some who prop up this Government may tell him, peace in Northern Ireland is not expendable, it is sacrosanct and it is not negotiable under any circumstances whatsoever?

Will the Government reject once and for all the demands of the hard-line minority? Will they accept that it is now time to listen pragmatically and constructively to the compromises that were offered almost two years by the Scottish Government and to the compromises being offered by others in this House right now? Will he agree to talk to those who might have an answer before we all crash off the cliff edge together?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his call for sensible and respectful debate and agree with him that every effort needs to be made to preserve our precious Union. One thing that is very clear in this House, notwithstanding all the differences that we have, is that we will not allow any proposals from the EU to draw a customs line down the Irish sea.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Northern Ireland and our proposals. Our White Paper proposals on the economic partnership will provide the long-term sustainable answer to this question. As well as preserving frictionless trade with our EU partners, they will, in the process, resolve the concerns around the Northern Irish border. At the same time, we remain committed to the joint report in December, which would be for a limited, finite and temporary backstop.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about economic analysis. That will be made available in time for the meaningful vote. Finally, he asked about staying in the single market and the customs union. The reality is, as he well knows, that if we stay members of the single market and the customs union, we would not be leaving the EU.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I am astonished that my right hon. Friend has written to his opposite number attacking Labour policy. Nobody here knows what Labour policy really is, so perhaps he can share those letters with us to help us understand it better.

Did my right hon. Friend read the recent paper by two former Northern Ireland Secretaries of State, Lord Trimble and my right hon. Friend's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), explaining how practical solutions are available right now to resolve any issues around having a hard border in Northern Ireland? If he read it, does he agree that that paper demonstrates that there is now no need for a backstop proposal?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend for his questions. The search for a Labour party policy on the EU and on Brexit continues, but on the reports that he mentioned—there have been various reports on the technical solution to Northern Ireland—they have provided very important, useful additional insights. The reality is that we have committed, on top of the technical solutions, to agree a legally binding backstop with the EU, but it

will have to be temporary and it will have to meet the conditions that we have set out and that the Prime Minister repeated in her statement after the Salzburg summit.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The more no deal technical notices that the Secretary of State published over the summer, the more he confirmed as correct the judgment of the Select Committee that a no deal Brexit would be chaotic and damaging. My question, however, relates to the outstanding issue in the negotiations, namely agreeing a legally operable and sound backstop to keep an open border in Northern Ireland. Given that the backstop, if it is used, will have to last until such time as another agreement is reached that achieves the same outcome, can he please explain to the House how on earth a backstop could be limited by an artificial time limit?

Dominic Raab: The point is that we hope the backstop will never be used. If it is required, it should be for a temporary, limited period. The right hon. Gentleman asked how that can be guaranteed. In fact, there are limits to the extent to which the EU can rely on article 50 for the backstop—there are very real legal concerns on the EU side—but of course we expect that there is no deal until we have the whole deal. That includes not just the withdrawal agreement and the protocol on Northern Ireland, but clear steps and a clear pathway to the future relationship, which will provide the lasting, sustainable answer on the Northern Ireland issue by ensuring that we have frictionless trade.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Given the vote to leave and the promised future control over our laws in this Parliament, why are UK voters and businesses being confronted indefinitely with binding EU rules on goods that are made behind closed doors by 27 other member states, with no effective parliamentary lock? Or will the Secretary of State explain now how the parliamentary lock that is being put about would actually work in practice, rather than in theory?

Dominic Raab: I do not accept that characterisation of the White Paper proposals. There would be not just technical consultation, but consultation on any legislative proposal in advance. My hon. Friend is right to say that we would be taking an up-front decision to sign up to the common rulebook on industrial goods and agri-food in order to maintain frictionless trade. There would be a parliamentary lock, but we would have to be mindful—as the White Paper sets out—of the consequences of exercising that lock.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Secretary of State rightly ruled out a hard border in Northern Ireland and a customs border in the Irish sea, but is it not now time to be honest with people about what that means? He appeared to be ruling out a customs union in the backstop. Is he also ruling out a common external tariff in the Irish backstop—yes or no?

Dominic Raab: We have been very clear that the arrangement needs to be time-limited. We would not accept an arrangement that drew a customs border down the Irish sea. It needs to be limited so that we can bridge to the future relationship, which would give us all the advantages of free trade that we want to take

[Dominic Raab]

advantage of, including export opportunities from Latin America to Asia, and the reduction of the cost of living here at home.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if we just leave without signing a penal and one-sided withdrawal agreement, we will have £39 billion to spend on our priorities, which would be a huge boost to our economy and public services—a true Brexit bonus? How can an agreement be better than that?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is certainly right to point to the countervailing opportunities that a no deal scenario would have, but it is only responsible to be very clear—as we have in our 77 technical notices and our wider planning—that the no deal outcome is sub-optimal because there are risks and short-term disruptions, including a buffeting to the UK economy and all those other things. I am confident that we could get through that, but it is by far and away a superior outcome to get a good deal with the EU that is good for the UK and for the EU, that preserves our trade and security co-operation, and that at the same time liberates us to trade more energetically with the growth markets of the world.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): If the Tories want to know what Labour policy is, they should read the excellent motion that was passed recently at our party conference. Does the Secretary of State agree that any withdrawal agreement must include precise guarantees that Britain and the EU will enjoy frictionless trade in the event of Brexit, as the No. 10 Downing Street spokesman said yesterday?

Dominic Raab: The right hon. Gentleman will know that our proposals are set out very clearly in the White Paper. That is what we are pursuing. He is right to say that the negotiations have been tough, but you do not throw your hands up in despair; you knuckle down and hold your nerve. We will keep pursuing and pressing our case. What I cannot do is accept the case that the right hon. Gentleman makes for reversing the referendum. That would be a democratic outrage and it is not something that we will countenance.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I welcome the deliberative approach to Brexit that protects businesses and endeavours to make sure that frictionless travel will continue across the board, but may I ask the Secretary of State what his plans are in the event of a no deal for security matters? I remain very concerned about the somewhat gung-ho approach to a no deal, given that security matters are not yet in place to ensure that our country remains safe from terrorists and from organised crime and that the EU has the same benefits from our efforts?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend for her remarks. I am confident that in the medium to long term we will resume all the kinds of co-operation that one would expect, but it is right that in a no deal scenario we could not rely on the EU continuing that in the short term. One thing that could be said is that in that scenario there would be countervailing opportunities, for example—she talked about security—preventive checks

at the border and the ability to deport when we are beyond the free movement rules that we are bound by under the EU.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): May I return to something that the Secretary of State said in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), because he did not quite respond, and I think that it is an important point? Yesterday, we heard from a No. 10 spokesman that there must be “precise” guarantees that Britain and the EU will enjoy frictionless trade after Brexit. Will the Secretary of State confirm that those guarantees will be a condition in the withdrawal agreement?

Dominic Raab: I am not sure that I am going to allow or let the Opposition set conditions on the UK’s policy—[*Interruption*]
—no, when it has been clearly set out in our White Paper. We want to pursue the frictionless trade with the EU that we have right now, and that is what our proposal will deliver, but it requires the EU to meet us halfway to match the ambition and pragmatism that we have shown.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): If the backstop comes into operation, the UK will effectively be within the rules of the single market and the customs union and ultimately the European Court of Justice. Three times, the Secretary of State has said that that arrangement will be temporary, but it will be open-ended. What will be the exact legal process by which we will end this, and what will be the incentives for the EU to end this arrangement, as it is happily taking large sums of public money from the British taxpayer?

Dominic Raab: We have made it clear that it would be temporary and finite. The reassurance that I can give my right hon. Friend in advance of the publication of our proposals is that it is very difficult for the EU. From its perspective, there is a difference in the way in which customs union is described, because, for it, it would normally include free movement and the rules on that, which in the case of the backstop would not apply. There will be a lot of pressure on the EU, both legally and as a matter of policy, to end the backstop, and we will not agree to anything that does not include a clear process and steps to exit. [*Interruption.*] No, I am afraid that the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) does not.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The idea that the sort of proposals that are floating about from the EU side and, indeed, some officials from our side in Brussels are necessary to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland is complete rubbish. There is already infrastructure on the border, and there are financial, fiscal and other differences because it is an international border. Of course it can be managed.

May I draw the Secretary of State’s attention to what the Prime Minister said in her commitments to Northern Ireland on 6 December? She said that there would be no new borders within the United Kingdom and that the whole UK, including Northern Ireland, would leave the customs union and the single market. On 17 December, she agreed that nothing would be done to create any border, constitutional, political, economic or regulatory, between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United

Kingdom. Does the Secretary of State stand by that, because he needs to understand that, as a democratic Unionist party, we will not tolerate anything that separates Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom on customs or the single market as we leave the European Union? We have been clear about that from day one. It is why we had the debacle in December—let us not repeat that mistake.

Dominic Raab: I listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. He registered his position very clearly. We intend, as he knows, because we have been engaging on this issue, to honour all the commitments that we made in December, and we will not do anything that would be a threat to the economic or constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to see the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) looking mildly anguished.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con) *indicated dissent*.

Mr Speaker: No? Well, I am heartened to hear it. We must hear from the voice of Harwich and North Essex, Sir Bernard Jenkin.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I commend my right hon. Friend and the Government for being absolutely determined to avoid any new infrastructure at the Northern Ireland border. Can he explain what the Government's policy will be if we leave the European Union with no deal, and therefore there is no backstop and we have a customs frontier? Will the Government implement the technical measures to maintain an invisible customs frontier? Will he rule out any new infrastructure at the border between the north and the south?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We have been clear that we will see no return to a hard border under any circumstances. That has been made clear to not just all parties in Northern Ireland but the Commission in Brussels.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Let me try again, because the Brexit Secretary is trying to shimmy his way out of this. Yesterday, the Prime Minister's spokesman said:

"There can be no withdrawal agreement without a precise future framework" on trade. Is that true—yes or no?

Dominic Raab: True.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Any decision to exit a backstop agreement must be one for Her Majesty's Government, must it not?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that we could not allow any third party—in this case, the EU—to have a lock on the process and that it could not last indefinitely.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the Secretary of State for his frank answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), because it sounded as though he was finally ruling out the notion of a blindfolded Brexit and the

idea that there would not be precise guarantees of frictionless trade in the withdrawal treaty on the future relationship. When he brings the motion before the House, if that is exactly what is presented, will he make sure that we have full details about the trade relationship for the future?

Dominic Raab: First, there is no question of some kind of blindfolded Brexit. We will be agreeing the withdrawal agreement and the Northern Ireland protocol, and we want to make sure that we have enough detail and enough of the substance in the political declaration on the future relationship, so that this House and the country at large understand the model of economic and security co-operation that we will be pursuing.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): My right hon. Friend has rightly paid much attention to the Northern Ireland border, but may I draw his attention to other important borders—notably, the cross-channel border and all the trade that comes through Dover and the roads of Kent every day? Can he assure me that the deal he is looking for will ensure frictionless trade through the port of Dover, so that we avoid any kind of local chaos on the roads in Kent and wider economic chaos in the supply chains of the manufacturing industry throughout this country? That is a very important part of the negotiations.

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He is absolutely right that, as well as on the issue of Northern Ireland, our proposal is designed to guarantee frictionless trade—in particular, for manufacturing businesses that rely on those supply chains. That is a critical element of the White Paper proposals, which is why we are pressing it so hard.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Secretary of State has said that the backstop has to be time-limited. Can he share with the House which particular date he has in mind and how he came to settle on that date?

Dominic Raab: We are not in a position yet to give a date. We will publish that when we publish the proposals in the round. What cannot be allowed to happen is for either Northern Ireland or the UK as a whole to linger in an indefinite limbo of the customs union.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The intransigence shown by the EU at Salzburg and some of the other antics there will have reminded every leave voter in the country and a great many others that leaving the EU is the right thing to do. How confident is my right hon. Friend that we will see an outbreak of the spirit of pragmatism that he spoke of earlier, to land a deal later this autumn?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He is right in his summary of the Salzburg summit, but the thing to do in such a negotiation is to keep your cool, hold your nerve and keep doing the professional, statesman-like thing, which is exactly what our Prime Minister has done. In terms of our confidence in reaching a deal, we cannot control the other side, but I think that the prognosis is good, because it is in the EU's interests just as much as the UK's interests to get a strong deal on everything from trade to security co-operation, to secure livelihoods and jobs on both sides and, in particular, to keep UK and EU citizens safe.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): At the heart of the Brexit promise was that we could gain full control and free ourselves from EU institutions and regulations, while maintaining the same economic prosperity we have enjoyed during 40 years of membership. Is it not time to come clean that both simultaneously are not possible? There is a choice: we can choose Brexit, or we can choose prosperity.

Dominic Raab: No, I do not accept that sort of binary choice. The one thing we must all do in this House, as democrats, is respect the result of the referendum. We are seeking to achieve the win-win of retaining our strong trading and security links and co-operation with our EU partners and being free to not just take back control of our own laws but trade more liberally with the growth markets of the future, from Latin America to Asia.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Time and again, customs experts from a range of countries in the EU, including Holland and Ireland, tell us that a free trade agreement can be made to work across the Irish border using pragmatic arrangements. When will the Government take the key that has been handed to them in the prison of this negotiation and admit that we can leave on an FTA basis, which would make this a proper, independent country, able to control its domestic regulations as well as its tariffs, so that we can lead the world into a new era of free trade?

Dominic Raab: I respect my hon. Friend and, as ever, I pay tribute to the work he has done, but he will know, because he was in government—indeed, in DExEU—at the time, that while it may be theoretically possible for us to do that, we cannot do it and have a deal with the EU. The EU is not offering us a Canada or super-Canada FTA without our keeping to the commitment we made when he was in government in December to come up with a legally binding backstop. That is a shortcut to no deal. We have always said that we will be ready if that outcome is forced on us, but the optimum aim and objective that we are working towards is a good deal with the EU. We could not get that if we pursued what he suggests.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Secretary of State aware that I consider myself sent here to secure the health, welfare and future prosperity of my constituents and the people of our country? Is he aware that nothing he has said today has convinced me that we are not heading for a steep decline and a miserable future for our country and my constituents?

Dominic Raab: All I will say to the hon. Gentleman is that we are ambitious for our post-Brexit relationship with the EU. The economic news from the Bank of England on GDP accelerating in growth terms and rising real wages is important. This is the moment to go into these negotiations with some economic self-confidence and political ambition. If we do that, this country's best days lie ahead.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): The Japanese Prime Minister recently declared that Japan would welcome the United Kingdom into the Trans-Pacific Partnership “with open arms”. Does my right hon. Friend agree that membership of the TPP is highly attractive and

should be pursued? Does he also agree that membership of it is virtually impossible for so long as we remain part of the customs union?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. We want to pursue trade deals, whether with the US or Asia-Pacific countries, precisely because it is better than purely leaving on no deal and WTO terms. I certainly accept the premise and the assumption underlying his question, which is that we should not allow ourselves to remain in the customs union, because we would then avoid all the opportunities of Brexit that we need to grasp.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): My constituents are worried about the political declaration to come from the Secretary of State, because so far all they have heard is warm words and political rhetoric, which does not guarantee their jobs. I want to ask him a simple question. Can he define “frictionless”?

Dominic Raab: I have listened to the hon. Lady in these debates, and she always makes sensible and constructive arguments, but we have not just given warm words. We have set out in our White Paper, which is 100 pages long, detailed proposals on the frictionless trade that she refers to and on security co-operation. If she wants to give her constituents some reassurance, she can point to that.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): The Secretary of State will have heard the clear intention of many colleagues on our Benches to vote down the Prime Minister's pragmatic deal. Meanwhile, the clock ticks down to 29 March and there is a serious risk that we could crash out with no deal and no transition. The consequences of that would be disastrous and very different from the dodgy prospectus that was set out in the referendum. Particularly if that is the case, will the Secretary of State commit to giving the British people the opportunity to give their informed consent to that final deal? It is not about obstructing the referendum; it is checking that we have informed consent, and no decent surgeon would proceed without it.

Dominic Raab: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend about the need to pursue a good deal with the EU, and all our efforts are focused on achieving that. I do not accept the premise of her suggestion of a second referendum. I think it would inevitably be aimed at trying to reverse Brexit, and that would create democratic outrage and a huge amount of mistrust in the establishment and the political system.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Secretary of State mentioned the Joint Ministerial Committee in his statement. An issue of huge importance to Wales is post-Brexit cohesion funding. Following Salzburg, the Prime Minister seemed to indicate that the proposed shared prosperity fund would be the sole responsibility of the British Government. As he knows, economic development is a devolved issue, but the indication seems to be that it would be clawed back by Westminster. Is it not now clear that, for Wales, Brexit means the complete opposite of taking back control?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. It is important to ensure that Brexit works for all parts of the United Kingdom. We continue to engage

with all the devolved Administrations on all the devolved issues, including in Scotland, as I set out in my statement, in relation to Scottish and Welsh Ministers and officials from the Northern Ireland secretariat. We want to make sure that we continue to engage in the process that he has described and ensure this great opportunity for the people of Scotland.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I thank the excellent Secretary of State for coming to the House to make this statement. Obviously he would like to get a Chequers deal, but as the European Union has already rejected that—in some ways insulting the Prime Minister in the process, I have to say—and as he thinks that coming out without a deal is sub-optimal, should we not learn from a former great Labour Prime Minister about a third way? Labour Members didn't cheer that point; I do not know why. If Chequers fails, is not Chequers-plus-plus-plus the way forward?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend knows that we have made it clear that we will listen to the other side, but we need to understand their objections. We are not going to just take the face-value, “computer says no” approach, when we have put in a huge amount of effort and looked at our proposals in a very innovative way. We will therefore continue to press our case to make sure that we get a good deal, but I hope that my hon. Friend agrees with me that, whatever the view on no deal, it would be a far better outcome for this country if we can secure a good deal, and that is what we are aiming for.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said that a Canada-style free trade agreement is nowhere near good enough for the United Kingdom. Does the Secretary of State agree?

Dominic Raab: I think we should be aiming for the best possible outcome. Our White Paper proposals give us that, and one of the crucial things we need to disabuse people of is the illusion that the EU is offering us CETA-plus or anything else without the legally binding backstop. That is what we are focused on achieving.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Many jobs rely on getting a free trade deal and frictionless trade, but such a trade deal also relies on fair competition between both parties. May I urge the Secretary of State to continue to reassure those in Europe that this country will not lead a race to the bottom in environmental standards, consumer standards or welfare standards, and that this Government are committed to fair competition?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we want to make sure that we have a pro-competition regime at home. As she will know, in our White Paper we have set out reassurances on a level playing field, and they come as a package with the Chequers deal, so we have also been clear with the EU that there cannot be any cherry picking from the proposals that we have put forward.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Secretary of State said in his conference speech that he would rather leave with no deal than negotiate any form of deal that involved a customs union. Did he run that past the management at Jaguar Land Rover? How does

he think the poor workers at JLR, now enjoying a three-day week and a two-week total shutdown, will respond to such a stubborn, intransigent attitude?

Dominic Raab: JLR wants the deal that we are pursuing through our White Paper proposals. What it certainly does not want is all the extra additional uncertainty of a second referendum, which the leader of the Labour party has now exposed it to.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): Representing the port of Dover, I have given the situation a lot of thought. The reality is that a Canada-style deal could work and could be made to work in a frictionless way if we build on already existing juxtaposed controls, which enable frictionless movement with passport checking. We could do that for goods as well, to ensure that we have a Canada-style agreement and frictionless trade as well. Will the Secretary of State take that forward?

Dominic Raab: I always listen very carefully to my hon. Friend. He makes his case in a powerful way. I would still suggest to him that if we are looking for the right balance between making sure that we protect our precious Union, preserving our frictionless trade with the EU and also liberating the country to trade more energetically with the growth markets of the future, then the proposals that we have set out are the only credible plans that deliver on all those objectives. That is why we are pursuing them.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): In contrast to some of the suggestions coming from parts of the Government Benches about a minimalist free trade-style agreement, the director general of the CBI told the BBC recently that a minimalist agreement would introduce friction at borders, would not solve the Irish border question and would damage our supply chains. Will the Secretary of State say whether he agrees with the director general of the CBI and therefore rule that out as an option?

Dominic Raab: We cannot rule out leaving with no deal, because we do not have full control of the EU, but I addressed the CBI president's committee recently, and the hon. Gentleman will know that the CBI is fully supportive and wants to see the Government's approach as laid out in the White Paper proposals delivered. He should get behind that.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for his approach to the negotiations, notwithstanding their difficulties. He talked about pragmatism. Businesses in my constituency and across the west midlands are very pragmatic, and the outcome that they want from these negotiations is our being able to do free trade deals around the world, to stimulate exports and improve our prosperity. Can he reassure me that that is still the centrepiece of what we are trying to achieve in these negotiations?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he is also right to talk about the future opportunities for businesses. It is also right to say that an energetic, global free trade policy is good for consumers at home as well, because reducing prices eases the cost of living for low and middle-income families.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In his statement, the Secretary of State said that the Government are expediting their no deal preparations. He also referenced the technical note on aviation, which advises airlines that they will need to secure permissions from the national authorities of each state they want to fly to, as well as authorisation from the European Aviation Safety Agency. Can he explain how telling airlines that they need to sort it out themselves is making preparations for a no deal?

Dominic Raab: The technical notices set out our proposals and all the actions that airlines and the aviation industry should take. We cannot control what the EU would do in a no deal scenario, but as it set out earlier this year, this is one area where it would envisage at least some sort of bare-bones agreement. I think that is important for giving people and the industry the reassurance they need.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): There has been much talk of the Irish border in relation to Brexit discussions—indeed, it has become a political football. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is to ignore the political reality, which he has restated today in part, that the UK will never enforce a hard border on the island of Ireland, that the Republic of Ireland will never enforce a hard border on the island of Ireland and that neither the UK nor the Republic of Ireland are going to allow the EU to enforce a hard border on the island of Ireland?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his depiction of the UK position, and I think it is also an accurate reflection of the Republic of Ireland's position. I cannot say what the EU would do in that scenario, but it is important that we continue to strive to forge a good deal on the terms that we have set out, which avoids the need for any of that to be even in question.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): With respect, can the Secretary of State hear himself? We are just weeks away from needing any deal, but he is no closer to an agreement; there is urgent no-deal planning, civil contingency planning and secret Cobra meetings; security in Northern Ireland is at risk; and businesses and industry are expressing grave concerns. Surely the only real democratic thing to do now is put this back to the people and let them decide.

Dominic Raab: I think that reversing the referendum would be a big mistake that would create huge distrust in our democratic system. What we have to do in such negotiations, which will be tough in the final stretch, is hold our nerve, keep our calm and recognise that the EU will always try to drag them out. The hon. Lady has ignored a lot of the progress that I set out in my opening statement. What we should not do at this stage is start blinking and panicking. We will hold our course and deliver a good deal for this country.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): My part of Somerset has one of the highest degrees of exports to the rest of the world, as opposed to the EU, but for every minute that the rest of the world thinks we might remain in some sort of customs union or common external tariff alignment, the less interest they have in negotiating with us on future trade. When will the Government publish their version of the backstop?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is right that we need to be clear in our approach. One of the advantages when we secure a deal, as I am confident we will do this autumn, and publish our political declaration is that we will be very clear about the course we are charting, particularly on retaining control over our tariffs, which will put us in a good position to deliver the free trade deals that will benefit his constituents.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State have an example of any other process so monumental for our constitution, for our way of life, and for our businesses, jobs, trade and environment, that has taken place over such a minute space of time? Will he not consider whether this is insufficient time for our businesses, universities, healthcare services and so on to prepare for what might turn out to be a no-deal Brexit?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Lady is right to point out that there are risks. We set out our plans, through our technical notices and through legislation, to mitigate, manage or avoid those risks. The referendum was held in 2016, so this has not been done in a hurry. The reassurance I can give her is that we will pursue as best we can the best deal with our EU friends and partners. The wrong thing to do now would be to open the door to a second referendum, with all the uncertainty that would bring. That is why the decision of Labour's Front Benchers is so flawed.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend please remind those who are calling for a people's referendum, particularly in the Labour party, that we have actually already had one, and that it was one of the greatest democratic exercises that this country has ever undertaken?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Furthermore, when we passed the legislation, all parties on all sides agreed and stated that they would respect the outcome. Nothing fuels mistrust in the political system more than when politicians reverse on commitments they have already made. That is likely only to fuel the kind of mistrust in the political system that we need to avoid.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Prime Minister's entrance just before her speech at the Conservative party conference was one of the worst examples of restricted freedom of movement that we have seen since the referendum. Is the fact that she has restricted her movement today by not coming to the House to make this statement a sign that Chequers is dead? Can the Secretary of State stand at the Dispatch Box and tell us that whatever we will be voting on will be based on Chequers?

Dominic Raab: I will pass on to the Prime Minister the hon. Gentleman's advice to take dancing lessons from him, but I am not sure that she will take him up on that immediately. What I can tell him is that we will continue to chart a course based on our White Paper proposals, for all the reasons I have set out, because it is good for trade, good for jobs and good for maintaining the security co-operation that we want to continue with our EU partners and friends.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I welcome the more positive language coming out of Brussels over the weekend, but does my right hon. Friend agree that, although warm words are all very well, it is time the EU matched that language with actual movement if we are to reach a mutually beneficial deal this autumn?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The time for warm words is over; now is the time for deeds, actions and political decisions. I am confident that we can get there, as I have said, if the EU matches the innovative approach that we have taken. The EU is often at its best when it is innovative, rather than dogmatic and relying on dry legalism. If it can produce the political will to meet us halfway, I am confident that we can get a good deal, in the way he described.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): When the Select Committee met Michel Barnier on 3 September, he set out four reasons why the EU could not accept the proposal on the facilitated customs arrangement and the common rulebook for goods. The Select Committee then published its evidence. Why, therefore, did the Prime Minister apparently not know when she went to Salzburg on 19 September that those key elements in her Chequers proposals had already been rejected by EU member states? It has been said that she was insulted, but she should have known that that was their position.

Dominic Raab: The right hon. Gentleman is right that the EU has at various points set out objections, some of which I do not believe stand up to scrutiny. For example, there is the distinction between goods and services that the EU takes in relation to Ukraine, so that is at least a precedent showing that it can do it if it wants to.

The reality is that if we are in a negotiation, having taken our time to work out plans and think them through, bearing in mind the equities and key interests on the EU side, we will not just throw our hands up in despair when one or other element of the EU says no. We will continue to press them, understanding the EU's concerns better, as we have set out in our proposals, and make sure that we can deliver a good deal that works for the EU as well as for the UK.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): In Redditch, we were fortunate enough to have a visit from the Leader of the Opposition recently. I was unable to attend, as I was busy seeing constituents in my surgery. If he had spoken to my constituents, as I do, he would have found that the vast majority do not support a second referendum, because they believe that it would undermine our democracy. Can the Secretary of State confirm for my constituents that he does not support a second referendum either?

Dominic Raab: I can happily confirm that neither I nor the Government support a second referendum. Of course, it would be a betrayal not just of my hon. Friend's voters, but of all those who voted for Labour at the last election and who thought that the Labour party was serious about respecting the verdict in the referendum.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Manufacturing accounts for 12% of jobs in the east midlands, and thousands of them are dependent on just-in-time supply chains. Can the Secretary of State

explain to workers at Toyota, Rolls-Royce and Bombardier, and to the thousands more working for their suppliers, how the "countervailing opportunities" of no deal could possibly compensate for the threat to their jobs? If he cannot, why is he prepared to contemplate leaving with no deal but not to contemplate remaining in the customs union?

Dominic Raab: Remaining in the customs union would not be giving effect to the referendum. The hon. Lady mentioned Rolls-Royce, which has just announced extra investment in its Goodwood plant in Sussex. Many businesses are saying that, regardless of Brexit, this country is an excellent place to come to and invest in, because of the skills and entrepreneurial creativity of our workforce and our people. I hope that she can have a little more confidence in the ability not only of her constituents but of the people of this country to make the best of the opportunities of Brexit.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, particularly his clarity and reassurance towards EU citizens living and working in this country. Contrast that clarity with the response from Labour's Front Benchers, who have refused to set out what their party's position is and who are still facing both ways on the issue of a second referendum.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Labour party has no clear or coherent position on any aspect of the substance. The Labour leader's calling for a reversal of Brexit through a referendum is a betrayal of everyone who voted Labour at the last election.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Jaguar is on a three-day week and Land Rover's Solihull plant is ceasing production for two weeks. The company, the workers and their union, Unite, are working together, but it is becoming ever more difficult. Will the Secretary of State rule out any deal that does not guarantee frictionless trade and access to the single market, which are vital to the future of the jewel in the crown of British manufacturing—automotive generally and Jaguar Land Rover in particular—and will he disown those on his side who, when faced with industry warnings about the potentially catastrophic consequences of a no-deal or hard Brexit, wrote them off, saying that they were "making it up"?

Dominic Raab: I agree that we need to listen to businesses. I explained in my oral statement the steps we are taking to make sure we listen to businesses in all sectors and of all sizes. That is an even stronger reason why the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members should get behind the Government's approach. Through the White Paper we can guarantee frictionless trade with our EU partners, while expanding our global opportunities. The one thing that would cause more uncertainty for businesses is the prospect, dangled by the leadership of the Labour party, of a second referendum.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): We heard it here today: the Labour party is calling for a second referendum and the Scottish National party is calling for two second referendums. Does my

[Andrew Bowie]

right hon. Friend not agree that while it has always been the case that only the Conservative party has any plan to take us out of the European Union, we are now the only party left in this place that respects the democratic will of the British people?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do not know what Brenda in Bristol would think about all the proposals from the Opposition parties. The vast majority of the people in this country want to see unity of purpose and for us get the best deal. They are fed up with the political opportunism of those on the Opposition Benches.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), the Secretary of State confirmed what the No. 10 spokesman said: there must be precise guarantees that Britain and the EU will enjoy frictionless trade after Brexit as a condition of the withdrawal agreement. The question is: does he agree with that position?

Dominic Raab: We made clear in our proposals, first in relation to the question that I answered, that we want to see a well detailed political declaration so that people, when they come to vote on the meaningful vote, have a clear idea of the direction of the economic model and the security model of co-operation. As the hon. Gentleman will know from our White Paper proposals, we are pursuing and aiming for frictionless trade. That is the point of signing up to a common rule book on goods and agri-food, and that is the reason for the facilitated customs arrangement. He should get behind those proposals.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): My constituents tell me that they are concerned about the Labour party's hokey-cokey approach. They also tell me that they have had their people's vote, in June 2016, and do not need or want a second one. Does the Secretary of State agree with my constituents?

Dominic Raab: They are absolutely right, as they proved by electing my hon. Friend to this place.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentioned that he is confident of reaching a withdrawal agreement in autumn. He also talked about a political declaration having a clear blueprint for a future relationship with the EU. When will the House be able to scrutinise both the withdrawal agreement and the blueprint, and what level of detail will they have?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Lady for her very important question. The timeframe for scrutiny in this House and the other place is also very important. After the agreement has been reached in all the areas she describes, we will have a period where the documents are laid and a meaningful vote. After that, the legislation implementing the withdrawal agreement would be introduced.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. There has rightly been a lot of focus on one of the land borders affected by the UK leaving the EU, but so far

no questions about the second one—the one between Spain and Gibraltar. Will the Secretary of State outline how he is keeping in contact with the Government of Gibraltar on the process of negotiations and ensuring that their views are fully taken on board?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is right. I met the Chief Minister recently. We are making sure that the Government of Gibraltar are fully involved and fully aware of all the negotiations. We have made good progress together in Madrid. The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), will be seeing him again next week.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): In a letter dated 23 August, the Health Secretary said:

“based on the current cross-Government planning scenario we will ensure the UK has an additional six weeks supply of medicines” in the event of no deal. However, it was then reported in *The Sun* that on 8 September that Cabinet Ministers were to be warned of a 12-week disruption at the border in the event of no deal—twice as long as the Health Secretary was planning for. Will the Secretary of State clarify the Government's current planning assumptions for the length of disruption at the UK border in the event of no deal?

Dominic Raab: May I give the hon. Lady a bit of reassurance? In both the technical notices and the letter the Health Secretary sent to stakeholders, that has been set out very clearly. I can also give her the reassurance that the stockpiling of medicines and vaccines is a standard part of UK planning in the way the Government engage with the pharmaceutical industry in lots of other areas.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): In the course of the referendum campaign my constituents weighed up the arguments on behalf of the leave and remain campaigns and voted overwhelmingly to leave. Since then, there have been siren voices calling for a second referendum. I wonder if the Secretary of State has heard a single argument made since the referendum that was not been made before it, because I have not.

Dominic Raab: I think at the time, come the end of the referendum, everyone was looking forward to getting a conclusion to it, because it seemed to drag on forever and we had gone around the houses with all the different arguments. The country heard both sides, the claims and the counterclaims, and plenty of controversy. I do not think the people of this country are fools. They made their decision, they knew what they were doing and now it is time to leave.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): We welcome the Secretary of State's commitment that whatever form the backstop, which was foolishly agreed in December, takes, it will not include any customs or regulatory arrangements that treat Northern Ireland differently to the rest of the United Kingdom. However, we are concerned that he still sees the need for a backstop, albeit one limited in scope and time. Will he clarify for the House and for the people in Northern Ireland how such a backstop would be limited? What would it be limited to and how long would it be limited for? Can he also assure us that the comments made by Michel Barnier

this week, that Northern Ireland would have to be prohibited from taking part in any trade deals negotiated after Brexit, will not be the case?

Dominic Raab: I understand the points the right hon. Gentleman makes. He will have seen the statement made by the Prime Minister in the aftermath of the Salzburg summit. We have been very clear that the backstop would need to be a temporary and finite bridge to the future relationship, which would subsume and supersede the need for any backstop at all. Of course it cannot be right to have any distinction, in terms of customs regulation, for any one part of the UK. We proceed as one.

Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences)

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

6.27 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about offences when perpetrated against retail workers; to make certain offences aggravated when perpetrated against such workers in the course of their employment; and for connected purposes.

My reason for wanting to bring about the Bill is simple: to protect shop workers in the course of their jobs, recognising that they are working in the public interest. I will define that shortly. The Bill would mean that future assaults on workers in the retail sector are treated as aggravated assaults, and that the perpetrators of the violence we often see our shop workers subjected to will receive greater punishment. This protection would act to prevent further assaults and properly punish those who seek to behave in such a manner.

I have been asked quite a few times in recent days why I have singled out retail workers for the Bill. That, Mr Speaker, is because I believe they represent a very specific case. Over the years, Parliament has legislated for shops to regulate over 50 types of products, including cigarettes, alcohol, weaponry and acid, which is of course currently in the news. At the moment, we ask shop workers to act not just in the interests of businesses but in the public interest to make sure that the rest of us are safe. We perhaps do not even know that that is happening. In that moment, the shop worker is in a potential conflict situation. Like lots of us in this place, I have worked in a shop. I know that telling someone who is drunk that they cannot have anything more to drink, or someone who is probably the right age to buy a product but has not brought the right ID that they cannot purchase it, is quite a difficult thing to do. Every time that happens, it presents a potential flashpoint situation with the wrong individual. When researching this issue, I was shocked by the level of such flashpoints. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, USDAW, the shop workers' union, says that shop workers are on the receiving end of 250 such violent situations each day, six involving knives and two involving guns. It behoves us to act.

Here are a couple of cases from my own constituency, kindly gathered by the Co-operative Group, which is, I know, 100% committed to protecting staff:

"A bloke entered the store and nicked some chocolate rice crispies and hid them under his jacket. The store manager approached him and asked him to return the food. This was when the bloke became aggressive. He threw the food at the manager and made a headbutting gesture to the manager and another colleague. Once he'd left the store, he pulled out a small knife and made a gesture towards the colleagues".

Secondly:

"Another guy came into the store and filled a basket with 7 bottles of booze, he also hid one inside his jacket. On his way out, 5 colleagues cornered him and he left the store. He came back 10 minutes later to try again and pushed a colleague to the floor. When challenged, he also tried to hit her with the bottle but missed and the bottle broke on the floor. 3 other colleagues chased him, but he gave up and handed the bottles back. Whilst leaving, he threatened that he would be 'back to do them in with a bottle'".

[Alex Norris]

Incidents of that nature are happening up and down the country in all our communities in high volume, with nearly 2,000 every single week.

I strongly believe that anyone who was assaulted while doing their job should be afforded all the protections of the law, but I believe that what sets retail workers apart is that they have been entrusted with an important civic responsibility that goes above and beyond their duties and responsibilities to their employer. We in this place, as a legislature, should be acutely aware of this, because we are the people who gave these workers these extra responsibilities. Effectively, we have asked them to police the law on the sale of alcohol, knives, glues and now acid on behalf of us all. We have asked them to step forward to protect society, and now we need to show them that we have their back while they do so.

It is also worth recognising that the retail sector is unrepresentative of the wider population that uses the shops. Nearly a third of retail employees are under 25 and nearly 60% of people working in this industry are women. That means we have a young and by no insignificant margin predominantly female workforce. In this place, we are often accused of being distant from the reality of the day-to-day-lives of the people we serve, and I think we have a really good chance with this Bill to show that that is not the case.

We have public support, too. The Co-operative party—I am a Co-op MP, of course—commissioned polling with Populus that showed that 85% of people, when asked, supported my proposal. That reflects how much people appreciate the work of retail workers and want to work free from the fear of violence. I pay tribute to USDAW for its years of campaigning on behalf of shop workers across the country, and to the Co-operative party and my 36 Labour and Co-operative colleagues who have fought so hard for these workers across the country. I feel I need to apologise in advance for being able to have only 11 sponsors, given that they all wanted to sponsor the Bill. We are proud to stand with USDAW, campaigning to take forward the proposals in my Bill.

This must go hand-in-hand with supporting new clause 1 to the Offensive Weapons Bill, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson), which is due to be debated on Monday. I am relatively new to this place, but it might be that the ten-minute rule Bill process might not be the best route to getting the change I want secured. It was the best path available to me at the time, which is why I took it, but we have a good opportunity on Monday to show that we get this and I hope that Members will take that chance.

I am glad that the Ministers are in their place, and I call on the Government to give this subject time. I know where this Bill will go next, and it might well get buried if it is passed today, but if we have the proper time to talk about this issue we could make a real difference.

I know that we support shop workers, and 80% of them believe that the law needs to be strengthened because they are worried about things at work. I think we should hear their call. Through this Bill, we can ensure that those individuals who seek to assault our hard-working retail staff face the appropriate consequences. This is not a party political or partisan issue. It is about protecting those people who support our day-to-day lives, in many cases without our even realising it. I asked Ministers and colleagues across the House to support the Bill. Doing so will help to protect thousands of each of our constituents and to fail to do so will risk the situation worsening. Within the past year, there has been a significant increase in the number of these violent offences that I have talked about. I believe that the Bill is based on our shared values of tolerance and that nobody should be subjected to violence in their place of work.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Alex Norris, Luciana Berger, Anna Turley, Mr Chris Leslie, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Tracy Brabin, Jo Platt, Mr Paul Sweeney, Preet Kaur Gill, Alex Sobel, Jim McMahon and Stella Creasy present the Bill.

Alex Norris accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed (Bill 270).

Backbench Business

Baby Loss Awareness Week

6.35 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered baby loss awareness week 2018.

I rise to open today's debate on Baby Loss Awareness Week, and if you, Madam Deputy Speaker, or others wish to read the account of Fiona Crack and her husband about their daughter Willow that is on the BBC site today, you will understand why this debate has continuing endurance and relevance. I am also extremely grateful to my colleagues and the charities that have worked with us on the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss. I want to use my time to highlight some of the successes, to describe how we can ensure that we build on them and to mention a couple of areas where we must focus our efforts more closely as they have become areas of concern.

Looking back over the past year, I am proud of the higher profile of parental bereavement issues. Whereas before many people felt that they did not know how to approach the subject or what to say, we are increasingly seeing people coming forward and offering words of sympathy, kindness and condolence, and the 60 charities working in this field have produced an excellent video, which is available on YouTube under the title "Baby Loss Awareness Week". Members of the public and anybody watching this debate can watch and see how to approach and discuss the subject.

This change has come about because of a slow and steady change in how we in this country treat those who have lost a child. All of those involved in Baby Loss Awareness Week can be proud of this change, from those of us in this place today to the fantastic charities and voluntary groups, such as Sands, the Lullaby Trust and the 60 other charities that have been involved in the initiative. In addition, doctors, nurses and midwives on the frontline have been changing attitudes during the past few years.

It is not just attitudes that have changed in the past year, but policy. I am delighted that the past year has seen two major policy shifts: the implementation of a pilot of the national bereavement care pathway; and the passage of the Parental Bereavement Act 2018 into law. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) will want to discuss that Act in more detail, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for his able stewardship in taking the Bill through Parliament. This is a significant step in ensuring that those who lose a child can mourn their loss while knowing that they have a period of paid parental leave from their employment. It marks the introduction of a new benefit such as has not been seen in this country for many decades, and I welcome the progress that the Government have made on that.

I want to spend a little longer concentrating on the national bereavement care pathway. Good care cannot remove parents' pain and grief, but it can help them through this devastating time. In contrast, poor care can significantly add to their distress. The national bereavement care pathway sets out to deliver that good quality care and it was designed to address the previous

postcode lottery in quality of care. The first wave of pilots was launched this time last year, during Baby Loss Awareness Week 2017. Eleven trusts were joined by 21 more when the second wave started in April of this year. This week, we take another step forward, as all the documents, tools and resources are being made publicly available for the first time. The national bereavement care pathway is paving the way for excellent care after pregnancy and baby loss. It aims to improve the quality of bereavement care experienced by parents and families at all stages. That includes miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal death, molar and ectopic pregnancy, termination of pregnancy due to foetal abnormality, and sudden and unexpected death in infants of up to 12 months. This bereavement care pathway provides healthcare professionals with detailed guidance, training programmes, staff resources and simplified paperwork so that they can provide high-quality bereavement care when families need it most.

We are lucky because an evaluation of the first wave of pilots has taken place, and the results have been really positive. Parents have responded overwhelmingly positively, considering what they went through at the time. Some 95% of parents surveyed agreed that the hospital was a caring and supportive environment; 98% of parents agreed that they were treated with respect; 90% felt that they were provided with information that was easy to understand; 92% felt that the decisions they made in hospital were the right ones at the time; and 96% felt that they were communicated with sensitively. That is so important, because that shows that there has been a huge change in advice and support. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) will be talking about the less encouraging statistics for areas that have not been able to roll out the pathway.

It is not only parents but medical professionals who feel the difference. At the beginning of the pilot, medical professionals were interviewed and asked what was preventing the delivery of the best possible quality bereavement care. One said that

"people were in their own little bubbles. There wasn't much sharing, nothing was passed around as a standard."

Medical staff also identified a lack of staff training, poor bereavement suite facilities, complex paperwork, long delays in getting post-mortem results back, staff not knowing how to communicate with parents about their loss, and different levels of awareness or knowledge between departments at the same hospital. The evaluation shows that significant progress is being made on a number of those concerns. Some 77% of the professionals who are aware of the pathway agree that, overall, bereavement care has improved in their NHS trust during the period of the pilot. That is something that our national health service can be really proud of, because it represents a significant change. Two thirds of professionals who are aware of the pathway agree that it has helped to raise the profile of effective bereavement care in their trust. The proportion of health professionals who feel prepared to communicate with bereaved parents, able to discuss bad news with parents and supported to deliver good-quality bereavement care has increased. If this were an exam, the student would have passed with flying colours.

The testimony of one parent who was involved in the pilot says it all:

"There was a doctor who was really, really helpful with me. It was such a shock and took such a long time for me to process why and how this happened; I must have gone in about five times, where she had to sit me down and tell me the same thing again

[*Antoinette Sandbach*]

and again. It was never too much trouble for her, and I needed that. Having patience with someone is really, really important—because you might have said it five or six times but I need you to say it again. She's a doctor, she's a very busy woman but she always made time to speak to me."

This kind of care, and this kindness in care, is so important for parents in that position. They are going through the worst experience of their lives, and they are not always thinking straight. They are guaranteed to be sleep deprived and distraught. The kindness of a doctor or the concern of a midwife can be the first small building block on the road to recovery.

However, despite these successes and others, which I am sure colleagues from across the House will mention, we must continue with our work. In the most recent year for which figures are available, 5,500 babies were stillborn or died within 28 days of birth in the UK. Some of our European neighbours have managed to cut perinatal mortality rates by up to half, which shows there is still more to do. I welcome the Government's target of halving perinatal mortality rates in the UK by 2025.

One thing I am becoming increasingly concerned about is the rising number of child death cases in hospitals. Although I am pleased that the light of transparency is being shone into these hospitals, I cannot help being concerned by the number of such cases in the last year. Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust has been the subject of horrific news, with the investigation into maternity care expanding to more than 100 cases. Likewise, in my own area, the Countess of Chester Hospital is the subject of a criminal investigation amid allegations that a member of medical staff was involved in 17 deaths and 15 non-fatal collapses. More broadly, a recent study found that the baby death rate was 10% higher than expected for a maternity unit.

Just last week, we saw the news from Wales that Cwm Taf University Health Board may have failed to properly investigate historical cases of stillbirth and neonatal deaths in its maternity units. I know that that case—the most recent—is devolved, and there will be things that the Minister cannot say while investigations are ongoing, but I would be grateful if he reassured the House about the steps that are being taken to address these specific issues, and what plans he has to ensure that when such issues arise in the future, there is a plan in place to support affected parents and ensure that the investigation is as quick and thorough as possible.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The hon. Lady is speaking with great authority on this issue, as she always does. Does she agree that one thing the Government could do in this area, particularly when it comes to stillbirth, is to extend the power of coroners to investigate stillbirths of full-term babies? We have discussed that previously, and it is the subject of a private Member's Bill. Does she think that that would help in the investigation, and therefore the prevention, of unnecessary deaths?

Antoinette Sandbach: I know that across the House there is a great interest in the need for coroners' investigations, and I believe that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) will be introducing a private Member's Bill. I think that the idea has support from the Government. It is incredibly

important for parents to give consent to post-mortems—that can be a very sensitive area, particularly for parents from ethnic minority backgrounds—because very often, medical findings assist with the research to discover the causes of stillbirth and neonatal death. The hon. Lady makes a very good point.

In closing, I hope that colleagues will recognise that this year has been one of significant policy wins.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I echo the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) made by commending the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) on her joint leadership of the all-party group on baby loss and her support for the charities that have come together once again to initiate Baby Loss Awareness Week. Will she praise the intervention of a councillor in my constituency, Sarah Butterworth, and her husband Jon, whose baby, Tiger Lily, was stillborn in June 2005? They have joined in the support for Baby Loss Awareness Week to encourage more debate about this sensitive issue.

Antoinette Sandbach: I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in praising his constituents' work in memory of Tiger Lily. Let me also refer to the story of Fiona Crack and her daughter Willow. Fiona went to speak to the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and there is a detailed account on the BBC's website, highlighting the way in which they have turned a negative into a positive in commemorating the memory of Tiger Lily and the steps that they are taking to help other parents in their grief. I believe that they help with the memory boxes; I have a memory box at home, and I know how valuable that is.

I think that there has been a real uptick and a real positive story to tell this year, given the policy wins that have come from the Government. We know that we must address these challenges, but we have come a huge way in the last three years, and we have won important changes in policy.

Members may be wondering what they can do to drive the changes that we need. First and foremost, they can join me in encouraging the Minister to fully fund the national bereavement care pathway into 2019-20, so that it is embedded and becomes the national standard for best practice. I hope that the Minister will have something to say about that when he winds up the debate. Secondly, Members on both sides of the House can engage with their local charities who help those who have lost a child, as, indeed, many of their constituents have. I know that many Members are present because of the work that their constituents have done, or because of their own experiences.

Members can also help to promote the national bereavement care pathway in their constituencies. We have seen from the pilot that it works, but political support and public awareness are crucial to ensuring that it is embedded throughout the UK. If Members leave this debate with one thing in their minds, let it be the testimony of a grieving parent who experienced the pathway:

"I was shocked at the level of care. I thought 'this is the NHS, why are they making such an effort for me?' I didn't know care like this existed and I was blown away by it—my expectations were exceeded in every way".

We have all benefited from amazing care from our NHS, but sometimes it does not have all the tools that it needs. The national bereavement care pathway gives it the tools that it needs to deal with this very difficult issue, and we must work to ensure that it is put in place throughout the country.

6.52 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Let me begin by expressing my admiration for the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who made such a powerful contribution to the debate and, in particular, for her personification of bravery when recounting what can only have been a painfully traumatic experience.

I speak as someone who has not lost a child and who, as such, cannot begin to imagine how harrowing, how devastating, such a loss must be. I cannot begin to understand what it feels like to have enjoyed the exhilaration of expecting a new addition to the family and the months of anticipation and preparation, and then to be deprived of such joy.

As a society, we must strive to reduce the UK stillbirth rate, which remains high in comparison with those of other wealthy countries. There is also a disparity within the United Kingdom that needs to be acknowledged: Wales still has the highest stillbirth rate, at 4.44 per 1,000 births. Others who are present this evening will have far greater experience and expertise than I—so I will keep my remarks brief—but it appears to me that a range of measures will be needed to reduce our rate significantly. For example, researchers from the University of Edinburgh have recently discovered that introducing a package of care when women report a change in foetal movements can help to reduce the stillbirth rate slightly. Raising awareness among expectant mothers is important, but we should also ensure that training for frontline maternity professionals is not only available but prioritised, so that they are best able to react to any change in movements reported by mothers. Training and resources must be made available to maternity units so that they can act promptly when necessary.

As I am sure will be mentioned later this evening, hand in hand with greater awareness of changes in foetal movement is the potential for an enhanced programme of ultrasound scanning into the third trimester—which occurs elsewhere in Europe—to measure a baby's growth more effectively, potentially reduce the number of adverse perinatal outcomes caused by foetal growth restriction and prevent avoidable deaths. This is, of course, at the heart of the debate: the desire to represent the experiences of parents who have lost their child and, from their strength, endeavour to prevent others from having to suffer the agony of losing their child.

Let me express my admiration for the bravery of all the parents—some, I know, are in the Chamber this evening—who have lost a child. I am simply in awe of those who are able to speak so eloquently about their loss and work determinedly to improve things for other parents. I pay particular homage to the Members who are so active in the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss.

A young couple in my constituency embody such courage and fortitude. Having lost their little girl, Mari-Leisa Jên, this summer, Clare and Gareth have undertaken a range of initiatives to raise money to help to fund the

purchase of additional “cuddle cots” for Ceredigion. The cots allow grieving families to have more time with their children—precious time in which to make lifelong memories—and I thank the charity Cariad Angel Gowns for enabling that to happen for Clare and Gareth.

The couple have climbed Snowdon to help raise money for the cots and to raise awareness of the causes of perinatal loss. Close friends completed the Cardiff half-marathon this weekend in memory of Mari-Leisa Jên. At a time of unimaginable grief, when most would understandably retire into themselves, Clare and Gareth have thought of helping others and, to date, have raised thousands of pounds. Such incredible resilience speaks for the strength and depth of their love for Mari-Leisa, and although her time with us was all too brief, the impact that she has had on family, friends and the local community is second to none. Mari-Leisa has brought them together to make a positive difference for others, and I, for one, cannot think of a more loving or a more worthy legacy.

6.57 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Thank you for letting me speak early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should start by apologising for the fact that I have an unbreakable commitment elsewhere and have to leave before the end of the debate. It is the debate that I dread most during the year, but it is also one of which I am determined to be part.

It is a great honour to follow both the Members who have spoken so far, to speak in a debate that marks the beginning of Baby Loss Awareness Week and to serve as vice-chair of the merry band—largely—of people who form the all-party parliamentary group. We have been brought together by horrific circumstances, but we have had extraordinary success. There are hundreds of all-party parliamentary groups, perhaps even 1,000, but very few can boast the success that we have had in the past three years. We have really put baby loss on the agenda, and we have changed the law on, for example, parental bereavement leave.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Hear, hear.

Victoria Prentis: I gesticulate at my hon. Friend, who has joined us so enthusiastically in championing that issue.

We would not be where we are today were it not for the support that we have received from the Government, especially the Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care, and, indeed, the hard work of the charities that work with us. This year is particularly special for Sands, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary. I am very proud of my constituent Karen Hancox, who has worked so hard for Sands in Oxfordshire since losing her first daughter, Kayleigh, in 2008. She was responsible for lighting up Banbury cross in memory of Baby Loss Awareness Week last year, and she also helped with the fantastically helpful service in St Mary's, Banbury last year, which we are repeating this Sunday, and at which I hope any hon. Member passing on the M40 will join us.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I want to take the opportunity of this intervention to congratulate the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach),

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

who has been tirelessly campaigning on baby loss for many years now. I have listened to these debates before and they are very difficult for everybody, even those who have no experience of baby loss. I can remember the issues around cot deaths, when women were charged and accused of perhaps harming their babies. But there is also the fairly recent problem—I think there are some ongoing investigations and prosecutions—where parents have lost their child at birth but still do not know the reason for that. I congratulate the hon. Member for Eddisbury once again for her tireless work in this area.

Victoria Prentis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and, if I may on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), I thank him for his kind words.

The hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) mentioned the issue of inquests into stillbirths. I have been leading on that area in the all-party group because of my previous legal background and the fact that I spent much of my legal life conducting inquests on behalf of the Government. There is a current private Member's Bill on this issue. It is a very broad Bill; the Member in charge likes to refer to it as the hatched, matched and dispatched Bill, which gives some idea of its scope. This is an extremely difficult and sensitive area both legally and in terms of the messaging. Many interest groups are concerned that it touches on the law about abortions and the law about when babies become beings and part of society, but there is no need for much of that discussion in this debate; it does not in fact need to touch on those terribly difficult issues. We in the all-party group are working hard with the Department and the Ministry of Justice, which is also very involved in this, to push this issue forward and to try to ensure that that does not happen and that we are able to address any concerns in the very small number of cases where an inquest would be helpful and extra transparency is needed. I know from my own experience that inquests are very hard for families. The Scots are also working in this area, and, give us time, as next year we may have some announcements, I hope.

Returning to Sands, I want to mention the brilliant work of my constituent Karen. She is one of the 40 volunteers to be nominated as part of the charity's anniversary celebrations, and I am looking forward to welcoming her to Westminster later this week at our parliamentary reception. I am also very much looking forward to the service we are having in St Mary Undercroft on Thursday and I encourage anybody who works in this House, whether as a Member or peer or any of our staff, to come to that service. It is extremely warm and friendly; everybody might weep throughout, but in a positive way.

I must also praise the BBC—wow, two Conservative MPs praising the BBC in successive speeches—for highlighting our awareness week. The slot on “The Chris Evans Breakfast Show” this morning meant I had to stop the car; it was about the amazing bereavement midwife Nicola Taylor and a couple she helped around the birth of their three babies, and it was incredibly powerful. Fiona Crack's story is currently on the

BBC website. If any Member's concentration wavers in this debate, I ask them to look at it, or perhaps better to do so when they get home tonight. “Woman's Hour” is also handling this issue extremely sensitively and well.

I want to touch on three points this evening. First, the bereavement care pathway is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury said, a real success. I received some brilliant care but also some less good care when our baby died 18 years ago. Crucially, the national bereavement care pathway embeds the standards across trusts—across the nation—as a matter of course; that is very important. The situation at present is still patchy. According to Sands, only 46% of trusts with maternity units provide mandatory bereavement care training for maternity unit staff. Of those, 86% provide their staff with just one hour or less of training on bereavement care each year.

While it is of course right that we focus on families, we should also think a little about midwives and obstetricians, who are also very affected by the death of a baby in their care. They often build up an enduring relationship with families, and their future health and ability to function must be considered in thinking about what training they receive.

I want to focus on neonatal units, too. They are very stressful places. Anybody with a child on a neonatal unit is not a happy parent; it is not the place they want to be. Some 41% of neonatal unit patients have no access to a trained mental health worker, and many neonatal units still do not have dedicated bereavement facilities. The Government have funded better bereavement places in nearly 40 hospitals, but this is only the beginning. Prioritising the pathway within the new NHS long-term plan would make a real difference. Planning one year ahead is not good enough. We know that despite our best efforts to reduce neonatal death and stillbirth bereavements will continue to occur, and we need to plan for that. I hope the Minister will have some good news for us on this today. My hon. Friend described the Government as passing the exam with flying colours. I agree and am very grateful for what they have done, but I would say that if the Government want to be an A* pupil, further work is needed in this area so that this becomes the norm.

My second point is that better training is only possible if we have enough midwives. I hosted the launch of the Royal College of Midwives “State of Maternity Services” report recently, which found that finally more midwives are entering training. When I hosted it last year we were very concerned by the ageing of the profession. We are all getting older—we cannot help that—but I am pleased to say that we now have over 2,100 more full-time equivalent midwives in the NHS than we did in 2010, and the vast majority are in their 20s and 30s. It is also important that we focus on retaining these midwives and persuading former midwives back to work. This is progress in the right direction, but the situation remains critical. I really do wake up at night worrying about labouring mothers in my constituency in north Oxfordshire going to the Horton General Hospital to give birth only to be told that the unit has closed because the midwife who staffs it has been sent to cover gaps at the John Radcliffe. This been the case on at least three separate occasions in recent weeks. If anybody knows of anyone who is thinking of becoming a midwife, please encourage them to do so. It is a

brilliant profession and it is important that the Department continues to encourage the training and retention of the midwives we need.

Finally, I want to touch on perinatal mental health. On the eve of world mental health day, it seems appropriate to focus on the mental health of mothers and fathers. Pregnancy presents the health service with a brilliant opportunity to engage with people who are becoming parents and to give them life lessons that will improve health choices for them and their children. Their mental health is as important as their physical health. We know that those who have had difficult pregnancies or have lost children will, understandably, struggle with subsequent births. We need to identify families at risk and pour resource in before it is needed. These families may not fit into the usual definitions of post-natal care.

The definition and structure of care in the six-week post-natal period has changed very little in the past 150 years, but during this time there have been dramatic changes in women's health and our attitude to birth—and indeed in the outcomes of birth. It is critical that contraception is also discussed and is easily available during this time. Waiting months to have a long-acting contraceptive fitted is not helpful to new mothers. It might seem ridiculous to bring up the subject of contraception in a debate on baby loss, but it is important given the maternal mortality statistics. Some of the women who are dying while giving birth should not have been pregnant in the first place. It is critical that we deal with contraception early, where that is appropriate, and that we give people real choices so that they can get the contraception that works for them straight after they have given birth.

We in the all-party parliamentary group will continue to say the unsayable on issues such as baby ashes or the appropriateness or otherwise of inquests. These are dark areas for any society to deal with, but I believe that the APPG has been a force for good. I am really proud to play my part in breaking the silence.

7.10 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to be here for this important debate in the Chamber today. I would like to pay tribute to colleagues across the House for sponsoring the debate and for the work they do to keep this important issue on the agenda. I do not want to speak for too long, but I do have a few words to say. Baby Loss Awareness Week is an important part of the calendar and provides important support networks for bereaved parents, their families and friends. I recall sitting in the House for the debate on this issue last year, and I know that all colleagues agreed that it represented Parliament and politics at their best. In its 16th year, I welcome Baby Loss Awareness Week 2018 and the 60 charities that support it. Those charities are based in all parts of our United Kingdom, and they are doing brilliant work.

Before talking about a link to my own constituency, I want to place on the record my own personal experience of facing the loss of a child. My son was eight months old when he took ill with meningitis and we were given 24 hours to see whether he would survive. Twenty-eight years on, he has survived, thanks to the NHS staff at Monklands Hospital. Today I thank them once again on behalf of my family.

Fifteen babies die every day in the United Kingdom either before, during or shortly after birth; the number of unexplained deaths in children aged over one is not easy to identify across the whole of the United Kingdom. I am particularly interested in the discrepancies in bereavement care. I am firmly of the view that there is a need for bereavement suites in all neonatal units, with increased training and improved staffing levels. This is because 41% of neonatal units have no access to a trained mental health worker and many still have no dedicated bereavement facilities. I hope that we will see the kind of policy decisions in all four nations of the United Kingdom that will allow progress to be made. I welcome the commitment in Labour's 2017 manifesto that pledged to "significantly reduce infant deaths". We support the Government's commitment to reducing the rate of stillbirths, neonatal deaths, maternal deaths and brain injuries that occur during or soon after birth by 50% by the year 2030.

I want to say a few words in honour of my colleague, Gordon Encinias. Gordon was a councillor in Coatbridge South and a colleague of mine in Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill. Gordon died earlier this year and I know that I speak for many in the Scottish Labour family—and, more importantly, North Lanarkshire Council—when I pay tribute to Gordon and thank him for all his work. I mention Gordon because he and his wife lost children to infant deaths themselves, and they committed themselves to championing this issue through supporting Bumblebee Babies, a charity based in North Lanarkshire. Gordon helped it to find a property and premises and gave it his support. It is led by Brenda Murray and now supports parents in all parts of our United Kingdom. I pay tribute to Brenda and all the staff at Bumblebee Babies, and to my late friend Gordon Encinias.

I want to pay tribute to all hon. Members involved in this, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) and the hon. Members for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Colchester (Will Quince). Importantly, I also pay tribute to all those parents who have lost children, and I pledge to use my office to do all I can to ensure that the right support is there at the right time. Finally, I pay tribute to my mother, Helen Gaffney, who recently passed away at 86. Her first job as a young nurse was to look after stillborn children, and she looked after those angels as if they were her own. Rest in peace, Mum.

7.14 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney); I am pleased to say that his is one of the Scottish constituencies that I do not have a problem pronouncing. I should also like to thank all the previous speakers, particularly the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). He and the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill have shown the importance of hearing men's voices in the Baby Loss Awareness Week debate. I particularly want to thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the time for this debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group, for securing this important debate for the third year running.

In November 2015, when I was a relatively newly elected MP, I remember coming back after the recess and putting in for an end-of-day Adjournment debate.

[Will Quince]

Based on my own experience, I thought we should have a debate on bereavement care in maternity units. Little did I think that we would have made such progress in just over three years. We now have the all-party parliamentary group, and we are in our third year of marking Baby Loss Awareness Week here in Parliament. That demonstrates the power of this place when we put aside the squabbling and party political differences and work together with a clear aim. It is clear that we are united and speak with one voice when we say that we are committed to reducing stillbirths and neonatal deaths—I include miscarriage in that description. We are also committed to ensuring that we have world-class bereavement care right across our world-class NHS for those who go through the huge personal tragedy of losing a child.

This is a particularly important and poignant week for me and my family, because it is four years ago this week that we lost our son, Robert. We will be marking his birthday on Friday, when he would have been four years old. On Sunday, my two daughters and I picked out the birthday cake that we will be sharing. Sadly, we are just one of the families who are going through this experience week in and week out, up and down our country.

We should not underestimate the importance of talking about baby loss. This is why debates such as these are so important and powerful. Totally wrongly, baby loss is a massively taboo subject. We have made huge efforts over the past three and a half years to try to break the silence and the taboo by working with charities, organisations and health professionals, but the taboo still exists. It exists because we do not like talking about death, full stop, and particularly about the death of children or babies. It is important that we talk about it, however, because that little baby was a huge part of somebody's life. It is part of their story and their journey, and to ignore it can cause irreparable issues.

We must use the power of Parliament to break that taboo and talk about the issue, rather than crossing the street and avoiding someone who has suffered a stillbirth, miscarriage or neonatal death. We should talk to them about it. We should ask about their child and refer to them by their name, because people do want to talk. If they do not want to talk, they will tell us. It is really important that they should not be ignored.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I am so impressed by the work of the all-party parliamentary group. I rang my sister, who lost a baby a long time ago, to ask her what she would say if she were here. She asked me to encourage hon. Members to ensure that two things are available in hospitals. First, there should be someone practical to give advice on issues such as burials. The second, more important, thing was to have someone who can give emotional support to people who are in a moment of crisis and panic, and she felt strongly that in today's era such services should be multi-faith and no faith. The chaplain's offices in our Gloucestershire Royal Hospital can do that.

I should also like to mention a male constituent of mine who said that there had been a lot of support for his wife when they lost a child, but there had been no male support group. What does my hon. Friend think of those suggestions?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for raising those very good points, which are entirely valid. His points about support, both in hospital and post-hospital, and about the support available to fathers, are very important and I shall come on to them in a moment.

Just before we move on to the debate proper, I want to talk a bit about my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), because we have not had a chance since his elevation to the position of Foreign Secretary to praise him for the work he did on these matters when he was Health Secretary. From the beginning, we also felt supported by Ben Gummer—I think I am allowed to call him that now, as he is the former Member for Ipswich; he encouraged us to set up the all-party parliamentary group. However, the former Health and Social Care Secretary, now Foreign Secretary, could not have been more supportive, and we felt from the very beginning that we were pushing against an open door. He knew that the issue needed to be addressed, and he threw the full weight of the Department behind it. I thank him on the behalf of the APPG, and I know that all the charities feel the same way. He was hugely supportive and continues to be so.

We produced a video for Baby Loss Awareness Week, which is live now, and my right hon. Friend features in it, showing how passionate he is about tackling this issue. I also want to say how much the rest of the APPG and I are looking forward to working with the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), who has already reached out to me and other members of the APPG, as have his special advisers, to continue that work, which they recognise is important.

Several colleagues have already referenced the hugely important work done by charities up and down the country. That includes both big charities such as Sands, which is marking its 40th anniversary this year, the Lullaby Trust, the Mariposa Trust, Tamba and so many others and small charities that provide support locally. The support that they provide to parents at the most difficult time in their lives is so valuable, and I thank everyone who works in and volunteers for those charities.

Lilian Greenwood: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful contribution, as he always does, and I congratulate him and all the members of the APPG on their work. Will he join me in congratulating a local Nottinghamshire charity called Forever Stars? Not only is it doing fantastic work supporting parents who have lost a child, but it has managed to raise £300,000 to create two new bereavement suites at the two Nottingham hospitals over the past year. I know that that has already been touched on in the debate, but it makes such a difference to parents who have experienced the loss of a child when they have somewhere suitable to be with their baby and deal with the aftermath of a terrible situation.

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I will absolutely thank and pay tribute to that charity. In so many cases, bereaved parents want to do something to make a difference and to provide a legacy for or mark the life of their child, however short, and raising money to support our NHS or to provide support for bereaved parents is hugely worth while. If I heard the hon. Lady right, an incredible £300,000 was raised: I pay tribute to the work that parents across the country do to raise

such sums, which support the NHS in providing world-class facilities. I will discuss this further in a bit, but although we do have world-class facilities and bereavement suites some of our hospitals do not have them, which is an issue in and of itself.

I have thanked charities, but it is also important to thank the clinicians and support staff within the NHS who work so hard in this area. They really are heroes, and their work is incredible. Midwives do an incredible job, because although they are so often there at the best time in someone's life—when a child is born—they are sometimes sadly also there at the very worst time in someone's life. Their ability to, in effect, wear both hats and provide that caring, compassionate, empathetic support is a credit to them. We really do have world-class staff in our NHS.

I also thank all the clinicians who are working so hard on the national bereavement care pathway. Numerous colleagues have mentioned it already, and it is important to reference the progress made so far. I do not want this to be a back-patting debate, because I will move on to some areas where the Government could do more, but we have achieved quite a lot in just over three years. The first, and probably most significant, achievement was the Government's commitment to reduce stillbirth and neonatal death by 20% by 2020 and by half by 2025. I note that that target has been moved forward—I think the target three years ago was 2030—thanks to the work of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Health Ministers and clinicians. Having spoken to the Department and to clinicians up and down the country, I understand that those targets are realistic and achievable and that we are on track to achieve them, which is quite incredible.

However, it is important to note that even if we achieve the target of reducing stillbirth and neonatal death by 50%, that still means that around 2,000 or 2,500 babies are dying in the UK every single year and that a similar number of families will be going through a horrific personal tragedy, so we must ensure that we have world-class support. That is why the national care bereavement pathway, which I think it is fair to say was a concept initially drawn up based on the APPG's work with charities, is game changing. The pathway is game changing, because what we had and continue to have across our NHS is world-class bereavement care, but it can be found only in pockets. It is not consistent across the NHS.

A particular hospital trust may have one or perhaps even two specialist bereavement suites and one, two or maybe more specialist bereavement-trained midwives or gynaecological counsellors, and all sorts of charities may be supporting bereaved parents within that hospital trust. In other hospitals, however, there may be no bereavement suite and perhaps just one or even no specialist bereavement-trained midwives or gynaecological counsellors. That is an issue, so a national bereavement care pathway that provides consistent, compassionate, empathetic care and support across our NHS, whichever hospital one visits, is so important.

Antoinette Sandbach: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that point. However, even where world-class care is not available, that can change, and the Medway NHS Foundation Trust is a great example of that. It received a negative inspection report, but it completely turned the situation around and now has absolutely first-class

facilities. World-class care is achievable when hospital managers and NHS trusts are absolutely committed to delivering it.

Will Quince: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The core purpose of the national bereavement care pathway is to show what good care looks like so that it can be rolled out across our NHS. My hon. Friend is right that we can do that by having bereavement suites and trained gynaecological counsellors and midwives, and we are seeing it. The pathway has now been launched in 32 sites, and I must again praise the Government for their initial funding, which supported the establishment of the principle and the pilots, and then the further funding for the roll-out into more sites.

I echo the comments made by my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) about further funding to roll out the pathway to ensure that it reaches the entire NHS nationwide, but 77% of professionals at the pilot sites who were aware of the pathway agree that bereavement care improved in the trust during the trial, and some 95% of parents interviewed agreed that the hospital was a caring and supportive environment. We therefore know that the pathway is making a difference and will work, which is why the Government have been so supportive. We just want to ensure that it is rolled out. The roll-out has deliberately happened in stages because ensuring that it is effective and embedded is just as important as the initial implementation.

Others have mentioned the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, which is an incredible and ground-breaking piece of legislation. It is the first time that workers have had such a right, and it is one of the best rights in this area in the world. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for so ably and passionately steering the legislation through the House of Commons and then ensuring its passage through the House of Lords and beyond. It is game changing, because it means that, from 2020, parents who lose a child up to the age of 18 will be entitled to two weeks' paid leave. That is particularly important in relation to this baby loss debate, because it means that parents who lose a child to stillbirth will also be entitled to those two weeks.

For a mother, those extra two weeks may not be a huge change because mothers are entitled to their full maternity leave, but for a father it is game changing. Instead of two weeks' paternity leave, he will get four weeks, because he will get the additional two weeks of paid leave. The Act will make a huge difference to fathers up and down the country who go through the awful experience of a stillbirth.

I said earlier that this was not a back-patting debate. Far, far more needs to be done. Earlier we had reference to bereavement suites. It is essential that we have bereavement suites in every hospital up and down the country. It is not acceptable that any parent should have to suffer a stillbirth or neonatal death in a maternity unit where they can hear happy families, crying babies and people with balloons and teddies—all the joy of that. People who are going through this most traumatic of experiences need somewhere quiet for reflection, to grieve and to spend time with their baby in peace. We know that we can provide this because NHS trusts up and down the country are providing bereavement suites.

[Will Quince]

In Colchester we were lucky to have use of the Rosemary suite, and I am not quite sure what we would have done without it.

So we have to ensure, Minister, that we have a bereavement suite in every hospital away from the main maternity unit. Ideally, I would like another room to be available, because you cannot book in. You do not know when exactly you are going to have a baby—these things do come on, as my wife and I found out with our second, who was born at home, unexpectedly. It was also a pretty traumatic experience, but it ended well. The point is that people do not know and they cannot book suites out. They can just turn up at hospital. If, sadly, the suite is already being used, another room should be available. It might not have the full facilities of a bereavement suite, but it is important to have that room.

As was mentioned earlier, cold cots are also important. Not all parents will want to spend time with their child, but those who want to should be able to spend as much as they need after the birth, and for that cold cots are important.

As I mentioned earlier, it is important that bereavement-trained midwives or gynaecological counsellors are available in every hospital—not part time but full time, and available for parents when they need them. Let us not forget that many stillbirths and neonatal deaths are sudden and unexpected. It is a hugely traumatic experience and people need support immediately. A trained individual is so important. However, there is merit in ensuring that bereavement training is a module in the midwifery course so that every midwife is trained to an extent, because sadly we know that they will come across stillbirth and neonatal death in their career.

The other thing is to ensure that there is learning from every miscarriage and stillbirth. We still do not really understand why 50% of stillbirths happen. I will come on to it, but research is so important. I have already mentioned embedding the national bereavement care pathway.

I want to touch on the new pregnancy loss review, because it has not been mentioned so far. One of its heads is Zoe Clark-Coates of the Mariposa Trust. We often talk about stillbirth and neonatal death, but we do not talk enough about miscarriage and we still do not really know the true numbers of miscarriages. Colleagues in the Chamber have spoken emotively in previous debates about their experience of losing a child at less than 24 weeks. They said that their loss was not recognised in any way because it was classed as a miscarriage, not a stillbirth, even though they gave birth. This is why the pregnancy loss review is so important.

I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury about post-mortems. Too often, people are scared to have the conversation about a post-mortem. It is a difficult subject; I would not want to approach parents who have just lost a child and ask if they would consider a post-mortem. But it is so important that that question is asked, because post-mortems will enable us to start to understand why stillbirths happen. So changing cultures within NHS trusts to ensure that that question is asked as a matter of course is important. The parents can say no, but if they are not

offered the opportunity, they may look back and say, “My child’s life could have made a difference to future children.”

I would like to see the national bereavement care pathway and bereavement support more widely included as part of the matrix and assessment regime for the Care Quality Commission. We do not put enough emphasis on bereavement and the support that parents are given. I would also like to see support for subsequent pregnancies. There is pretty good support in many NHS trusts at the point at which someone suffers a loss, but what about subsequent pregnancies? Often the mother and the father will be thinking every single day up until the 12-week scan, every single day up until the 20-week scan, “Is this going to happen again?” But at that point often no support is available unless they reach out. The support network is patchy across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) spoke about fathers, and he was absolutely right to do so. As I said at the beginning of the debate, it is important that men take part in it. So often, men bottle things up. They think they have to be the tough guy and hold it all in to support the family. I did it, and I have spoken to other fathers, so I know that it is a common reaction. Men are often treated like the spare part. That is by accident, not design. The chaplain or midwife will often be talking to the mother—understandably—but the father has just witnessed the woman they love give birth to a child they love and have now lost. They have been through the experience too. They are often the ones who will have to go off and tell family members, register the death and make arrangements for the funeral. So it is important to ensure that fathers have all the necessary support available to them, and it is one area that the NHS needs to get much better at.

It is important that we have more research into baby loss. The taboo nature of this issue means that charities that specialise in it—even the bigger ones such as Sands, the Lullaby Trust, the Mariposa Trust and others—do not get the financial support that other charities do. I implore people up and down the country to support baby loss charities, because they can fund vital research, which will lead to fewer babies dying.

Lastly, I want to touch on another passion of mine. We talk about 15 babies dying every single day in the UK. Every single one is a tragedy. But 7,175 die every single day worldwide. Every day 830 mothers die from preventable causes related to pregnancy, and 99% of them are in developing countries. So let us be passionate about reducing stillbirth and neonatal death here in the UK, but let us be equally passionate about tackling this issue worldwide. I am a big champion of UK aid because I know that it makes a difference around the world. UK aid is not sold, especially by some of the right-wing media, but it is so important in tackling issues such as this. I do not think that there is one person in this country who would say that spending money on reducing the number of deaths of babies is not money well spent. If we were to get the newborn mortality rate of every country down to the average of high-income countries such as our own, or even better below it, that would save 16 million lives a year.

UK aid is already making a huge difference to this issue. In 2015-16, something like £124 million was spent on maternal and neonatal health. That is equivalent to about 15% of aid spending. The Department for

International Development is supporting programmes in about 16 countries, focusing on maternal and neonatal health. I recently made a visit with Unicef to Ethiopia, a country that has a high prevalence of baby loss. Although the number of deaths of children aged between one month and five years has dramatically fallen in recent decades, newborn death remains a massive issue. Think of the difference we can make worldwide if we can share some of the learnings from this country and others in the western world by using UK aid and support from clinicians in this country. Let me give an example of that.

One of the biggest causes of newborn death in Ethiopia is sepsis, which is relatively rare in the UK because we have high levels of hygiene and sanitation. UK aid water projects will make a huge difference on that, but we can do far more. At one neonatal unit there, the scrubs and clogs I was asked to put on were dirtier than the clothes I was wearing, which was a little worrying. There was a baby in there with sepsis, and I spoke to the doctor, who was a general practitioner, not a specialist in gynaecology or an obstetrician. There is a real need for some specialism and specialist training there. I asked, "Where is the hand wash? Where is your alcohol rub? This is commonplace. You can't go about 10 feet along a hospital corridor in the UK without finding an alcohol rub dispenser." He replied, "Ah, yes, I've got some of this" and he reached into a bottom drawer, underneath a load of stuff, and pulled it out. This is exactly the sort of intervention, on cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation, that we in the UK can share with countries around the world and that can make a difference. So I invite the Minister, and I will also be pushing the Secretary of State for International Development on this, to have a little more focus on tackling infant mortality, stillbirth and neonatal death on a global scale.

I have probably spoken for long enough, but I just want to say that this is a hugely important subject. We in the all-party group will continue our work, and I wish to thank all Members here from across the House, the Government and Members from all parties for their ongoing support.

7.41 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a great privilege to take part in this debate. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and others have set an almost unsurpassable standard in their comprehensive, thoughtful and moving accounts of the issue before us tonight. When I thought about what I was going to say today, I found myself strangely circumspect, reticent and shy about what I might or might not say, possibly because I am old fashioned—probably more so than I should be. At the back of one's mind there is always the thought, "Is it in good taste? Should I go there? Should I not?" But in a flash it came to me: I have only one sibling, my younger brother, who is nine and a half years younger than me, and all my mother ever said about this—she is dead now—was that she had a number of miscarriages between me and my brother. It is very much to my detriment, to my dishonour, that I never broached this subject with my mother and said, "What happened?" I very much regret that. My parents were immensely British, and they got on with it and suffered in silence, but I wonder how many miscarriages she had and what that agony was like. It is too late now, and "too late" are some of the saddest words in English.

The point has been made about parents, and I am a parent, all three of whose children were born relatively easily and successfully. As one or two Members of this place know, I am also a grandparent and a brother-in-law, and for that reason am not untouched by the type of tragedy that has been described today. One thinks, "It is not going to affect me", but it comes damned close. So I have the experience. The second thing I found to be almost like a searing wound to me personally: witnessing the extraordinary grief of what happened. This was a searing, dreadful, ghastly grief. The hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) has said that we must reach out, give people a hug and ask how we can help, but that grief has to be seen to be believed and it is terrible.

Victoria Prentis: I have really appreciated the hon. Gentleman's input into our group. We should, of course, have mentioned the importance of grandparents and wider family. They have been present in the all-party group, in the form of my father, right from its inception in the middle of the night, when we were waiting for a late vote, and they play a crucial role in helping parents and others to get through the awful loss of a baby. Of course grandparents matter!

Jamie Stone: The hon. Lady makes the point much better than I can. I take great comfort in the thought that I may be slightly more than just a doddering old fellow who amuses the kids. I like to think, and I hope, that I helped my two daughters through their trauma.

The hon. Member for Colchester made the point about the partner—about the man in the equation—several times, and nothing was ever truer. How terrible it must be to witness a stillbirth—a child who arrives too early to survive. I would dare to suggest that the man is emotionally every bit as bruised as the woman.

I wish to conclude simply by saying that in a debate such as this the House is at its best, and I give credit to the hon. Member for Eddisbury and others for that. I hope and believe that if people out there chance upon this debate online or read the record of it, they will find some human comfort—some milk of human kindness—which shows that we care. The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) mentioned to me the service in the Crypt on Thursday, and I will take part in the service and contribute a reading with the greatest of pleasure. Finally, I cannot even begin to surmise how, but when we had my family traumas, to my great surprise several Members, from all parts of the House, came up to me and said, "We understand. We know what you are going through." When a completely unexpected hand reaches out like that, it is pure gold and reminds one of what friendship is really all about.

7.47 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I wish to join my colleagues in commending the Members who have so bravely recounted their own experiences of baby loss here tonight and at last year's baby loss debate. As many have said, the loss of a baby is one that no parent should ever have to bear. I am fortunate not to have suffered such a loss, but as a children's doctor I have, unfortunately, been the bearer of such bad news on too many occasions.

In my experience, the first reaction of a parent confronted with the tragic death of a baby is to ask, "Why? Why did this happen? Why my child? Why me?" In these agonising

[Dr Caroline Johnson]

circumstances, answers as to why this situation has occurred can help to provide respite. The second reaction, one that is testament to the incredible empathy human beings have, even in the most difficult circumstances, is the desire to ensure that lessons are learned from their personal tragedy so that no one else has to endure that same heartbreak. I am in awe of colleagues, such as those here this evening, who have been through such a traumatic experience and found the strength not just to share that experience, but to use it to campaign successfully for improvements in care and to highlight areas to improve so that others do not experience such suffering in the future. I commend the work of the all-party group and my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester (Will Quince), for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) for their work to develop the bereavement care pathway. I have worked in hospitals where there has been excellent bereavement care, with the bereavement suite that has been described, and in others where the care has been less well developed, and I have seen the importance of the national bereavement care pathway. I congratulate them on it.

Although he is no longer in his seat, I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on his private Member's Bill, which has developed child bereavement leave. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester has said, it will enable mothers to have an extra two weeks of maternity leave and fathers to have a doubling of their leave—some extra time to reflect and be at home with their family.

One recent improvement that the Government have made is the introduction of independent investigations by the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch, which will look at every case of stillbirth or life-changing injury. That will help to meet the needs of parents in respect of that first question—"Why did this happen?"—and to prevent it from happening again. When the lessons are disseminated throughout the health service, doctors and midwives will be able to learn from previous experience to ensure that problems do not occur in future. It will be important—I look to the Minister to respond on this—to ensure that health professionals can speak openly in investigations without fear of blame. A blame culture will deter people from speaking openly and prevent improvements to patient safety. I have spoken numerous times in the Chamber about patient safety, and I am hopeful that the national roll-out of investigations will help us to meet the NHS's goal of becoming the safest healthcare system in the world in which to give birth.

One development in neonatal care that I have seen in my 17 years of practice is the increasing centralisation of neonatal care, with the smallest and sickest infants now transported to specialist centres. I have worked in these centres and, although they provide exceptional care, they are often many miles away from the hospital where the child was first admitted or where the family live. For example, if a baby's family live in Sleaford and North Hykeham, their nearest tertiary centre is in Nottingham. If the centre in Nottingham is full, the family may be sent many hours away to Norwich, Sheffield or Leicester. For working families on low incomes, the need to visit their sick baby several hours

away imposes significant travel costs. Some families go through intense financial difficulty to meet that need to travel, while others have the distress of being physically unable to travel to see their baby as often as they would wish because they do not have the money to get to the tertiary centres. I raised the very same issue in the debate last year and would be interested to hear an update from the Minister on any measures being taken to help struggling families, many of whom work, to meet the travel costs in such an extremely distressing situation.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a good point about safety. In respect of smaller hospitals retaining maternity services, some years ago there was an attempt to downgrade Worthing Hospital and St Richard's Hospital, such that they would lose their maternity departments and the service would be centralised in Brighton or Portsmouth. Fortunately, we defeated those proposals, and Worthing maternity department is now rated outstanding. It is also rated as the safest maternity department in the country; indeed, many mums now come from Brighton to Worthing because of its success. There is clearly a case for larger specialised hospitals for particular ailments and problems that need specialist treatment, but in most cases we need a good-quality, safe and trusted maternity service closer to where the parents live.

Dr Johnson: I congratulate the hospital in Worthing for its outstanding success. My hon. Friend is right that there is a balance to be struck between the centralisation of care for babies who require very low-volume but high-specialist care, and the need for care to be delivered as close as is reasonably practical to the individual family concerned. That is true of all medical specialties, really. In the case of neonates, we probably have the balance roughly right, but a trend may be starting whereby people ask for things to be centralised that in my perception do not really need to be centralised. As a professional, I often see babies who are not returned to the step-down care as quickly as they could be. Babies are sometimes kept in the tertiary centres for longer than is absolutely necessary. There are complex reasons for that, but I would be grateful if the Minister looked into the issue so that babies can be returned closer to home as soon as possible.

I welcome the Government's ambitious aims to halve the rate of stillbirths and neonatal deaths by 2025. That will be possible only by reducing the number of pre-term deliveries, which are the leading cause of neonatal death in the UK. The Department of Health and Social Care's goal of reducing pre-term birth from 8% to 6% will require a lot more research and intervention. We have a healthier population of women, but the number of pre-term babies continues to increase. More funding is needed for pregnancy research, and particularly for research into the causes of pre-eclampsia, cervical length and infections such as group B strep, as well as for the identification of small babies with early scanning. There must also be more work to discourage smoking, which we already know is an established risk factor for pre-term delivery. I welcome the previous Secretary of State's saying in November 2017 that the Government will reduce smoking during pregnancy from 10.6% to 6% and raise awareness of foetal movement. All those things will contribute towards the reduction of the

number of neonatal deaths and stillbirths. Through that work, the Government are best placed to meet their “halve it” aim, and in doing so save 4,000 lives.

Finally, I wish to discuss those babies who die in the post-neonatal period—that is, under the age of one but after 28 days of life. Currently, 1.1 in every 1,000 babies die in the post-neonatal period. The major reason is babies having congenital malformations, and the second most common reason is sudden infant death, the rate of which has recently increased, although the cause is not clear. What is the Minister doing to identify the reasons for the recent increase in sudden infant deaths? What is being done to prevent the number of sudden infant deaths from rising further and, indeed, to bring it down?

7.56 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank Mr Speaker for granting this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for selecting the subject. I thank the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who as always set the scene on a subject about which she is very passionate and knowledgeable, with her personal story. I thank all the right hon. and hon. Members who have made incredible contributions, every one of them straight from the heart. They have certainly set the scene for a very serious debate in which we acknowledge what has happened. The hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) put forward ideas that he thought would be helpful. Everyone did that, to be fair, but he did so especially.

I will never begin to speak in a debate of this variety without first expressing my sincere sympathies to all those who have been affected by the loss of their baby, at whatever stage. My thoughts are with those people today, and I pray that the God of peace and comfort will be their strength. Baby loss is an extremely painful topic, but it is one that is being spoken of more and more. Such debates enable some of the pain and hurt to be talked about, and that can only be a good thing. We must thank charities such as Saying Goodbye for raising the topic and saying that it is okay to speak out, remember and reflect. Whatever way a person deals with their pain is okay, as long as they know that they are not alone. Such debates allow us to express the message, “You are not alone.” The Members present who speak in these debates reflect the opinions of our constituents outside the Chamber, about whom we talk.

As I have said in previous debates, my mother suffered several miscarriages, as did my sister and a member of my staff—in fact, the member of staff who helps me to prepare my speaking notes. For me and for all of us in the Chamber, this is a matter that is very close to our hearts. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) spoke of the miscarriages that his mum had between his birth and that of his younger brother. That is probably very real to me, as well. As we spoke about my staff member’s workload for the coming week, we realised that it was Baby Loss Awareness Week. Might I suggest that if a debate ever came at the right time, this one did? We discussed how during the last two weeks of September, we had heard of six couples who live in my constituency who had suffered miscarriages. That is six children lost; six expectations never to be fulfilled; six homes filled with sadness; six women who felt empty; six partners who

felt so helpless; and countless loved ones who simply had no words. Those six people were known to all of us very personally, and the fact that one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage has never felt so real.

In the past eight months, I have known three ladies, who are also constituents of mine, who have carried their babies for the full nine months only to have them for just two hours. I can well remember my wife, Sandra, informing me that she was pregnant with our first son, Jamie. Like every parent, I had never felt such joy. I planned for our future and imagined what he would look like. I did not check whether the baby was a boy or a girl as I have always liked the element of chance. I just hoped that whatever sex the child was, they would be accepted. To be truthful, I did ask for three boys and I got three boys—I am not sure how that worked. As I held my child, I realised that the expectation could never meet the reality of having a child in my arms. I also remember very well holding my first grandchild, Katie—I know that there are other Members here who are grandparents as well. Katie is now nine years old. I remember when Del Boy, the character on TV, took Damian in his arms and he looked at him in wonder, and there was I at the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald. I said, “Next year, Katie, we will be millionaires.” Of course, we were not millionaires, but we were in a way as we had our grandchild. Such was the joy that we felt. Therefore, when I think of those families who have lost that hope for their future, my heart simply aches. Through my constituents, I have stared into the face of pure sadness and emptiness, and I would have given anything to change the outcome. That was never going to be in my power, or in the power of anybody in this Chamber, but, having spoken to many women, one theme is clear: they cannot forget their loss and they do not want others to forget it either.

I know that my parliamentary aide will not mind me saying that she lost her first baby abroad while on a church mission trip. She returned a few years later with her family—she now has two wee girls—and planted a tree with a simple plaque in remembrance of the wee child who had died. This simple act of remembrance, while not addressing her grief, helped her to move forward, as she knew that that tree would grow and be a testament to the life that began but could not flourish and grow. This is a desire that is reflected in the events that are organised to celebrate the short lives of babies. Women no longer feel that they must and should grieve in silence. The taboo that existed in my mother’s generation that kept women silent in their grief has gone now. One look on social media will reveal messages that say no more than a date, or a number of dates, and that is proof that it is good for some women to acknowledge and commemorate their loss. Balloon releases and services of remembrance indicate that those who grieve want to see their loss acknowledged.

There are, of course, other women who wish to grieve in silence and that is their right, and I absolutely respect that. Some pain can never find a voice. We may never know the people around us who have gone through baby loss—I am sure that a trawl of families of staff members in this place would show us all to be connected in some way to a loss of child—but what we must know is that there is a way in which we can remember and pay tribute to those lives, those hopes and those dreams that have been lost.

[Jim Shannon]

I want to take a brief moment to think about the fathers. This is something that my aide mentioned to me and that others have referred to as well. Fathers suffer emotional loss—not the physical emotional loss—and have to watch their loved one going through the physical and emotional trauma of loss and they need to be remembered as well. It is their loss as well and they have a right to grieve, and that should be said in this place, too. Others have also referred to grandparents and other family connections. There must be support available for the whole family, and I feel that this is lacking. I have heard it said that the leaflet that is handed to a mother when she miscarries does not help. It is often not read or thought about. A follow-up phone call offering help and advice may go a long way to dealing with the pain and the fear, and I am grateful to the charities that fill that breach when perhaps, with great respect, the NHS does not.

What words do I have for those who have lost babies?

Will Quince: I distinctly remember the intervention that the hon. Gentleman made in that speech back in November 2015 when he raised the importance of the hospital chaplain and the huge comfort that they give to families. Does he agree that the point he made then is as valid today as it was three years ago?

Jim Shannon: Absolutely, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and for reminding us of that debate. Like many others in this Chamber, I am a man of faith who feels that it is important to have a chaplain available—to have someone to share one's grief and hard times. The intervention that he mentions was right along those lines. I felt that it was so important to have that help at that time, just when one needed it the most. I thank him for his intervention and for his salient reminder.

Richard Graham: Chaplains play an incredibly important role, as do the volunteers who work with them. I think that we have more than 30 in Gloucester Royal Hospital, all of whom go through a significant amount of training for about a year. They are multi-faith, so we have Muslims and Sikhs as well as Christians. We also have chaplains of no particular faith, and they are very clear about not trying to differentiate so that a Baptist chaplain might only talk to a Baptist patient and all that sort of thing. Increasingly, there are secular patients who need someone who can engage with them without religion. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be useful for the Minister to say a few words about the role of chaplains in hospitals and whether the encouragement that they and the volunteers who work with them get at our hospital should become best practice around the country?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He is right: the chaplain has a responsibility for all those of faith and of no faith, because that is the time when a person needs that wee bit of succour, support and compassion—perhaps even a shoulder to cry on. Those are important things, and he is right to mention them.

I have asked a few women for the things that have been said by them or to them, and this is the message that I want to leave with the House today, “What has happened to you is not okay, but you will be okay.

Give yourself time. It doesn't matter how much time you need. One day you will realise that the smile that you have faked for so long is now a real smile. It doesn't mean you have forgotten your baby—it means that you can remember them while you live. Weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

8.7 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I want to begin by echoing the words of the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who is no longer in her place, that this is indeed one of the most difficult debates—if not the most difficult, debate—in the entire parliamentary calendar. It must be debated because it is too important for us not to. A number of my colleagues would have dearly liked to participate in this debate today, but, sadly, our conference is not accommodated in the recesses of Parliament, so therefore they were unable to be here.

As the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) has pointed out, this is the third year that we have made a special effort in this House to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week, which culminates in International Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day 2018 on 15 October. In a cruel twist of fate, sadly, that is the same date that my own baby was stillborn at full term in 2009. Kenneth would have celebrated his ninth birthday on that day. It is in his honour that I began to talk and to campaign—and will continue to talk and continue to campaign—about this issue. I want to shine a light on it to break the taboo around it and to break the silence that we all know exists and that we are all working to change.

I want to thank my fellow members of the all-party group—the hon. Members for Colchester, for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Banbury. As a Scottish member of that group, I like to think that I am able to provide a Scottish perspective. Health in Scotland is devolved, but on this issue, as in all issues, I believe that where we can work together and learn from each other then we most certainly should do so, because this issue is certainly above politics. I also want to thank all those across the House who have championed the issue of baby loss and shared their personal and painful experiences and circumstances, as well as the charities that work on the frontline every single day, helping bereaved parents through this life-changing and traumatic event, as the hon. Member for Eddisbury reminded us and others in this debate have pointed out.

It is important for all the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters who have been affected by such an appalling tragedy as baby loss to know that even though they feel isolated in their grief, they are not alone. Sadly, the tragedy of baby loss and stillbirth is terrifyingly common, with around 6,500 babies dying before or shortly after birth—one baby every hour and a half. During this debate, two babies have died. Some 4,000 of these 6,500 babies are stillborn, with another 2,500 surviving for less than a month after birth.

We are all working to the same end in this House and across the UK—to reduce these terrible statistics. Behind each one is a family devastated by grief, living under the shadow of the pain of this for the rest of their lives, while appearing to function normally on the surface, because the grief of losing a baby and all the hope invested therein does not go away. Families and parents simply find a way to learn to live with it somehow.

However, I am pleased to say that progress is being made. The hon. Member for Colchester made a good point about back-slapping, but I do think that we have to acknowledge it when we make progress.

Although we are not yet there, Scotland is now close to the high standard set by Nordic nations in minimising stillbirths and early infant deaths. I was very pleased to read that, according to a University of Leicester study, rates have fallen across the entire UK, with Scotland leading the way, although of course there can be no room for complacency. The rate of stillbirths and deaths of babies within 28 days in Scotland was 4.72 per 1,000 live births in 2017, which compares with the Nordic rate of 4.3. Probably everybody here who has an interest in these matters—I think that we all do—will know that Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland are generally regarded as having the gold standard in neonatal survival. The 2015 rate of stillbirths and deaths of babies within 28 days of birth for the entire UK was 5.61 per 1,000 live births—a drop from 6.04 in 2013. So, yes, improvement has been made, but this is not job done; far from it. Nevertheless, it is extremely welcome progress. Prevention is, and absolutely must remain, the key.

Mary Ross-Davie, director of the Royal College of Midwives in Scotland, has said that in recent years Scotland has undertaken very important work in this area that has improved outcomes for Scotland, with the national stillbirth group established in 2013. In addition, we have had the Maternity and Children Quality Improvement Collaborative since that time. Moreover—as we have heard about today with regard to England—the Scottish Government have funded the national bereavement care pathway, which will benefit bereaved parents across Scotland. I think that this is being rolled out in parallel with the care pathway in England.

The pathway is important because it seeks to improve the quality of bereavement care experienced by parents and families at all stages of pregnancy and baby loss, so that all bereaved parents across the UK can expect the same high-quality, sensitive bereavement care that they need and deserve. It is still in the process of being established, and it will involve collaboration and partnership with baby loss charities and stakeholders, and so it should. The stillbirth and neonatal death charity, Sands, is working with—and will continue to work with—the Scottish Government, other baby loss charities and other healthcare partners in Scotland to develop the approach over the next two years, with the plan to pilot, implement and embed the pathway across Scotland by March 2020.

When the worst happens and parents must face this nightmare, it is important that the correct support mechanisms are in place. That is the least that can be done, but sadly this was not always the case in the past, when bereavement care experienced by parents and families during pregnancy or shortly after birth could be patchy and variable, as the hon. Member for Banbury pointed out and to which I can personally testify. Support and the right kind of care in the immediate aftermath of such a life-changing event can make all the difference to those affected, as we heard from the hon. Member for Eddisbury.

I have lobbied the Scottish Government, who are now also investigating the provision of fatal accident inquiries for stillbirths in some circumstances, as was

mentioned earlier. This is another mark of how far we have come and it is a huge step. Nobody should underestimate the complexity of this step forward—of the fact that the issue is even under discussion and investigation. It is also being explored by the Department of Health in England.

Currently, until a baby lives independently of its mother, any change in the law here would be profound and require the law around it to be looked at very carefully. Of course, no one would expect a fatal accident inquiry—in England, a coroner's inquiry—to be carried out routinely following a stillbirth, although it may be appropriate in very specific circumstances, not as a way of seeking to punish anyone who may have made mistakes, but as a learning tool to better inform medical practitioners as they carry out and seek to improve antenatal care. The only reason that this idea has even been raised at all is that in the past many hospitals have been extremely reluctant to investigate stillbirths fully and transparently. Parents often report feeling excluded from the process and denied proper answers to the question, “Why did our baby die?” We know that sometimes it is not possible to answer that question; sometimes we just do not know. But when explanations or information can be given, they should be. Any relevant information needs to be shared with bereaved parents. The fact that it has not been in the past is not good enough, and it is hoped that the bereavement care pathway and a more transparent ethos around baby loss will help to address these issues.

Of course, we could not measure progress and the support that parents and families can access without mentioning the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, which we heard about earlier in the debate. This legislation means that, for the first time ever, bereaved parents who lose a child up to the age of 18 years old are entitled to statutory paid leave under the law. Parents who go through a stillbirth are also protected.

An age-old wrong has been corrected in this legislation. The law has rightly recognised the enormity of losing a child and the protection in the workplace that parents should be entitled to expect as a right, not as a gift conferred on them by their employer. I thank everyone in the House whom I had the privilege to work alongside on this legislation, particularly the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), whose approach was sensitive and reflective; for that, I think we all thank him. The Act is not perfect, but it is ground-breaking and I am sure that it will evolve over time.

Another measure that will help with baby loss is the move in England to permit the registration of babies lost before 24 weeks' gestation. The Scottish Government are also actively looking at this with input from professionals in the field and baby loss charities, examining the current system, its effects and how a potential voluntary registration process or other kind of process could work in practice. Certainly, parents who lose their baby before the 24-week threshold—when it is classified as a miscarriage, rather than a stillbirth—often feel that their loss is dismissed, officially at least, because there is no documentation to testify to the fact that their baby existed, was eagerly awaited and that their loss has left a lasting impact on the entire family.

In such cases, the opportunity to register their baby's death may provide many parents with some comfort at an extraordinarily difficult time. For that, if nothing

[Patricia Gibson]

else, such a provision must be seriously examined. We are all mindful of cases we have heard about whereby twins are lost—one before the 24-week threshold and the other after it—but only one baby is eligible for registration. Imagine being the parents going through that. It is not hard to see how much worse that makes parents and families feel. That is something that we are looking at in both England and Scotland—it is something that we should look at, and it is time that we did so. All that can be done to ease the trauma of losing a child must be done.

The speech that I have delivered today on this issue is, thankfully, more optimistic than previous speeches that I have delivered on it. Progress has been made, and I am delighted about that. Slowly—very slowly, but we are getting there—we are beginning to break the taboo on this issue, which demands that we move forward. We have come some way, but there is still much to do, and the hon. Member for Eddisbury pointed out some sobering examples in England and Wales. According to Embrace, 15 babies are stillborn or die within the first 28 days of life, and 80% of stillbirths and deaths that are investigated could have been avoided with better care. We can and must do better, and progress in recent years shows that we are capable of doing so. For my part, as a Scottish MP, I will continue to communicate with the Scottish Government and maintain a dialogue on this matter. I will also work with the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss.

We have discussed the emotional trauma of baby loss, but we should remember that there is also a social cost. Parents who lose a child, whatever the circumstances, are eight times more likely than their counterparts to divorce. They are more likely to drop out of the workforce, perhaps never to return. We have to do everything that we can to support parents in this position. The former Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, Shona Robison MSP, was receptive to concerns that I raised with her. Her successor, Jeane Freeman MSP, has continued very much in the same vein. I very much look forward to next year and continuing to work to challenge the silence, taboo and difficulties surrounding baby loss and neonatal death. Cross-party work has never been so constructive, I suspect, and on an issue that we all care about and which impacts all too often on too many families in every single constituency across the United Kingdom. We have a duty to work together, we have a duty to make things better, and we have a duty to break the silence.

8.22 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am humbled once again to respond to such an important debate on behalf of the Opposition. I would like to begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) on securing today's debate and on her continuing work in drawing from her personal experience to campaign on behalf of thousands of others who have been affected by this important subject. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who could not be with us tonight. As we have heard, her contribution to the all-party parliamentary group is greatly valued, as is the work of all the members of that group who have spoken tonight. There are something in

the order of 630 registered APPGs, but few if any can claim to have so much success in bringing attention to a vital subject and securing a tangible change in policy.

As several Members have said, today's debate has once again shown Parliament at its best, and I would like to reflect on some of the contributions that we have heard. The hon. Member for Eddisbury spoke in positive terms about the success of the national pathway and gave interesting statistics on parents' feedback. Some 98% felt that they had been treated with respect, which is really important and, critically, 90% felt that they had been provided with information that was easy to understand. She gave the example of a parent who had to go and speak to the doctor on about five occasions to get an explanation that they were comfortable with, which brought home how important it is in this difficult area for parents to be empowered to ask questions and understand what has happened. It was also interesting to hear that medical professionals gave positive feedback as well.

The hon. Member for Eddisbury expressed concern about ongoing investigations in the Shrewsbury area at the Countess of Chester Hospital, and I am sure that when they conclude we will both have questions to ask. It is worth saying that one of the things of which I have been aware, particularly in relation to the Countess of Chester issue, is the impact on the local community. Many parents, whether they are directly affected or not, have children who were born at the hospital, and were understandably concerned when the news came out. We need to take that on board for future learning.

We heard from the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), who gave specific examples of how we should improve outcomes, and raised the importance of training and awareness of foetal movements, and improvements in ultrasound scanning. The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) gave a wide-ranging speech. She always speaks with great personal knowledge and authority on this matter. She said that media coverage of this issue was pretty impressive and very sensitive, and that there was much more of it. She spoke positively, as did every Member who contributed, about the impact of the pathway. However, she pointed out that only 46% of maternity units provide mandatory bereavement training, some of which lasts only an hour or less. She was right to talk about the impact on staff of some of the issues with which they have to deal. She was right to highlight the fact that of course we need more midwives and that the focus should not just be on recruitment but on retention, and the serious challenges not just in midwifery but across the NHS workforce.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) spoke from personal experience, and I thank him for doing so. He again raised access to mental health support and the lack of bereavement facilities in all units. He discussed the Bumblebee charity in his constituency, which was another example of how individuals turned their own experiences into a force for good. He ended with a tribute to his mother, who had to deal with stillborn babies in, presumably, the early years of the NHS, when things were treated very differently. We ought to pay credit to the service that she gave to the health service in a very different era for dealing with these issues.

It was a pleasure, as always, to hear from the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who gave a wide-ranging and compelling speech. He spoke about why it was important that we talk about these issues. No matter how short someone's life, it is incredibly important to the parents. He will know of my own constituent, Nicole Bowles—the badge that I am wearing gives a signal that someone has suffered child bereavement and it is all right to talk about it. That is a really important message that we cannot repeat enough: it is okay to talk about these things, because it helps to raise awareness and discuss matters.

The hon. Gentleman was crystal clear that we need bereavement suites in every unit up and down the country, and he was right about having more midwifery training. He made a very fair point, which I presume comes from his own personal experience, about continuing support for parents when they are dealing with subsequent pregnancies. One can only imagine the anxiety that they face throughout the whole pregnancy in that situation, and I am sure the Minister will reflect on that. The hon. Gentleman also made one of the strongest arguments I have heard in support of international aid and what a difference it can make to tackling baby loss around the world.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) eloquently reminded us that this issue affects grandparents and the wider family, as well as the parents. The hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) spoke from her professional background and experience when she said that the first question the parents always ask is, “Why?” and the second question is, “What can be done to prevent this happening again?” We have heard countless stories of parents taking that second question and using it as a force for good. She raised, as she did in the last debate, the impact on families of having to go to specialist units a long way from their homes, and I hope the Minister will reflect on that. She was also right to highlight the recent increase in sudden infant death syndrome, which is of great concern and is certainly perplexing.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke with great sincerity about his own family's experiences. He drew a contrast between how his mother's generation dealt with such issues and how we are beginning to talk about them much more openly today. He was right to say that we are all probably connected in some way to someone who has suffered such a loss.

As we have heard, today's debate coincides with the 16th year of Baby Loss Awareness Week, which is an important opportunity for us all to unite with bereaved parents and their families and friends to commemorate the lives of babies who died during, before or shortly after birth. I echo the comments made in praise of the more than 60 charities that now collaborate on this week. When I first spoke on this subject two years ago, around 40 charities were involved. That increase in numbers shows what an impact this week has had on raising awareness and bringing people together, which is what we want to see. Each of those organisations should be extremely proud of what they do and of the way they work together to drive through change on a national basis. It seems to be a characteristic of this issue that personal tragedy moves people to go to huge lengths to help others in the same position. In doing so, they display extraordinary levels of courage and resilience, and I pay tribute to them all.

As well as using today's debate to raise awareness, this is an opportunity to take stock of progress and once again highlight the fact that although excellent care is available in the country, it is not available to everyone everywhere. It has been said many times before and during the debate that one of the key challenges for the Government is to tackle regional disparities. In England alone, there is still a 25% variation in stillbirths. Although there has been a reduction in the stillbirth rate and the perinatal mortality rate, it is quite a slight one, and sadly the neonatal mortality rate in England and Wales has increased two years in a row.

While we can rightly say that we are beginning to improve the approach to those dealing with the consequences of baby loss, it seems that we still have a long way to go in understanding and really tackling the causes of it. The example we have heard a number of times today is that 15 babies every single day are stillborn or do not live past the first month, and it is believed from studies that up to 80% of those deaths could be avoided. As the hon. Member for Colchester said, too many deaths remain unexplained, and as many Members have said, we are still a long way behind where we should be in terms of prevention. According to *The Lancet*, the annual rate of stillbirth reduction in the UK has been slower than in the vast majority of comparable high-income countries.

One measure that may hopefully make inroads into improving outcomes is the maternity safety training fund, but as a one-off limited fund, it was by definition restricted. I raised the concern last year that time might not be found for the training to reach all those who would benefit from it, so it was disappointing to hear from Baby Lifeline that workforce pressures meant that many staff could not access the training available under the scheme. It gave clear examples of where the training given has improved outcomes, but this must not be the end of the story. The fund needs to be repeated on an annual basis and, crucially, staff need to be given the time and space to take advantage of what is on offer.

In many areas of the NHS, workforce challenges are the biggest barrier to improving outcomes. The “Bliss baby report 2015: hanging in the balance” stated that 64% of neonatal units did not have enough nurses to meet safe staffing levels and 70% of units looked after more babies than is considered safe. That was three years ago, and on many indicators the staffing situation is more acute now than it was then. We know that we have a shortfall in nurses of more than 40,000. We have more nurses and midwives leaving the register than joining it, and registrations by people from the European economic area are dropping dramatically. We know that the demographics of the existing workforce are not in our favour, which is why the retention issues raised are so important. I would be grateful if the Minister updated us in his concluding comments on whether any progress has been made to improve the figures that Bliss set out in 2015.

It is also worth considering staffing challenges in the context of the worthy aim of introducing a continuity of carer model, when even the modest target of 20% of women being covered by March 2019 looks challenging. Can the Minister say whether we are on track to meet that and when he anticipates there being full coverage? There is ample evidence to show that continuity of care can make a big difference to outcomes as well as the patient experience.

[Justin Madders]

Finally, I want to say a few words about the national bereavement care pathway, as it has been rightly trumpeted this evening. It is clearly making a big difference on the ground, but it needs to be rolled out comprehensively as soon as possible. The Prime Minister indicated some time ago that it would be rolled out nationally by about this time. Again, I wonder whether the Minister can update us on that ambition.

In conclusion, the debates that we have had over the last few years, and again tonight, underline the importance of the work undertaken by hon. Members and the many charities in the sector. It means that the silence that we talk about is now beginning to end. It is not possible to overstate how courageous those who have spoken out about their personal experiences are or how influential those interventions have proven to be. Having now spoken out, we must continue to talk about what we need to do to improve outcomes. This year my council will be joining the wave of light, and I am hopeful that other public buildings in my constituency will join in—I am doing what I can to encourage them. Such symbolism can only increase public awareness of this subject, and if actions like that reach just one grieving parent who may have felt that they were alone, but who now feels that they have someone to turn to, then it will have been worth it.

8.36 pm

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): May I join colleagues across the House in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) for securing this debate on Baby Loss Awareness Week? It is particularly appropriate, as today marks the start of the 2018 campaign. How we reduce the numbers of baby losses is an issue that unites the House, as has been very much reflected in the tenor of this evening's debate. May I also say to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) that I am sure that all in the Chamber will be thinking of Robert and him on Friday, as he marks that particularly poignant fourth anniversary?

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury raised a number of important points in her speech, including about the national bereavement care pathway and the ongoing investigations at the three hospitals in England and Wales. I will address those shortly. She is right to recognise the higher profile that this issue has received in recent years, this being the third such debate in the last three years. That is very much testament to the work of the all-party group on baby loss and in particular my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury, for Colchester and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who is not in her place, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), to whom my opposite number correctly paid tribute and who very much moved the House in a previous debate, and the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), who quite rightly spoke of Kenneth, who is very much in her thoughts and reflects much of the work that she has done in this place. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) also made the point very well that this issue affects the family as a whole, including grandparents.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I join the Minister in congratulating all the Members who have brought this issue to the Floor of the House today and especially the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) on securing the debate. The Minister has talked about the family, and we have heard much about the emotional journey for mothers and fathers who experience loss. We are living now in a more equal society, in which more lesbian women are becoming mothers, and they, too, experience loss through the death of a baby or young child. Will he ensure that that is reflected in the opportunities to learn about the lived experience of mothers, to which my hon. and good Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) referred, whether they have a husband or a wife?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. He will have noticed that my colleague the Minister for Women and Equalities was in the Chamber for part of the debate, and I am sure that those sentiments are very much reflected in the work that she is doing. I am very happy to work with him to ensure that the Government's approach takes those points on board.

Before coming to the wider areas of progress and considering what still needs to be done to deliver the improvements that we all want to see, I will address some of the specific comments made by Members across the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester rightly mentioned the inconsistency between trusts. I understand that Sands is asking for the national bereavement care pathway to be included in the CQC's inspection framework for maternity. I am happy to write to the CQC to request that this becomes part of the inspection regime. I think that can build on the point my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury made about recent progress in Medway.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester also suggested a training module for midwives on bereavement. Again, I am happy to write to Professor Ian Cummings, the chief executive of Health Education England, on that point and to share the correspondence with the all-party parliamentary group. One of the objectives of the pregnancy loss review is to recommend options to improve maternity care practice for parents who experience baby loss, so that is part of that work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), who so often brings her clinical expertise to debates, raised the issue of travel costs. The Patient Advice and Liaison Service can advise on eligibility for schemes, as this tends to be specific to individual trusts, but it can apply in certain instances, particularly when linked to benefit entitlement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), who is no longer in his place, mentioned the important work of the hospital chaplaincy, and I think that Members on both sides of the House recognise the support that chaplains can offer following baby loss. Indeed, the bereavement care pathway guidance recommends offering parents contact with the chaplaincy team, so the role of the chaplaincy will be given greater visibility as the pathway is rolled out across more trusts.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) rightly mentioned midwife numbers. We recognise that the workforce do face pressure, as is reflected in the 25% increase in the number of midwifery

training places that the Government are committed to. Indeed, numbers have increased in each of the last four years. But he makes a valid point and we are focused on dealing with the workforce pressures.

As a number of Members have recognised, the Government have a clear ambition to halve the rates of stillbirths, neonatal and maternal deaths and brain injuries that occur during or soon after birth by 2025, and to achieve at least a 20% reduction in these rates by 2020. Since the launch of the national maternity ambition in 2015, the Government have introduced a range of evidence-based interventions to support maternity and neonatal services, under the leadership of the maternity safety champions, who are responsible for promoting safety in their organisations.

I am pleased to report that we remain on course to achieve our 2020 ambition. The stillbirth rate in England fell from 5.1 to 4.1 per 1,000 births between 2010 and 2017, representing a decrease of almost 20%, which equates to 827 fewer stillbirths. We currently have the lowest stillbirth rate on record. The neonatal mortality rate also fell from 2.9 to 2.8 per 1,000 live births between 2010 and 2016. Many Members will be aware that multiple pregnancies are at greater risk of perinatal death, so I welcome the findings in a recent MBRRACE-UK report showing that the stillbirth rate for UK twins almost halved between 2014 and 2016, with a fall of 44%. In addition, neonatal deaths among UK twins has dropped by 30%.

There are areas of progress, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester rightly said, part of the focus of today's debate is on the areas where we need to improve, not just on the areas where there has been progress. One key area relates to ethnic minority groups, where we know stillbirth and neonatal mortality rates are increasing rather than decreasing. The Government continue to work with others to develop and implement policies to tackle such inequalities. This is an area on which we would be very happy to work with the APPG. It is an issue of concern to Members on all sides of the House.

A number of Members raised the role of the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch and the importance of identifying where there are lessons to be learned. My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham is right that clinicians must be free to speak up where mistakes have been made. Indeed, the former Secretary of State championed that in his work on patient safety. It is also why we are improving investigations into term stillbirths. There is a role for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in terms of the Each Baby Counts programme. Considerable work is under way, part of which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury recognised, is on ensuring that in respect of the investigations at the specific hospitals she mentioned the appropriate lessons are learned. She will appreciate that, as they are live investigations, I cannot comment on them in detail.

Evidence demonstrates that women who have a midwife-led continuity model of care are less likely to suffer baby loss. In March, the Secretary of State pledged that most women will receive such care throughout pregnancy, labour and birth by 2021, with 20%, or about 130,000 women, benefiting by 2019. This will help to bolster maternity safety and further improve care standards.

It is positive to see the impact that many initiatives can have on reducing baby loss, but the Government recognise the need to improve the care bereaved families experience. That is why the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), the Minister with responsibility for maternity care, recently announced full funding of £106,000 to the charity Sands to continue the roll-out of the national bereavement care pathway. I hope that reassures my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury that the value of the care pathway is very much recognised within Government. As my hon. Friend mentioned, this initiative has seen a positive response from parents and medical professionals, with 77% of professionals saying bereavement care has improved.

On pregnancy loss and the pregnancy loss review, which my Department commissioned earlier this year, the review has been considering the question of whether legislation should provide new rights to bereaved parents to register pre-24-week pregnancy loss, as well as investigating the impact of such losses on families and how care can be improved for parents who experience it. That review is currently scheduled to be completed in the new year. A number of very important points on that pre-24-week period were raised.

The Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Justice have been consulting with coroners, patients' groups and charities to consider the role of the coroner in relation to stillbirths. This is about ensuring that bereaved parents are given a full account of the events leading up to the loss of their baby and that important lessons are learned. The hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) in particular made a point on the role of coroners in an intervention. This work will continue over the coming months.

In conclusion, progress is being made. I think that was recognised in a number of the speeches this evening, particularly in respect of: the commitment to fund in full the national roll-out of the bereavement care pathway in 2018-19, for which guidance and resources have been released today; the ongoing pregnancy loss review, which is due to report in early 2019; the work being done by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Justice regarding the role of the coroner in investigating stillbirths; the progression of the private Member's Bill, which will have its Third Reading on 26 October, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on those last two issues; and the recent passage of the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, mentioned by a number of Members, through the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake).

I would like to close by making it clear that the Government are actively listening to concerns on this issue. This issue unites the House. On behalf of the Government, I very much look forward to working with the APPG, and Members across the House, to ensure that the progress we have seen in recent years continues, so that we can all tackle the most appalling loss that the families we represent can face.

8.49 pm

Antoinette Sandbach: It is a pleasure to follow the Minister and the commitments he has made. As he said, this issue unites the House. The hon. Member for North

[Antoinette Sandbach]

Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) spoke about her dread about today's debate, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), and I did not go to sleep last night because of the worry and the feelings that it brings back. But the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran also spoke about the optimism for this year and what we have achieved in the past three years. As the Opposition spokesman said, personal tragedy moves people to go to enormous lengths, and we have heard from Members across the House about constituents who have gone to enormous lengths to try and build on their experiences, ensure that lessons have been learned and make sure that things are better for those who follow.

Three themes emerged from the debate. The first, which is where we started three years ago, is about breaking the silence. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), in the week in which Robert has his fourth birthday, spoke about taking on the taboo of speaking about childhood death. We have all taken on that taboo in this House. Each year, different aspects of it emerge. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) spoke about his mother suffering in silence. So many people have suffered in silence; indeed, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) had his mother and sister share that experience. We are breaking that taboo, we are breaking that silence, working together with those 60 charities that cover all sorts of loss and that are embedded in our communities and supporting our constituents who have been through this.

There is some optimism and hope in Baby Loss Awareness Week, not least because on Saturday we have the wave of light, which travels across the world as parents light candles in memory of their children. The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) also spoke about the role of his mother. At that point in time, with the newly emerging NHS, looking after what are commonly referred to as angel babies must have been very difficult, and I know that my own mother suffered in silence from her own experience, although she was not looking after stillborn babies. That work is important, as was the work of his constituent, Gordon, with Bumblebee Babies.

The second theme was pregnancy support. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) spoke about this, and particularly about ultrasound scanning in the third trimester. I campaigned on that in Wales when I was an elected Member of the Welsh Assembly, and I urge him to work with his colleagues in the devolved Assembly to try to deliver it. Ultrasound scans in the third trimester have been proven in other jurisdictions to reduce stillbirth and neonatal death, and they can make an important

contribution to the debate going forward. He also spoke about the work of Gareth and Clare in memory of Mari-Leisa.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) was the only Member to mention Group B Strep Support, which forms an incredibly important part of this debate. A test for group B strep can be done for £11, and people can discover whether or not their baby might be vulnerable to it. That is an area that we can perhaps work on. I am grateful to her for raising the matter, in the light of her clinical experience, and I know that other Members of the House have campaigned on it.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran said that prevention was the key. Pregnancy support—both around smoking and for BAME communities, who are, as the Minister mentioned, particularly vulnerable—is absolutely critical to that. The MAMA Academy wellbeing wallets have been used in the Countess of Chester Hospital trust, and they recently saved two lives. Because the women had on the front of their medical notes the areas of concern that they should look at, they went and sought help, and there are two babies alive today who might not otherwise have been. Prevention is key.

The third theme that came out of today's debate was post-bereavement care and support. The Government have made huge strides, working together with the third sector. The best abilities of the third sector have been harnessed together with the drive and ambition of the Department of Health to deliver the national bereavement care pathway, and that is a really good example of co-operative working. I think it will lead to a huge change in the quality of care and help to end the postcode lottery that parents face.

I know that the previous Secretary of State for Health was absolutely committed to the idea that health professionals should not close ranks to try to protect other health professionals when things go wrong. The idea is to promote transparency and openness. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham said, it is about the “why?”—the desire to find out why something happened and make sure that it does not happen to anyone else. I think we should take forward such positive learning experiences to help to reduce the number of neonatal deaths, stillbirths and perinatal losses. There is work to be done, but there is much to celebrate. Many other events are taking place during Baby Loss Awareness Week, and I urge Members to get involved in them.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you. It has been an excellent, honest and constructive debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered baby loss awareness week 2018.

Business Rates: Small Retail Businesses

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

8.58 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am privileged to follow the emotional and sensitive debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach). I sometimes wish the public could see more of such debates, where sensitive subjects are discussed so constructively on a completely apolitical, non-partisan basis. I congratulate my hon. Friend.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to you and Mr Speaker for scheduling this important Adjournment debate on reforming the business rates system for small retail businesses. I am particularly grateful to the Paymaster General and Financial Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) for being here to answer this debate at such a late hour, when I am sure he would much rather be at home with his family.

I am quite sure that right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House will agree with me when I say that protecting our country's small businesses is of paramount importance. There are more than 5.7 million small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK, and we must recognise their importance to the local economies of all our constituencies in providing much-needed jobs for our constituents.

I have been working closely with the British Independent Retailers Association and with many businesses in my constituency to promote their business rates reform proposals. It is an eminently sensible idea for the so-called small business rate relief, which has a £12,000 threshold and has to be claimed, to be replaced by an allowance which would be automatic. That would benefit the huge majority of the small businesses that currently qualify for the small business rate relief. Retailers pay nearly a quarter of the collective rates bill, amounting to a staggering £7 billion a year. They pay far more than those in any other industry. The present system does not value business rates on the basis of business profitability. That unfortunately results in a system that fails to place the burden of taxation on the businesses that are most able to pay.

The national decline of the British high street is a worrying trend. More than 8,000 shops have closed over the last 18 months, and one in eight high-street shop units in England and Wales now stands empty. Large shopping centres away from town centres qualify for much lower rates than smaller retailers on our high streets, owing to their peripheral locations. That, of course, does not take into account the significantly higher turnover of retailers such as the "big four" supermarkets.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: My golly! I will give way to both hon. Members, but I will give way to the hon. Lady first.

Rachael Maskell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is making an excellent speech. In York, there are 47 empty units in the centre of our city, partly because of high valuation rates. Offshore landlords are more concerned with their investments than the revenue from the rentals, so they keep pushing up the rents. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the whole system needs to change if order is to be restored?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Yes. The whole thrust of my speech is that we shall ultimately need to reform the rates system, but it will take time. The Government have to be very careful to guard the huge amount of revenue that they gain from the rates in any change that they make. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will have something to say about my proposals in that respect.

I have a problem in the Cotswolds. The rents are very high, which influences the rateable value. It takes time to deal with that when there are a number of empty units, such as the ones in York that the hon. Lady mentioned. When the rents are lowered the rateable values follow, but the district valuers are, of course, reluctant to lower the rateable values, because they do not want to lose revenue. That problem is increasing, as I shall explain shortly. Offline businesses, IT businesses and so on, do not need premises as large as those required by some of the businesses in the hon. Lady's constituency. For example, furniture shops, bed shops and cycle shops need large premises, which inevitably means large rateable values, but they do not necessarily have the turnover to match those rateable values. The ability to pay is not necessarily reflected in the rates that must be paid. However, I sympathise with the hon. Lady.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue, which is a problem in my constituency as well as others. He referred to a national decline, and the evidence of that is very clear: planning portals in local areas show a downturn in the number of businesses applying for extensions and renovations. Does he agree that that is because businesses cannot expand because of costs, and does he agree that a review of business rates might just allow some companies to take the plunge, upgrade their businesses, sow into them and, hopefully, reap the benefits, rather than continually treading water—as they often do—just to keep afloat?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I entirely agree, and I will shortly demonstrate the way in which the current rates system is a disincentive for small businesses to expand. Surely what we should be doing, in the entire economy, is encouraging small businesses that will one day become medium-sized businesses, and will hopefully one day become large businesses, employing more people, selling more goods, and exporting more goods around the world. That is exactly what we want to see in a dynamic UK economy, particularly in the post-Brexit era. We need to look very carefully at the rates system, which is why I initiated this debate.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) Lady was talking about the relationship between the ability to pay and the rates payable. I do not want to knock the banks as I have great regard for them, but I was shocked to hear that HSBC has six banks in London alone that qualify for small business rate relief. I am sure that HSBC would not have those banks open

[*Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown*]

unless they were making a good profit. That is an excellent demonstration of how the rates payable are not related to the profits a business makes.

I am not for one second questioning the importance of competition in the marketplace, but to reverse the decline of our high streets we must ensure that competition is fair in every respect, and if the rates system is making it unfair, we should look at reforming it. There is a stark example in my constituency in the beautiful town of Stow-on-the-Wold. The large edge-of-town Tesco store is excellent; I go there myself to shop. It is only a five-minute walk from the town centre and pays business rates of £220 per square metre. However, a small independent delicatessen, with much higher costs because it occupies a listed building and which, no doubt, as the hon. Member for York Central says, will have to pay considerably more rent per square metre than the Tesco store would pay if it were not the owner of the store, has to pay £500 per square metre as opposed to £220 for the out-of-town supermarket. I cannot believe that that system is fair, and that, of course, is what is leading to a decline of some shops in our high street. It is therefore imperative that we support our small businesses through these measures.

However, sadly, the Federation of Small Businesses small business index for quarter 3 of 2018 showed that small business confidence has fallen into the negative for only the third time since 2013. Small retailers continue to report the lowest confidence level of any sector. That has to be a worrying trend for all of us.

Another concerning consequence of the current business rates system is the penalties that businesses face when expanding under current rules, which is the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made. The majority of small businesses growing from one premises to a second will lose the existing small business rate relief, which has a negative effect on business growth. This quirk in the rules means that a business can receive full relief if it has a single property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, but a business with two properties each with a value of £3,000 would not receive any relief. That is clearly unfair and discourages businesses from expanding to more than one site.

I have another constituency example. The beautiful village of Guiting Power contains two pubs: The Hollow Bottom and The Farmers Arms. You might like to come and sample them, Madam Deputy Speaker, to see whether what I am saying is true. The Farmers Arms recently invested a significant amount of capital into the business and is now a very nice gastropub. However, The Hollow Bottom remained a traditional Cotswolds pub, much loved by many of my constituents. Unfortunately, even though The Farmers Arms and The Hollow Bottom started as the same size and as roughly similar businesses, because they are both in the same village only The Hollow Bottom now receives business rates relief because it is not possible for two pubs in the same village to receive the relief whatever the circumstances, and The Hollow Bottom is regarded as the smaller of the two pubs and is therefore the pub designated for relief. It would be helpful to understand why this inequality exists and how business rates could be reformed to promote, rather than penalise, investment.

It is troubling that the current rates system in certain respects discourages, and even stifles, investment by penalising ratepayers who invest in their business, as I have just demonstrated with The Hollow Bottom pub. For example, if a business owner were to add an air conditioning unit or CCTV cameras to their business, their rates bill would increase. To tackle this, time-limited exemptions for new store developments should be provided. I am keen to understand from the Minister what steps the Government are taking in linking business rates more closely to a company's turnover, not just its physical size. As I indicated to the hon. Member for York Central, I find the example of a large IT firm pertinent. Such a business requires, by turnover, much less space compared with a cycle shop, a furniture shop or a bed shop, which would inevitably have a lower turnover but require more space.

In the last revaluation announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, the Government did offer some help to smaller businesses by doubling the threshold from £6,000 to £12,000, and I want to make it absolutely clear to my right hon. Friend the Minister that I am not carping about the reliefs that are currently available. Many of the small businesses in my constituency, and in those of other hon. Members, benefit from small business rate relief. However, this does not help the majority of my retailers, who are above that level. The average rateable value in this country is £34,000.

To provide further detail, the new allowance proposals that I support—as opposed to the relief that businesses have to claim—would be based on the same principles as the personal allowance currently applied to income tax. This is a pragmatic, pro-business solution that would simplify the tax system and significantly cut the burdensome tax levels that small retailers are facing. A simple allowance, ahead of a full review of the system, would see a reduction in rates for the majority of those small businesses that qualify for the relief and that are struggling with their tax. All those below this allowance—for example, £12,000—would be out of the system entirely, because they would not have to claim the allowance. This would cut down on the resources required to process these claims. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister has a figure in mind for the Government's current compliance cost for processing small business rate relief claims. That compliance cost affects not only the Government; in percentage terms, it is even more burdensome for the small businesses that have to claim the relief, because they often need to employ specialist professional practitioners to enable them to claim the tax satisfactorily and not have their claim disallowed.

An additional benefit of introducing such an allowance, as opposed to a threshold, would be the simplification of the relief system. In other words, there would no longer be any need for small business rates relief as there would be a standard application for all small qualifying businesses across the country. Furthermore, the small business relief system currently costs the Government £2.6 billion. Introducing such an allowance and erasing the £2.6 billion in rates relief—even though we would be redeploying it as an allowance—would result in businesses reducing their compliance costs. Perhaps the Minister can tell me what the compliance cost is for the Government. If not, perhaps he could ask his officials to look it up. We could then redeploy the

money involved in that compliance cost—and in the bureaucracy involved in administering the system—and perhaps consider raising the £12,000 threshold and introducing the allowance that I would prefer, so that even more small businesses could benefit.

I, and I am sure all hon. Members, want to see this country's small businesses thriving in post-Brexit Britain, and we should be encouraging small enterprises, not penalising them for wanting to expand and grow further. We should cherish the fact that 500,000 new businesses have been created under this Conservative Government in the past five years and under their predecessor coalition Government. That shows the strength of the British economy. That is why we have such full employment rates, and we need to keep it that way. We need to keep employing as many of our constituents as possible, particularly the youngsters, and to encourage them to consider forming their own businesses. As I have said, from small businesses come medium-sized and large businesses. This country has always been full of entrepreneurs. I have great optimism for the future, post-Brexit, but we need my right hon. Friend the Minister and his team in the Treasury to consider the fairness of the current rating system. I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to say these few words tonight.

9.14 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):

Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say what a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair after the recess? It is also a pleasure to realise that I have an hour and 16 minutes in which to address my response to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), but I may cut it down just a little bit to please the House.

I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this important debate to the House tonight. It is entirely characteristic of him that such a debate is in his name, because throughout his parliamentary career he has been a strong advocate of business both across the country and, importantly, in his constituency. He was right to highlight in his opening remarks the sheer size and importance of our small business community—there are 5.7 million small businesses, a figure that he cited—and the recent growth that we have had under the coalition Government and this Government. He has worked closely with the British Independent Retailers Association on various thoughts and proposals, some of which he put forward this evening and to which I shall respond in a moment.

My hon. Friend is right that business rates are an important tax. When we consulted on business rates back in 2015 and considered the various alternatives, several different suggestions were made, such as turnover taxes, taxes on gross value added and so on. Inevitably, with every kind of measure or metric that one focused on, they had their own particular drawbacks and complexities and so on. The conclusion that was reached at the time was that business rates were a stable tax that is difficult to avoid because property is static by definition. Of course, as my hon. Friend also rightly pointed out, business rates raise around £25 billion a year, which is a significant contribution to our public services and funds, in turn, our doctors, nurses, policemen and policewomen and so on.

The Government recognise that business rates represent a high pressure on small businesses, particularly for high street retailers. Rates are a fixed cost that cannot be avoided, irrespective of whether a business is profitable or otherwise, which is why we have undertaken a series of important measures. In the 2016 Budget, we made 100% small business rate relief permanent, at that time increasing the threshold for the relief and taking 655,000 of the smallest businesses out of business rates altogether. We also increased the threshold for the standard multiplier, taking 250,000 properties, including most high street shops, out of the higher rate of business rates.

However, that is not all. Following the most recent property revaluation in 2017, we introduced a £3.6 billion transitional relief scheme to cap and phase in bill increases. Additionally, at spring Budget 2017, we announced an extra £435 million to support those businesses facing the steepest increases in bills, including £110 million to support 16,000 small businesses losing small business rate relief or rural rate relief to limit increases in their bills to the greater of £600 a year or the real-terms transitional relief cap for small businesses in each year. We also provided local authorities with £300 million of funding for discretionary relief to support individual cases in their local area.

In parallel to all that, we have taken significant steps to ensure the fairness of the business rates system as a whole. That is why, at spring Budget 2017, the Chancellor announced that we would reform the revaluation process to make it fairer. I am pleased to say that we have delivered on that by increasing the frequency of business rates revaluations from every five years to every three years, following the next revaluation. That is an important point in the context of what my hon. Friend said about the difference in the rates being paid by the out-of-town store and by retailers on the high street. If we can have more frequent revaluations, as rateable values on the high street perhaps fall, we can more quickly pass on the benefit of that within the system.

Rachael Maskell: Does the Minister recognise that inequality exists between property size and turnover and that online businesses do not have the same huge valuations as retailers on the high street? Therefore, there is a complete dissociation between the success of a business and its ability to pay under a rateable system, whether that system is based on turnover or profitability, as opposed to a system that is dependent on an external landlord and the rents that they are charging for their property.

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady will probably be aware of the Chancellor's speech at our recent party conference, in which he spoke quite strongly about the importance of a level playing field for online businesses that derive value in the United Kingdom and end up paying very little tax and about the international tax approach that we may look at taking unilaterally as a consequence. The most important thing overall is that the Government recognise that when it comes to high streets and the smaller retailers to which the hon. Lady refers, we should take measures to reduce the burden of rates, particularly among smaller businesses, in the way that I have described this evening. That makes bills fairer for everyone, as they more closely reflect the current rental values and relative changes in rents. To ensure that ratepayers benefit from this change at the earliest point,

[*Mel Stride*]

the spring statement 2018 included an announcement that the next revaluation would be brought forward by one year to 2021.

Before I address some of the specific points raised by my hon. Friend, it is worth highlighting that, at autumn budget 2017, we brought forward the planned switch in the indexation of business rates from RPI to CPI by two years. This switch is worth £2.3 billion over five years, and the move to CPI is worth £4.1 billion in total by 2023. So once more, the Government are making a significant investment to recognise the pressures that rates introduce.

My hon. Friend raised the specific issue—

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Before my right hon. Friend goes on to the specific BIRA proposals, may I put to him something about the out-of-town retailers, particularly supermarkets? As I explained to the House, the rateable system is based on rents payable, which one would assume in a market would sort itself out. The problem with out-of-town supermarkets is that they have a monopoly on these sites and they manage artificially to keep the rents low, so their rates are unfair compared with the in-town shops, as I have already demonstrated with my Stow-on-the-Wold example. Something needs to be looked at. I do not know whether the issue could be looked at in a revaluation system or whether legislation is needed, but it is an issue particularly when the out-of-town supermarkets are competing with the small in-town businesses. For example, the owner of a card shop recently told me that the out-of-town supermarket started selling cards and immediately put him out of business.

Mel Stride: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I know that the Valuation Office Agency is thorough in the way in which it conducts revaluations. It is an independent agency. However, I note the point that he has made, and if he would like to write to me or meet me to discuss it in the context of potential undervaluations, I am open to doing so.

The points that my hon. Friend made included the idea of an allowance instead of the threshold. I assume that he wanted to apply that allowance to all retail businesses, and of course that would come with some cost. It would mean providing further additional relief to some companies or businesses that do not currently receive it.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I hope that I chose my wording very carefully. I said that the allowance would be applied only to businesses that qualified for small business relief. It would be nonsense automatically to give the big businesses an allowance. That would cost the Treasury, and I want to make it clear that my proposals are revenue neutral.

Mel Stride: I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying that point, and I am sorry that I misunderstood. He asked what the costs of compliance were under the current system and suggested that, if we changed it, we might

be able to absolve ourselves from those costs and pass the benefits on to these businesses. That is certainly something that I am happy to look at and discuss with him. The overarching point is that we had a fundamental review of business rates in 2015, and many of the issues that my hon. Friend has raised were carefully looked at.

My hon. Friend said that he recognised that change would take some time, and we are likely to be considering these matters over some reasonable period. He raised the issue of the confidence of small business retailers at the moment, and this is where I would broaden the debate's scope a little by saying that it is not just bearing down on business rates that is the mission of this Government. We also provide the employment allowance and we are bringing down small business tax rates, with corporation tax having fallen from 28% in 2010 to 19% now and set to reduce further to 17% in time. A lot of small businesses, including retailers, will be benefiting from other measures such as fuel duty freezes. We have just announced that fuel duty will be frozen for yet another year—the ninth year in succession.

In conclusion, let me again thank my hon. Friend for this very important debate. He is focusing on one of the great challenges of our time for our high streets, which lie at the heart of our local communities. It behoves us all to do all we can to make sure they are live, whole and thriving.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I want to impress on the Minister that this problem is not going to go away. The decline of our high streets is getting worse. It is accelerating, so the Government cannot just sit back. With great respect, just providing allowances in the rating system to try to make this work means that the tax base is being eroded, because the allowances have to be provided. The Government need to look at this seriously to see how they can make the system work a little better, particularly in favour of small businesses.

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; high streets face a variety of challenges, of which business rates is but one. One of the greatest challenges they face is the change in how we are now shopping, with just over 18% of all retail now going online; that presents a huge challenge and that number is likely to increase in time. That tells us that high streets will need to transition, reinvent themselves, change and come up with new ways to serve their local communities and drive traffic into our high streets. We recognise the importance of making sure that all those things are looked at through the planning system and the reviews we are carrying out at the moment and through the important work we have been carrying out to date. I see this debate as being very important in that regard. We will continue to keep this under review in terms of making sure we keep those cost pressures through the business rates system as low as they can be for our important high street retailers.

Question put and agreed to.

9.28 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 9 October 2018

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

Oil and Gas Industry

11.30 am

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the oil and gas industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I start my contribution today by taking a moment to remember the 167 workers who lost their lives 30 years ago in the Piper Alpha disaster, off the coast of Aberdeen, on 6 July 1988. Piper Alpha is the world's deadliest ever oil rig accident. This anniversary is and should be a reminder to us all that we must remain vigilant and do all we can to help the oil and gas sector in seeking to eliminate major hazards and risks.

I will focus my remarks on the success of the North sea oil and gas industry, and on how the sector is working alongside its partners downstream and in its supply chain to secure a lower-carbon future. I will also outline two choices that the UK Government must make. The first is to protect existing labour and supply chains through the single market and customs union membership, or risk sacrificing world-leading firms and skilled, productive jobs.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this important debate and for taking an intervention so early. Grangemouth, which is in my constituency, is home to Scotland's only crude oil refinery, as well as the terminus of the North sea Forties pipeline system. It hosts a number of petrochemical plants and leading players in the chemicals industry, and it accounts for more than a third of the chemical sector's gross value added in Scotland. In total, 60% of the UK's chemical exports and 75% of imports are to and from the EU. How important is it to have frictionless, tariff-free trade, and to ensure that multinational companies can move their staff between different countries to support local jobs and growth across districts?

John Mc Nally: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point; it is absolutely essential that we remain in the customs union. Of course, I will come on to the importance of frictionless trade and the supply of labour later in my speech; indeed, I hope that everybody will speak about that.

The second choice that the UK Government must make is to recognise the £350 billion contribution to the Treasury that the sector has made over the past 50 years and provide the political certainty and financial support it needs now, or risk undermining North sea oil and gas by once again using it as a cash cow, this time to pay for Brexit Britain.

With sales up by 18.2% between 2016-17 and 2017-18 and the North sea holding up to 20 billion barrels of oil, the sector is in very strong health. Recent industry

announcements, such as BP's successful discoveries in the Capercaillie and Achmelvich wells, Nexen's phase II development of the Buzzard field, and the Norwegian oil and gas giant Equinor's deal to buy Rosebank's share of the oil reserves to the west of Shetland, demonstrate the enormous investment potential that the United Kingdom continental shelf still holds.

The sector supports 283,000 jobs across the UK. In the town of Grangemouth, which is in my neighbouring constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk, INEOS alone employs 1,300 people, including seven new apprentices, who started training in 2017. Those figures somewhat contradict the predictions we hear about the sector's constant decline. Healthy investment is continuing.

Martyn Day: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again and for mentioning the great work that goes on in my constituency. INEOS, which now owns the Forties pipeline system, estimates that the economic life of the asset will be extended to 2040, which is 10 years longer than BP's original projection. INEOS has already invested £500 million in the Grangemouth site in the last five years, and it is now investing in infrastructure projects at Grangemouth that will have a further positive impact on the longevity and reliability of the Forties pipeline. The firm has already committed to the UK's North sea sector with investment in the northern gasfields west of Shetland, which contain the Lyon prospect. However, I wonder how much potential investment by the wider sector has been delayed until the uncertainty of Brexit has passed. Will he join me in calling on the UK Government to do more to stimulate exploration and investment?

John Mc Nally: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; again, he makes a very good point indeed. He is right to raise the concerns about investment, and I join him in calling for the UK Government to support and encourage investment in this vital asset that we have on our shores. I give him my full support in that regard.

Healthy investment is continuing, even though in some cases the level may not be as good as it should be, and new discoveries are being made and developed. In 2017-18, revenues from Scottish North sea oil and gas increased to £1.3 billion. Surely it is now time that the UK Government acted to support the sector's future.

The sector recognises the need to decarbonise our economy and its responsibilities in supporting that transition. It is an international leader in supporting the low-carbon transition. Average emissions per unit of production on the United Kingdom continental shelf—its carbon intensity—have fallen year on year since 2013, with total emissions in decline from their peak in 2000. Firms are increasingly diversifying and using their existing skills to grasp opportunities emerging from the green economy, thereby providing sustainable employment. Often, infrastructure owners and operators in the oil and gas sector are already part of wider portfolios across a range of conventional and renewable energy sources. Contractors and supply chain companies with expertise in offshore operations and maintenance are also providing solutions across a range of energy industries, to diversify and replenish their order books.

[John Mc Nally]

As we all know, innovation is absolutely key to that process. Building the sector of tomorrow presents exciting and challenging opportunities for our people. The Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation's workforce dynamics report has predicted that by 2025 there could be as many as 10,000 roles that require completely new skills. It is reassuring to note that the industry continues to attract young people to build its future. There were 105 new entrants to the oil and gas technical apprentice programme in September alone. Once again, I have seen that forward-looking agenda at first hand in my neighbouring constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk.

As I mentioned, the town of Grangemouth is home to Scotland's only crude oil refinery. It is a truly remarkable site. For example, the refinery was the first to introduce ultra low sulphur diesel and ultra low sulphur petrol to the UK market. Grangemouth already makes up approximately 8% of Scotland's manufacturing base. Many of my constituents are employed at the site or in its supply chain. Grangemouth's success shows the impact that downstream operations and manufacturing can have on the economy, locally and globally.

Martyn Day: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his indulgence in giving way to me so many times.

Grangemouth has one of the country's largest concentrations of energy-intensive industries in downstream petrochemicals operations, and its development of a strategically located carbon capture and storage infrastructure in its industrial cluster may be essential to ensuring that those industries can compete in the low-carbon world that is coming in the future. I know that the Grangemouth site, INEOS and others are working with Imperial College as part of a wider collaboration to evaluate the feasibility of CCS for the UK. Does my hon. Friend agree that this developing technology would have been given a huge boost if the UK Government had not cancelled its CCS competition back in 2015, and that that decision demonstrated how they are failing the long-term interests of the industry?

John Mc Nally: Once again, my hon. Friend makes a good point about the need for long-term certainty of investment and policy. The CCS decision was an example of a shambolic state of affairs, given that many hundreds of millions of pounds had been invested for the future. That future was basically taken away from under investors' feet, so I absolutely agree with him.

The export-orientated supply chain generates about £30 billion annually across the UK, and its exported services deliver £12 billion, and the future blueprint for the sector, "Vision 2035", grasps the importance of that. Alongside adding a generation of productive life to the basin, the blueprint has the objective of doubling the long-term opportunities for the supply chain. If we work together to maximise production from the UK continental shelf and to help the supply chain grow its share of the global energy market, we can boost that prize by half again and generate £920 billion of revenue for the UK economy through to 2035. That is a real game changer for us all. By doubling its share of the global market and embracing the opportunities available through diversification into other markets, the sector can achieve an additional £150 billion of revenue above the baseline estimate of £350 billion.

However, Grangemouth, its workforce and the wider sector are being put at risk by Brexit. The latest Oil & Gas UK report makes it clear that Brexit will have a significant impact on the oil and gas sector, warning about the impact on frictionless access to goods and services, and that the UK Government's Brexit plans could cause a "skills shortage" for vital North sea services such as emergency response and rescue vehicles.

The Scottish National party is clear that the best way to achieve the goals I have mentioned is to protect Scotland's place in the single market and the customs union. The Scottish Government have delivered an exceptional range of support for the oil and gas sector and its workforce, including an investment of £2.4 billion in enterprise and skills through our enterprise agencies and skills bodies, £90 million over the next decade to support the Oil & Gas Technology Centre as part of the Aberdeen city region deal, and a £12 million transition training fund to support individuals and help the sector to retain talent.

The other major risk that is looming also comes from Westminster, and that is the Budget on 29 October. With the Treasury having taken about £350 billion from the oil and gas sector in the past 50 years, this is an opportunity for the UK Government to repay their debts and show their support for the sector. The Chancellor must ensure in his autumn Budget that the UKCS is globally attractive for investment, with a competitive and predictable fiscal regime. The UK Government must not repeat the mistakes of previous Administrations and undermine the sector by using it as the Treasury's cash cow. Instead, they must protect tax incentives designed to support the sector, introduce measures to improve exploration and attract fresh investment, complete the work on transferable tax history, urgently ensure that the tax treatment of late-life assets is addressed so that those assets are in the right hands, and support the urgently required alternative solution to end-use relief.

The SNP also demands that the UK Government use the autumn Budget to implement an oil and gas sector deal, instead of dragging their feet, as is currently the case in Ayrshire, Tayside and Inverness. A sector deal should support practical steps to protect, progress and promote operators, the supply chain and the offshore and onshore workforce. A sector deal for the industry must include visionary national hubs for underwater innovation, transformational technology and decommissioning, based in Aberdeen but serving the whole industry.

In conclusion, North sea oil and gas is booming and the sector is working hard alongside its downstream and supply chain partners to secure a bright, lower-carbon future. The sector has a clear route map in "Vision 2035" and is ably supported by the Scottish Government, who are using their limited powers to the full. The UK Government must now make two choices: to protect the supply chains and the labour supply through single market and customs union membership, and to provide the long-term political certainty and financial support that the sector needs.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate can last until 1 pm. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench spokespeople no later than 12.27 pm, and there will be 10 minutes for the SNP Front Bencher, 10 minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister. I would be obliged, Minister, if you allowed the mover

of the motion three minutes to sum up at the end. Eight Members are seeking to catch my eye, so I will impose a time limit of five minutes and the clock will act as a helpful guide to those making speeches.

11.45 am

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Falkirk (John McNally) on securing the debate, and he has done so at an opportune time, just under three weeks before the Chancellor delivers his Budget. He has also provided us with the opportunity to highlight the vital importance of the industry to the UK: it is essential for the UK's security of energy supply, it has contributed billions of pounds to the Exchequer over the past 50 years, and it provides hundreds of thousands of highly skilled and well-paid jobs.

The industry has been through a great deal in recent years. As a result of the collapse in the price of Brent crude, tens of thousands of jobs have been lost and the industry has had to restructure. In many respects, it has emerged fitter and leaner, but significant challenges remain, and it is vital that the tripartite approach of industry, regulator—the Oil & Gas Authority—and Government working together continues. The oil price has bounced back, but that is almost certainly for short-term global geopolitical reasons, and it would be complacent to assume that the higher price will be sustained into the longer term. Production is up significantly, and by the end of the year could be 20% higher than over the past five years. Significant cost reductions have been made, though it is important that they are sustained if the industry is to remain globally competitive. However, warning lights remain on amber, with exploratory drilling activity at a record low and the revenues of supply chain businesses continuing to fall. It is vital that exploration and production companies work collaboratively with their supply chains, as their respective futures are very much intertwined.

I will briefly highlight three factors that need to be centre stage for the industry to continue to play its lead role. The first is the need for a stable fiscal regime. One of the key reasons why the UK continental shelf is an attractive investment proposition is that it is fiscally competitive. That reputation has been hard won and must not be thrown away because of an increase in tax rates. That would be short-termism, and it would cause lasting damage. In the Budget, the Chancellor should re-emphasise the Government's commitment to the "Driving investment" plan. The proposals for transferable tax history, to be included in the forthcoming Finance Bill, are extremely welcome and will drive investment in late-life assets and maximise economic recovery. It is also vital that the Treasury urgently clarifies its plans for ship end-use relief and introduces proposals that are in line with the "Driving investment" plan.

Secondly, it is vital never to forget those who work in the industry. As the hon. Member for Falkirk said, 167 people lost their lives in the Piper Alpha disaster 30 years ago. The drive for business efficiency, which is very important for the industry's future, must never compromise safety. It is also important to provide attractive career paths to encourage people into the industry. OPITO estimates that there is a need to recruit 40,000 people into the industry over the next 20 years, 10,000 of them into roles that currently do not exist. The "Workforce

Dynamics" review has been taking place this year, and skills demand maps are being worked up. The Government should encourage and support that initiative, which will enable the industry to employ safe and well-trained people who will maximise its contribution to the UK economy.

Lastly, the industry must provide a bridge to a low-carbon future, which means setting out a clear and deliverable deployment pathway for carbon capture, utilisation and storage. The Government should consider carefully the conclusions of the cost challenge taskforce and work with the industry to develop regional clusters that will bring significant economic benefits to both the north-east and Scotland.

Off the East Anglian coast, in my part of the world, an enormous development of offshore wind farms is taking place. The two industries—oil and gas and offshore wind—need to work together. There are encouraging signs that that is beginning to take place, as evidenced by the Oil & Gas Authority's promotion of "Gas to Wire", which involves the gas produced from gasfields being generated into electricity offshore, and then transmitted to shore via spare capacity in the subsea cables used for wind farms. The industry has a great future—it is important we do not squander it.

11.50 am

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. As time is pressing, I will try to keep my contribution relatively brief. I want to make two points. First, I want to remind Members of the historical context as it applies to oil and gas and the north of Scotland.

When I was at Tain Royal Academy in the north of Scotland, many of the brightest and best in my class left to go south—perhaps a rather sad facet of life in the highlands. Despite the best efforts, people left and sought employment further south; indeed, my own father said to me, "Go south, young man. That's where your future lies." However, in the 1970s, as we all know, the music changed completely and utterly, and the oil came.

Where I come from, the arrival of the Nigg oil fabrication yard was a crucial turning point, seeing the building, first of all, of the two giant BP rigs. Suddenly there was really high-quality employment available locally. Welders were trained, and other skills were trained up. The point is that the depopulation trend was halted and actually reversed, so we cannot underestimate the social importance of Nigg's contribution to the highland economy. I would not have married and brought up children locally if I had not been employed in the Nigg yard. The fact that my children were born locally and went to the local school is entirely down to the fact that that was where I was employed and had the income to live and to grow my family. In succeeding generations, we saw increasing evidence of a reversal of the population decline, as top-quality jobs supported local infrastructure and the local economy, so we should not forget how important that contribution was for the highland economy and how, structurally, it was very much to the good.

My second point brings us to today. Very good contributions have already been made, and the potential of offshore wind was mentioned. In my constituency, we have the Beatrice wind farm nearing completion—an

[Jamie Stone]

example of technology that is cutting edge for the future, but that is in many ways based on technology that went before, in terms of fabrication and working in very inclement conditions in the North sea. As I see that technology approach completion, I take considerable pride in the fact that, not long from now, it will be making a major national contribution to our grid and will literally keep the lights on.

West of Shetland, as I am sure Members will also mention, we still have great potential for the future. Discoveries continue to be made. It is deep water with incredibly inclement conditions, but the technology has moved forward. There is much more subsea work, but there is the new oil.

My point is this: I wish I knew what was going to happen with Brexit. I do not know, and I am sure many Members will tease me and say, "Would a Lib Dem know anyway?" However, I am damn sure that the contribution that the oil industry has made in the past, makes today and can make in the future to my constituency, to the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and to the remotest parts of Scotland is absolutely huge. So my final point is a plea to the Minister, Her Majesty's Government and future Governments. I want them to remember the goose that laid the golden egg: the oil and gas industry. Please preserve it, enhance it and protect it for the generations to come.

11.54 am

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) on securing this important debate. As many colleagues know, before I was elected to this place, I spent 25 years working in the oil and gas industry, as many of my constituents still do. The industry is still a major employer in my constituency, as is the supply chain that supports it.

Almost half the UK's oil and gas makes landfall by pipeline in my constituency. The Forties pipeline system, which has been mentioned, comes ashore just outside the coastal village of Cruden Bay and carries about 30% of the UK's oil. St Fergus, a few miles up the coast, is the location of the St Fergus gas terminal, through which 25% of the UK's gas is imported through three different pipelines. St Fergus is also the site of a new project currently being developed for carbon capture and storage—a technology that has already been mentioned.

A little further south is the slightly lesser known city of Aberdeen, which many know as the oil capital of Europe, and rightly so. Many people from my constituency and from all around the north-east of Scotland commute to Aberdeen, heading not only to the worksites and offices in and around Aberdeen, in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) and for Gordon (Colin Clark), who I am sure we will hear from, but offshore, to and from the world's busiest commercial heliport at Dyce.

At the start of the downturn in 2014, more than 460,000 jobs in the UK depended on the oil and gas sector. Throughout 2015 and 2016, the number fell steadily, reaching 280,000 in 2017, with about 40% in Scotland and 60% in the rest of the UK. As we approach

the end of 2018, the sector is seeing a cautious increase in employment for the first time since the start of the downturn. I say "cautious" because we have been in this situation before, going through the cycle of a high oil price followed by a crash in revenue and knee-jerk cost-cutting measures, followed by an equally impulsive return to wasteful spending when oil prices recover. I am encouraged by conversations I have had with oil companies in Aberdeen and with Oil & Gas UK and the Oil & Gas Authority, based in Aberdeen, because it feels as though lessons have been learned from the past. However, time will tell. Will the Minister take that into account in his response?

Even before the downturn in 2014, it was long realised that many of the wasteful and inefficient practices were not sustainable. The report by Sir Ian Wood in 2014 made a range of recommendations, including a joint Government and industry strategy for maximising economic recovery, or MER, and the creation of a new arm's length body charged with the effective stewardship and regulation of UK continental shelf hydrocarbon recovery and with maximising collaboration across the industry. The new arm's length body, the Oil & Gas Authority, working with industry, developed the MER UK strategy. Under the strategy, a range of taskforces have already delivered huge value: an additional 2.8 billion barrels of oil equivalent to be produced by 2050, in comparison with pre-Wood report baseline forecasts; average unit lifting costs reduced from £19 per barrel to £12 per barrel in 2017; and production efficiency increased from 65% in 2014 to 73% two years later. There is still a lot of upside there to be had.

Through Oil & Gas UK's "Vision 2035", it is estimated that the industry could generate £920 billion of revenue to the UK economy. By 2035, two thirds of the UK's primary energy is predicted to still be produced from oil and gas, with 60% coming from our own UK resources. Renewable sources of energy will and must continue to grow over that time, but they will not be able to meet the full demand.

MER is a strategy that can co-exist with a low-carbon agenda. As efficiencies improve, fossil fuels are burned more cleanly, CO₂ can be captured, stored and used to help enhance oil recovery, and the full transition away from oil and gas may actually be extended while still meeting climate change targets.

In summary, the future of the oil and gas industry is positive, but there needs to be flexibility and openness to change. We have seen support for this from the Government, which is very welcome. Transferable tax history was a great good news story from last year's Budget and shows how important it is that Members of Parliament, especially those representing constituencies in the north-east of Scotland, speak up for the oil and gas industry. According to Oil & Gas UK, TTH is one of a range of policies that can help the industry realise up to £30 billion of future investment opportunities.

I will conclude by asking the Minister to provide, if possible, an update on the decision on the sector deal that has been mentioned. That would be most welcome.

11.59 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank and congratulate the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) for securing this debate. As often happens during debates in Westminster Hall, although the issue might not directly

concern Northern Ireland—our seas do not contain any oil or gas fields, at least at the moment—a number of my constituents work on oil rigs and travel over and return each week or fortnight, depending on their shifts. The debate is important for those constituents, but also because, although the gas and oil is found in the seas off Scotland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland benefits from it. The debate therefore affects every person, every family and every household in the entire United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which is why it is so important.

We all know the importance of the gas and oil industry and how big it is, and the stats are clear: according to 2018 figures, 37,000 people are employed directly by the industry, and 127,000 are in the relevant supply chains. Most of those roles are in the offshore industry, which is also important to Northern Ireland. Some of the repairs done to the oil rigs and the apparatus that brings the oil and gas ashore take place at Harland and Wolff in Belfast, and it is important to note our input into the process. Statistics from 2017 indicated that 40,000 people were employed directly in the industry, and it is important to record the importance of the oil and gas sector to Northern Ireland. Oil and gas provided 72% of the UK's total primary energy, and net imports of natural gas were around 45% of UK supply. The majority of oil—almost 80% of final consumption—is refined for use in transport. Those figures indicate how important the industry is to everyone in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The debate is also pertinent as we look towards the Budget. In 2016, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced commendable reductions in taxation for North sea oil and gas fields to maximise the economic recovery of the North sea. The Budget also included commitments effectively to abolish petroleum revenue tax by permanently reducing the rate from 35% to 0%, to simplify the regime for investors and level the playing field between investment opportunities in older fields and infrastructure and new developments, and to reduce the supplementary charge from 20% to 10% to send a strong signal that the UK is open for business—we need the message to go out from this debate that we are open for business and working positively towards that. In recognition of the exceptionally challenging conditions that currently face the sector, those changes were introduced in the Finance Act 2016.

As has been said, although oil prices fluctuate between massive highs and lows, they are currently high. We want all regions to benefit from the oil and gas sector, so perhaps when he responds to the debate the Minister will indicate how we in Northern Ireland can continue to benefit from the oil and gas that we in the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland own, as individuals and as regions.

In the 2017 autumn Budget, the Government focused on decommissioning costs and announced that they would bring forward legislation to introduce a mechanism for transferable tax history. Tax relief on decommissioning costs is linked to tax payment history, so the new mechanism would allow tax history to be transferred along with the asset. The Government also announced that they would consult on reducing tax for decommissioning costs incurred by the previous licence holder.

It is clear, however, that we must do more to address prices for consumers. The Minister may not be directly responsible, but my biggest plea to him is that, because energy prices fluctuate, people consuming oil and gas think they are saving money when they come to pay for it, but actually they are not. Back home in Northern Ireland, a number of constituents who changed between oil and gas six months ago have found themselves in a difficult place in the past few weeks. That is yet another squeeze on so many families who cannot afford it, and we must address that issue at the highest level.

I look to the Minister for advice on how we can and will secure the future of this industry, and on our ability to provide our own sustainable energy source for heating in this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

12.4 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I thank the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) for securing this important debate.

I welcome the stated aim of the Oil & Gas UK trade association, which is

“to strengthen the long-term health of the offshore oil and gas industry in the United Kingdom by working closely with companies across the sector, governments and all other stakeholders”.

In late 2014, Her Majesty's Treasury developed a plan to reform the oil and gas fiscal regime. Over the last 50 years the oil and gas industry has contributed more than £350 billion to the UK Exchequer in production tax revenue alone—not an insignificant sum.

In 2017 the UK Government's industrial strategy stated:

“We can also reduce costs for the UK as a whole by making intelligent use of our oil and gas assets and expertise. While the move towards clean growth is clear, oil and gas remains one of the most productive sectors of the UK economy, supporting 200,000 jobs directly and in the supply chain, and generating £24 billion in annual exports. The emerging shale gas industry offers the prospect of creating jobs, enhancing the competitiveness of downstream sectors and building up supply chains.”

It seems likely that shale gas will be extracted only south of the border, as the Scottish Government appear—I emphasise the word “appear”—to have placed a moratorium on that source of energy. I understand, however, that imported shale gas from the US is helpful when securing the future of the important Grangemouth plant.

I read with interest a recent post note in the journal of the all-party group for energy studies, which considered decarbonising or reducing the carbon content of UK gas supplies as an option for reducing emissions from heating, potentially substituting natural gas with hydrogen or biomethane. I am pleased that such welcome research is continuing in that field. Indeed, some businesses in my constituency are already utilising biomethane, although not necessarily to the exclusion of natural gas.

The opening in February 2017 of Aberdeen's Oil & Gas Technology Centre clearly illustrates both the UK and Scottish Governments' commitment to the future of the oil and gas sector. The £180 million investment aims to unlock the full potential of the UK North sea for future generations, which is vital given that future energy demand, not just in the UK but globally, is predicted to increase as global living standards and population levels rise.

[Bill Grant]

Another important aspect for the future is securing for the UK work associated with the decommissioning of platforms and subsea facilities where a cost-benefit analysis proves that to be prudent. The Oil & Gas Authority has stated that such work may create a globally competitive market for the UK. The aim of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is to maximise the economic recovery in relation to the UK's continental shelf, and it endeavours to secure maximum value for economically recoverable hydrocarbons.

Although the oil market is volatile—post 2014 the price of a barrel of Brent crude plummeted—it is clear that oil and gas have a positive future. That future may not be a mirror image of the past, but rather a new vision, as scientific research and innovation define and constantly refine it for our children and grandchildren. Oil and gas may not have the same exclusivity they once experienced, but in my view they will remain part of an inclusive package of energy options for some time to come.

Let me turn to a fuel from the past—coal. These days, open-cast or imported coal is used mostly as an integral part of the UK manufacturing sector, especially in the chemical process to make steel and cement. Many Members present, however, will recall when coal was king. Collieries in Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock, such as Littlemill, Killoch, Barony, Knockshinnoch and Beoch, to name but a few, fuelled the industrial revolution and kept the home fires burning. Sadly, there are no longer any deep mines in the United Kingdom, and coal is outlawed as a polluting fuel. With the recent alarming UN report on global warming, we must be aware that the same fate may befall oil and gas in the rush to embrace clean renewables and to prevent a catastrophic rise in global temperatures. In closing, therefore, I ask the Minister to comment briefly on that recent UN report on rising global temperatures.

12.9 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) on introducing what is clearly a timely debate, given that the Budget is forthcoming. As he rightly said, that Tory Budget cannot undermine the future of the oil and gas industry by once again using the North sea as a cash cow—terminology that was effectively recognised even by the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), who acknowledged the £350 billion that the UK Treasury has accrued over the lifetime of the oil industry. That money has simply been frittered away.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alan Brown: No, because I have limited time.

Where is the legacy from the UK Government? Where is the onshore infrastructure investment to support Aberdeen? It has been left to the Scottish National party Government to pick up the pieces, including the Aberdeen bypass and rail improvements. Where is the oil fund we have called for? Norway's oil fund, started

in 1990, has now topped \$1 trillion in assets, and last year returned a profit of \$131 billion. That alone gives lie to the myth that Scotland relies on the broad shoulders of the UK to deal with any price volatility. Careful stewardship would have taken care of that.

Let us look at the measures the UK Government have taken recently. In the spring 2016 Budget, they reduced the supplementary charge back to 10%. That was very welcome, but the predicted cost to the Treasury of £1 billion was only a third of the inheritance tax giveaway to millionaires—such were their priorities. In the November 2017 Budget, the transferable tax history was a welcome measure, but given that it was predicted to bring an additional £70 million in revenue to the Treasury, that was not a difficult decision. The UK Government need to close out the process going forward. Over the same period, we have had the £1 billion carbon capture and storage betrayal. That project would have facilitated diversification from the wider oil and gas industry.

As others have recognised, the offshore oil industry has clearly been a great success story and has turned Aberdeen into a global city. Despite the predictions of when oil will run out, there is still a bright future. Just last month, Total announced a major gas discovery off Shetland, with an estimated 1 trillion cubic feet of gas that can be extracted. Rosebank, off the west of Shetland, is estimated to contain around 300 million barrels of oil. Equinor has called it

“one of the biggest undeveloped finds on the UK Continental Shelf.”

Overall, the North sea holds significant potential, with the equivalent of up to 20 billion barrels of oil remaining. That could sustain production for the next 20 years. I repeat that the UK Government cannot do another cash grab on the industry. Production statistics show that the sales value of oil and gas has gone up, and we know that production of oil and gas remains 23% higher than the level recorded in 2014-15. Even so, the UK Government must introduce measures to improve the exploration and attract fresh investment. They need to support the industry in its ambitions to increase the total economic value of the North sea.

With the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, we have to recognise the wider climate change issues and that the world is not on track to meet the temperature goals of the Paris agreement. The UK Government will have to take action in that regard, but that does not mean that we need to pull out of the North sea any time soon. Even if we did, we would then be reliant on imports.

Scotland's energy strategy recognises that a strong domestic oil and gas industry can play a positive role in supporting the low carbon transition. What would help that transition, while we are still extracting oil and gas, is carbon capture and storage, greater investment in renewables, and allowing onshore wind developments in Scotland. The UK Government must also back away from the nuclear folly, and invest that money in offshore renewables, grid upgrades and directly in energy efficiency measures in homes.

We must recognise that the North sea industry is highly regulated, with some of the most advanced and comparatively least polluting production methods in the world. The industry is focused on reducing its

carbon footprint and average emissions have fallen year on year since 2013. An oil and gas sector deal could help that process. Where is it? We really need one, and we need to hear about that from the Minister. The future of the oil and gas industry is bright, but it needs better leadership from the UK Government.

12.14 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) on securing this important and timely debate.

Hailing from the north-east of Scotland, having grown up surrounded by the oil and gas industry, having worked for an incredibly brief time in the sector, and now representing a constituency to which its continued success is vital, I know all too well the importance of the industry to not just the north-east of Scotland but the wider UK economy. Looking around the Chamber, contributing to debates about the industry's future seems to be the preserve of Members who represent such constituencies as mine, which is unfortunate. Yes, the industry is based proudly in the north-east of Scotland, but it is a UK-wide industry that has contributed more than £330 billion to the British economy, supports more than 330,000 jobs across the UK and has a supply chain worth nearly £30 billion stretching into every nation, region and community across our islands—as demonstrated by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—both servicing domestic activities and exporting almost £12 billion of goods and services to other basins across the world.

The success of the North sea oil and gas industry is, of course, a story born in the north-east of Scotland—all good things are—but it is a whole-UK success. It depressed me beyond belief to hear, not that long ago, a colleague exclaim, when he heard about the recent discovery west of Shetland on the Glendronach field of around 1 trillion cubic feet of extractable gas—the largest discovery of conventional gas in the UK since 2008, with a productive life of 10 to 15 years—that that was remarkable. He did not know that any exploration was going on anymore. He thought it was all decommissioning and closing up shop for the North sea oil and gas industry.

Sadly, that is a common misconception. Of course decommissioning is taking place in the North sea at the moment, and the rate of decom activity will increase in the years ahead, but that is only one small part of the story. Anyone who takes a stroll around the Oil & Gas Technology Centre in Aberdeen or visits the Oil & Gas Innovation Centre in Bridge of Don, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark), will be blown away by the great advances in technology being made. There is exciting, explorative work being done on the smaller fields in the North sea, led by enterprising smaller companies growing in the sector, such as ROVOP in my constituency. There is also the sustained commitment to the area of big companies, such as BP, which recently announced its two North sea developments, which are expected to produce 30,000 barrels gross of oil equivalent per day at peak production.

This is not an industry in decline; this is an industry with a positive future, but it remains in recovery. We are still emerging from the deepest and most sustained

downturn in the sector's history. Many jobs were lost, some companies disappeared completely and others had to radically change how they did business. However, through shared learning and experiences, through economising and doing much more with much less, and with the support of the Scottish Government and the UK Government, which has supported the sector to the tune of £2.3 billion, the industry is confident about the future.

However, as many Members have said, what the industry needs more than anything else is fiscal stability. The North sea is one of the most attractive mature basins in the world in which to invest today, because of the long-term and fiscally sensible approach taken by Her Majesty's Treasury since 2014. It was evident a couple of months ago, however, when there was just a hint of a change in policy or an increase in tax, that that would upset the recovery and put off investment, which could have damaging consequences.

Let the call go out from the Chamber today, from every Member and from every party represented, that we wholeheartedly support our oil and gas industry, that we recognise the huge value that it brings to the entire United Kingdom and that now is not the time to consider changing the fiscal situation, increasing tax or putting off further investment. Let us work with the sector and both of Scotland's Governments to ensure a positive, long-term and productive future for this world-leading industry.

12.18 pm

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) on securing the debate, only a few months after my own debate on the industry.

Oil and gas is a massive part of the UK economy and an enormous part of my constituency of Gordon, with 233 service companies operating from Gordon alone. I routinely claim that I have the largest oil and gas footprint, but other Members may try to argue the point. Thanks to this Government, and the transferable tax history that will come into effect in November, billions of pounds of investment will be released into the industry. I am disappointed that voices from the Opposition Benches have said that transferable tax history is the wrong thing to do.

The industry continues to develop efficiencies in decommissioning, supported by Her Majesty's Treasury. It contributes £1 billion a year to HM Treasury—somewhere short of the estimated £11 billion that the Scottish National party, during the independence referendum, claimed would be contributed. Fifty-nine UK constituencies have a major oil and gas footprint and, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) said, the same Members seem to turn up for such debates. Many other areas should realise what a significant industry oil and gas is. It is truly national and international, and it is not a dying industry. It has shrunk from 4.5 million barrels a day to 1.5 million. It is still of great importance, and it has tremendous longevity.

Why is that industry so important to the north-east? The north-east has 8% of the population of Scotland, but 18% of its economy. Even during the downturn,

[Colin Clark]

unemployment only got to 1.2%, because the people of the north-east believe in getting out and working, even if it is in another part of the world. The north-east is the engine room of the Scottish economy. The cost of living is higher and house prices were driven up by the boom years, but we have the highest council tax bills. It is the most expensive place to live in Scotland, because the Scottish Government chose to put council tax bills up. Employers feel penalised by higher business rates, to the extent that buildings are being knocked down in the north-east of Scotland. I recently drove past the Baker Hughes GE building in the constituency neighbouring mine, and I am told it will have to be knocked down because the business rates are so punitive.

The UK Government have delivered, with transferable tax history, a massive incentive for oil and gas estimated at £30 billion. The fiscal policy that is making the UK continental shelf the place to produce oil and gas is that of the UK Government, and there is low corporation tax for the whole sector, UK-wide, because of the UK Government. In the north-east there is the highest concentration of technicians and engineers in the UK. We have an incredibly strong and robust economy. The industry puts safety first, absolutely, and I pay tribute to Step Change in Safety, which has brought together producers, the service sector and offshore workers in a collaborative effort.

As for any downturn in activity, the Oil and Gas Authority estimates that £400 billion is still to come from the North sea through collaborative action. Chrysaor, a private equity-backed organisation, invested £3.8 billion to buy Shell assets. Wood Group bought Amec, to be a FTSE 100 company. General Electric and Baker Hughes have merged their oil and gas, which is going to float on the New York stock exchange. There is not a lack of activity because of Brexit—far from it. The size and type of mergers and acquisitions deals last year signalled confidence in the UK continental shelf. The sector needs fiscal stability and I agree with other Members that that is a message we are sending, loud and clear, to HM Treasury. Businesses are not seeking to exit the UK continental shelf, which is still seen as a strategically important basin. SNP claims of a Brexit downturn simply do not ring true. They should look at the money and where it is being invested. In the past couple of days, I and colleagues visited Wood Group, an £11 billion organisation only 6% of whose business is in the North sea, because it is a dynamic company investing further afield. As to oil and gas being something of the past, let us remember that it is our throwaway culture, not the hydrocarbons, polluting the sea.

Oil and gas have been pivotal in transforming the carbon intensity of the power sector, as has been mentioned. Let us get to the nub of things. Higher taxes in Scotland will encourage companies to register and operate from outwith Scotland, damaging its tax base. Punitive business rates in the north-east are costing jobs. Having visited 90 north-east firms related to oil and gas, I have not heard anyone speak about Brexit. Every single one has mentioned business rates. Both Scotland's Governments need to get their shoulder to the wheel and drive the industry forward.

12.24 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) for obtaining the debate. The timing is good, as other Members have mentioned, given that we are in the run-up to the Budget.

I want to talk first about Brexit, which several colleagues from throughout the House have mentioned. The economic report put out by Oil & Gas UK makes the point that 7% of the offshore workforce are from EU countries and refers to the fact that before Bulgaria joined the EU it took four days for goods to come from there to Aberdeen to be used in the oil and gas industry, but that they were routinely held up for an additional week because of customs controls. If we do not have a customs union deal that allows for those goods to come through the border without being held up for a week, it will cause problems for our supply chain companies and for the wider industry. A fifth of people living in Aberdeen were not born in the UK. We have done immensely well at attracting immigration, which has been good for our industry. It is a huge concern that that might be less easy after Brexit, particularly if the immigration plans mentioned at the Conservative party conference go through and we end up in a situation where very few immigrants are allowed to come to the UK. That would cause a real problem for my city and for the oil and gas industry as a whole.

The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) set out particularly clearly the requirement for a stable taxation regime for the oil and gas industry. One of the points most often raised with me is that if there is a story in the *Financial Times* about the possibility of the Treasury increasing, or massively changing, tax in relation to oil and gas, that story alone causes a problem for the industry—it makes a dent. We need a clear commitment from the Chancellor in the Budget to stability and predictability in the taxation regime.

Colin Clark: We were both at the same meeting when the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury came up. I think it was the myth being peddled that did the damage—he clarified it from the Treasury. Does the hon. Lady agree?

Kirsty Blackman: I do not disagree at all. I understood that that was a private meeting, so I did not want to talk about what that Minister said during it, but it would be good if the Chancellor could make a clear statement in the Budget. I agree that it was the myth, rather than any statement by the Treasury, that caused the problem. I am sorry; I thought I had been clear on that point.

There are other asks for the Budget. I have not heard anyone on the Opposition Benches being negative about transferable tax history. I apologise to the hon. Member for Gordon (Colin Clark), but I was calling for that in March 2016, which was more than a year before he was elected. We have consistently called for changes in the taxation regime for late-life assets. I have made the case for that on many occasions, and I am pleased that it may be coming through—we hope it will. It is a good example of the industry working together. Things have happened a bit more slowly than I would have liked, but the industry worked well with Government, and the

conversation went well about trying to make the tax regime work from the point of view of both the Government and the industry.

The importance of transferable tax history is because of what happens when assets at the end of their life are transferred to another company. Something that belongs to a big company with many different onshore installations will probably not be its No. 1 priority, but if it belongs to a new entrant and is all that it is concentrating on, it will be a priority. That is why transferable tax history is so important for maximising economic recovery.

The point about end-use relief is a good one. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk and the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) both mentioned it. Whatever happens, it is vital that the Government should speak to the industry about the best way to make the change work, if there is to be a change, and that as much notice as possible should be given of changes to end-use relief. We nearly had a big disaster in July, with the pulling of end-use relief. It is clear that that cannot happen. The industry and the Government need to continue to speak to each other to make it work better.

The final Budget matter I want to speak about is the sector deal. If the Chancellor could announce progress on that it would be phenomenal—excellent. I would be really pleased. If not, it would be good to know when a commitment is likely. My impression from speaking to those in the industry who worked on the deal is that they feel they worked together incredibly well on it. They feel that the proposal that has been put forward to the Government reflects the industry's needs and requirements, so it would be positive if the Government brought it forward sooner rather than later.

I want to talk about “Vision 2035” and focus on the subject of the debate—the future of the oil and gas industry. I will not talk much about the industry downstream—I apologise to anyone involved in it—because I represent Aberdeen and because my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, who represents Grangemouth, and the hon. Member for Waveney have spoken about that important aspect of the industry. “Vision 2035” is the Oil & Gas Authority's vision for securing the supply chain and the oil and gas industry in the north-east of Scotland to ensure that, in 2035, it still makes money for the Treasury, supports our local economy and provides jobs in the local area. That will happen only if the Government provide support now, including the stable fiscal regime that we spoke about earlier and support for the supply chain. They must talk positively about the industry, consider its asks, and make changes if need be.

The North sea field is a late-life asset—it is incredibly mature. It was one of the first fields in the world to reach that level of maturity, so our engineers who go out there are doing incredibly innovative things. They are working on enhanced oil recovery, bringing in tech in the supply chain, and using longer tiebacks so that small pools can be exploited. It is groundbreaking, world-leading stuff; this is the first time some of it has been done. If we get the technology right, we will be able to export it around the world even when there is no oil and gas in the North sea, but we must ensure that those companies stay anchored in the north-east of Scotland and the wider area.

The hon. Member for Gordon mentioned how many oil and gas companies he has in his constituency. I am sure he has more than I do, but I have the services that support those companies—two local authorities, the hospital and all the other vital things that the industry requires. As the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine said, it is hon. Members from the north-east of Scotland and those who represent constituencies with oil and gas industries who come to speak in debates like this. I have taken part in many such debates in my time as a parliamentarian, and it is interesting that we and Conservative Members are largely asking for the same things: transferable tax history, the sector deal and support for the Oil & Gas Technology Centre, which is doing absolutely phenomenal work. Previously, we were asking for the Aberdeen city deal. We are calling for the same things because we all go out there and speak to people who work in the oil and gas industry, and the companies involved in it. We ask them what they need, and they say pretty consistently that the most important things are stability and predictability.

Support for exploration is also hugely important just now. Anything that can be done to encourage exploration and help big projects be signed off will be incredibly important. More big projects have been signed off in the past year than in the previous couple of years, which is hugely welcome news, but we need them to keep coming through the pipeline so that we can secure the future economic benefit.

Hon. Members in the Chamber largely speak with one voice and have the same asks for the oil and gas industry, but I sometimes feel like we do not make as much headway with Ministers in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Treasury as we could. I hope that the Minister hears everything we are asking for. We are all calling for the same things, because we are reflecting the voice of the industry. I would very much appreciate it if he would ask the Chancellor to make a clear commitment to a stable fiscal regime in the Budget.

12.34 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): We have had an excellent debate, with informed contributions all round, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) on securing it. As hon. Members have said, this is a very important debate because the Budget is so close and because there are wider issues relating to the role that the oil and gas industry will play in a substantially decarbonised future. There are a number of assumptions about how oil and gas will be used in the future. As hon. Members have said, the debate is taking place literally the day after the IPCC published its report on global warming and its effects, and discussion about that report is just beginning. That must be the context for our discussions about the future of oil and gas.

As hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), have said, although the oil and gas industry in the North sea has recovered substantially from the miserable predictions and prognostications of 2014-15—it is estimated that production will be up 5% over the coming year, exploration is picking up, and various other indicators show that the industry is in a better shape than it has been in for quite a while—we must nevertheless be extremely wary

[Dr Alan Whitehead]

of assuming that happy days are here again, and that the industry can be the cash cow for the Budget that it has been perceived to be in years gone by. The industry's long-term future is of a different order from anything that has happened in the past, so we should strike those thoughts from our minds. Although it will make a good return for the Exchequer in years to come, it should not be seen as a cash cow in the future.

I say that because we face a period in which the lessons of the downturn, up to the recent upturn, must be put in place to ensure the long-term future, prosperity and health of the industry as a whole. There has been a recent efficiency trend: development drilling has fallen substantially, but the costs of drilling have reduced substantially, and the average unit operating costs have halved from about \$30 a barrel in 2014 to \$15 a barrel now. Those tremendous efficiency gains will stand the sector in good stead for the challenges that lie ahead. We can use them to exploit small pools, which will be one of the staples of exploitation and development in the future.

It is unlikely that any new Brent fields will be discovered. In that context, we need to understand, as hon. Members said, that the North sea is not just a mature field but a very mature field: 43 billion barrels have been extracted, and there are perhaps about 10 billion to 20 billion barrels left to extract. Its future therefore needs to be in the best possible hands.

I commend the creation and operation of the Oil & Gas Authority and—hon. Members have mentioned it—“Vision 2035”, which the OGA is putting forward for the future of the industry. In that vision, it does not just talk about continuing business as usual, but looks at the much longer-term future, even beyond the point at which the very last reserves have been produced. One of the OGA's missions is to create a sustainable energy service and technology centre long after the final economic reserves have been produced. We need to look not just at business as usual, but at a range of other things that the industry can start to develop, and is developing, as the North sea field becomes even more mature. Of course, one of the things it can do is develop decommissioning skills on a worldwide basis, so that we can ensure not just that the decommissioning in the North sea is done in the best possible way, but that those skills can be exported across the world.

We also need to contemplate a future of carbon capture and storage in the North sea and the use of decommissioning as a possible way forward to a position in which the North sea is not only producing oil and gas, but storing the carbon that comes from those processes and creating an industry so to do.

We need to be mindful of the fact that, as I mentioned at the beginning of my contribution, the IPCC report on global warming and the future of the world has just come out. It is pertinent to our discussions today, because it underpins what kind of long-term future there is for oil and gas. I consider that the long-term future involves looking at how oil and gas can be used in a range of ways that are not entirely familiar to us today but will be essential for the sinews of British industry. Oil and gas will have a substantial role to play, for a very long time, in those areas of activity. I am thinking of chemical products for which oil is irreplaceable

and of alternative vectors such as hydrogen, if the CCS implications of the formation of hydrogen can be managed. All those things imply that there is a substantial future for oil and gas from the North sea.

We know—I am not talking off the top of my head here, I am referring to BEIS's updated energy and emissions projections—that the demand for oil and gas in the UK economy is likely to go down substantially. Indeed, we can see that from looking at the 1990 figures, when there was a primary demand for oil of 87 megatonnes of oil equivalent and for natural gas of 97 megatonnes of oil equivalent. In the year when “Vision 2035” comes to fruition, the demand is projected to be something like 70 megatonnes of oil equivalent for oil and only 28 megatonnes of oil equivalent for gas.

There will be a substantial decline in demand, but that means, it seems to me, that the North sea can provide a secure UK supply for the declining demand over that period. It is surely best, for energy security purposes and many other reasons, to ensure that our supplies for the future come from the UK. That is the future that I want to see for the North sea oil and gas industry, by means of efficiency and by means of the innovative techniques mentioned this morning—the ways of managing a mature field so that it works in the best way possible in the national interest and in the interests of having very different future for oil and gas from what we have seen hitherto. We must ensure that it works for the UK and that it has a secure future. I hope that the Government will be able to join in that vision and provide support where necessary to underpin that innovation and those new methods of doing things, so that the oil and gas industry can be in the best shape possible to face that very different future.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. Indeed, I congratulate you on the discipline that you have brought to these proceedings, although curtailing the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), to 10 minutes is a clear infringement of his human rights and of the normal way he behaves. In fact, some would say that it is a crime against humanity that his erudition, which is never known to be brief, was curtailed. I look forward to hearing him, as I did today, on many other occasions.

I genuinely congratulate the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) on not just securing the debate, but the thoughtful way in which he made his contribution. That sums up today's debate. There is general consensus, and I hope hon. Members do not think I am saying this out of complacency, but the fact is that, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) said, most things to do with oil and gas are done on the basis of consensus. I wish there was the same attitude towards other debates in which I have the pleasure of speaking.

When I became Energy Minister, one of my first visits, in August of last year, was to Aberdeen—several hon. Members were with me that day—where I met industry leaders and visited Robert Gordon University to see the dynamic advanced response training simulator. That is relevant today because of the comments from the hon. Member for Falkirk about Piper Alpha. I saw a

lot of the virtual reality equipment there, and I felt that I was actually on a rig. Everything was about health and safety and preventing the kind of incidents that happened at Piper Alpha. It is a tribute to the area that academia, industry and Government work together. I was most impressed by what I saw.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's constituency interest because of the Grangemouth industrial site, which I visited as an A-level economics student in 1975—many hon. Members here were not born then, and some of their parents were probably only just born. However, I do remember the industrial site; I remember the scale of it. I think of it when I hear figures such as 8% of Scotland's manufacturing base and 4% of GDP; I will never forget that visit, so I do understand the issue, and so do the Government.

In a very thoughtful speech, the shadow Minister expressed how important oil and gas are for the UK economy. I am not paid to promote the shadow Minister; I just cannot help but compliment him at various times. He talked about the mutual vision for the future. In fact, I kept looking up at him and seeing him reading from a document with blue print, which I thought was a Conservative party document, as the colour appeared to be the same, but which I then realised was, of course, "Vision 2035", the authors of which at least had a good idea of which colour it should be in. But it does show no complacency; the serious point is that it does show a vision for the future, from what many people, out of ignorance, believe is a clapped-out former industry—they think that because they remember the boom days. One has only to visit it to realise that that is far from the case.

The upstream industry alone supports more than 250,000 jobs. Then there is the supply chain, supported by the sector, in key clusters all over the country. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who has been at every single Westminster Hall debate I have ever spoken in, contributed extremely well. He mentioned the importance for Northern Ireland of the supply chain. I am very pleased to say that it is a United Kingdom supply chain and is not restricted to the specific area that many hon. Members have spoken about today.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North mentioned Brexit, which came up in a few of the contributions. I do not take it lightly, I assure you, Mr Hollobone—none of us does. Many of the good things that have happened in the past couple of years have happened in a time when things have been written off because of Brexit, but I want to say to the hon. Lady and others that the Government fully understand the need for frictionless trade, on which the oil and gas industry has long depended, whether in the movement of goods, services or people. I assure her and other interested Members that my Department has made that matter very clear to other parts of Government—it is our job to do that, and we have. We are fully aware that the sector has paid more than £330 billion in revenue to the Treasury, which is phenomenal. I know of no other single sector that has been as beneficial to the Government over the past half-century.

The end-use facility mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and by the hon. Member for Falkirk relates to customs procedures. I assure Members that Her Majesty's Revenue and

Customs continues to discuss with the sector the possibility of future mitigations being available, and which ones. The issue is complex, and I cannot claim to understand the full detail.

Since 2014, it is fair to say that the industry has had a torrid time as a result of the collapse in the price of oil. From that point of view, I am pleased that the price has gone up, but what I realised on my visit to Aberdeen was that, despite the decimation of the industry and its contraction—a statement of fact about the number of employees and so on, as was explained to me—good things resulted as well, such as some new technologies.

I remain optimistic for the future. I feel that the tripartite approach between the OGA, industry and Government, which hon. Members mentioned, is particularly important. I am pleased that, since its establishment, an extra 3.7 billion barrels have been forecast, and production has risen by 16% since 2014 figures, with a reduction in the production costs. The issue was forced by what happened to the price, but those cost reductions will remain and be improved on.

Optimism is returning to the North sea. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark) mentioned the amount of mergers and acquisition activity over the past couple of years—about \$8 billion-worth last year—with some significant investment involving new players to the basin. Divestment by some of the supermajors does not mean that they are losing interest; it is part of the natural order of a mature basin, with newer, smaller companies coming in. Shell is investing in new frontier areas, and BP's development is moving well. There is huge potential.

To determine the industry's potential, we obviously need responsibly regulated exploration, and the Government support that. There are a lot of challenges, and we understand that. The Government all realise that exploring and drilling for the upper reaches of the remaining resources is more difficult than doing so for the original resources—that is a statement of fact—and the measures that we have put in place since 2014 will contribute significantly towards that.

The focus of the debate is on the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) asked me to comment on the IPCC report, and our clean growth strategy is clear. We are focused on meeting our Paris agreement climate change targets, and we have asked the Committee on Climate Change for advice on our targets in the light of the new evidence.

Whatever happens, oil and gas will be part of the energy mix for decades to come. We know that we have to reduce demand to meet our climate targets, but this industry has a lot going for it. Gas can play an important role, and so can oil. My Department's main interest will be to continue the security of the energy supply, which means that we have not seen the end of hydrocarbons.

I am running out of time, and I will do my best to talk briefly about the sector deals mentioned by several hon. Members. One of my responsibilities is the implementation of sector deals. We have had a lot of discussion with the industry, and I am confident that these will proceed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) pointed out, this is an ambitious sector deal to support the industry's "Vision 2035". We have not yet reached the final stage of the process, we will do so quite soon. It is a question of

[Richard Harrington]

assessing the value for money of the amount of contribution expected in the deal from Government, which takes more time than people think.

This is a complex industry with a great future. My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan said that it is an industry with a lot going on, and we know that the Government, the industry and the Members who have spoken today will be an important part of its future.

Dr Whitehead: On a point of order, Mr Hollobone. I may have misled the Chamber inadvertently by quoting a statistic erroneously. On the estimates for natural gas usage in 2035, the figure should be 59 megatonnes of oil equivalent and not 29, as I believe I said in my speech.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Thank you for correcting the record.

12.55 pm

John Mc Nally: I thank the Minister for his kind and generous comments. All Members have been supportive of the debate. Many points were made about how vital this industry is to the economy in the transition to renewable and sustainable energy in the future. We are all agreed that we need a stable regime in place so that we are all aware of what will happen for the future of the industry. The points made about short-termism were excellent. We seem to have been practising short-termism for decade after decade, and that has to stop.

I particularly liked the emphasis on safety in the North sea and on how important it is to retain skilled, clever and well-trained workers. I was not actually around at the time of the Piper Alpha disaster—I was running businesses at the time the news started to come out. I was terrified, as everyone else was, and I read the papers and listened to the news to find out whose friend or relative had been killed and who had been injured. The long-term consequences of that disaster, such as post-traumatic stress, are still going on today. That should never be allowed to happen as long as we are in charge of safety, so the emphasis on safety is appreciated.

The need for a collaborative approach has been well versed. We are all singing from the same hymn sheet. We might want to get there in different ways, but I think we are all trying to get to exactly the same place. I am very appreciative of that.

Good and interesting observations were made during the debate, which showed a good understanding of local and global issues and of the importance of the sector, in particular to our constituents and the businesses in our constituencies, including all the support industries. The basic thing that most people like in their life is stability and an understanding of where the future is going. I hope the Chancellor and the Government have listened to the points made today. We need certainty of policy and of investment—everyone present agrees that that is what needs to happen. I am extremely happy with the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of the oil and gas industry.

Antisocial Behaviour: Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire

12.58 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered anti-social behaviour in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. It was with a mixture of relief and disbelief to the point of amusement that I heard that austerity is over. Perhaps the Prime Minister could let us know when to expect to feel or see any difference, because many of my constituents feel only anger and upset that their lives are blighted by antisocial behaviour. I blame austerity for the unacceptable rise in antisocial behaviour. As always, those who deserve it the very least are expected to pay the highest price. Surely, it is not too much to say that in our modern society, everyone has the right to feel safe and secure at home.

I represent everyone in my constituency whose life has been made a misery by antisocial behaviour. My constituents and I have clear demands and expectations for the Minister that I hope will be listened to carefully and addressed. I want the Government to reverse the 31% funding cuts they have made to Humberside police since 2010. Will the Government follow Labour's lead by committing to a fully funded statutory youth service, change the school accountability system and increase funding for schools to stop an increasing number of children being off-rolled and excluded? Will they increase funding for social workers and early intervention programmes by increasing the children's services budget and support community groups with grassroots solutions to antisocial behaviour?

Some people dismiss antisocial behaviour as a mere nuisance, but not me. Crime and antisocial behaviour affect people of all incomes and backgrounds, but unfortunately it seems that the poorest and the most vulnerable are always disproportionately affected. Although antisocial behaviour may be a different category of crime from those that capture the headlines in our national newspapers, it still has a huge impact on the lives of my constituents. One, whose property was vandalised, told me that she worries

"what the next level is, for the perpetrators. What will they do next, where and to whom? Whilst I realise, it's just to property and not to humans, it's what it represents, in our society."

One young man was subjected to daily shouting and swearing from a neighbour and her friend. They damaged his car and personal belongings, constantly banged on his door at all hours of the days, and intimidated him by approaching him when he was outside and looking into his flat's window when he was inside. That young man had severe mental health problems and was attempting independent living for the first time. This antisocial behaviour caused a huge setback for him. My constituent Chris from Hessle contacted me today to share the frustration and anger of the biker community at the high number of motorbike thefts. The police used to run an operation called Yellowfin, but everything has had to be reduced because of funding cuts.

The first reaction of most people to antisocial behaviour would be to call the police. Before the summer recess, I spent a morning with Humberside police. Whenever I spend time with our public servants, be they nurses,

doctors, firefighters or others, I am always amazed by how dedicated they are to their vocation and to helping people. The police were no exception. I hope hon. Members join me in giving special thanks to Inspector Kirsty Tock, who is in my thoughts at this particularly difficult time for her. If it was up to them, all police officers would work every case until they were solved to the victims' satisfaction, but unfortunately we live in a world of limited resources. Because of the decisions made by this Government, those resources are getting more limited.

Since 2010, Humberside police's budget has been cut by 31%. In reality, that means 392 fewer officers and 54 fewer police community support officers. In order to service 999 calls, officers and resources are being diverted away from neighbourhood policing because there are simply not enough police officers to do it all. We understand that high-quality, well-resourced neighbourhood policing is vital to deal with antisocial behaviour. Officers who know the area and who know the children and families who need support are crucial to identify when intervention is needed and to gather evidence so that there are consequences for antisocial behaviour. That policing model is broken, because of the cuts. The police have to divert their neighbourhood policing team to deal with 999 emergencies. We need enough police to do both.

The visible police presence in our communities has shrunk and police stations have disappeared. A notable example in my constituency is the complete lack of a police station in Hessle. The Labour group of councillors in Hessle and I completely opposed that move, and we are working with Humberside police to try to ensure that some kind of police presence is brought back.

I do not hold any police officer or PCSO responsible for the rise in antisocial behaviour; I blame the Government and their deliberate choice to cut our public sector—a policy that they have pursued with relish since 2010. In fact, I wholly support our police services; I am as disgusted as they are with the pathetic pay increase that they have just been given. I support an increased police presence, but I do not believe that increasing police numbers will magically solve all the problems associated with antisocial behaviour. In west Hull and Hessle, when the police deal with an antisocial behaviour problem, that problem just moves somewhere else in the constituency. A holistic approach is needed to tackle the problem.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing forward the debate. I am interested in the issue of antisocial behaviour and I want to suggest some possible solutions. In my constituency, there were high levels of antisocial misbehaviour over a period of time. We took an initiative from the churches, which came together in concern for their community to work alongside a faith-based group called Street Pastors. In conjunction with the council, the police and social services, they have endeavoured to bring antisocial misbehaviour levels down, and they have succeeded. I suggest the Street Pastors initiative to the hon. Lady as something that is outside the normal sphere of what is on offer, and I would be happy to send her the details. I think that initiatives that come from people within the community can achieve change.

Emma Hardy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and I will certainly look into that initiative.

One of the most striking things about the antisocial behaviour in my constituency, especially in Hessle, is the number of constituents who report young people as the cause. Although this issue is not exclusively about young people, antisocial behaviour tends to be carried out by younger people. Earlier this year, I co-sponsored a Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) to make youth services provision statutory. In his speech to bring in the Bill, my hon. Friend quoted a 2016 survey that found "600 youth centres had closed around the country, 3,500 youth workers had lost their jobs, and 140,000 places for young people had been lost... In 2010 we spent £1.2 billion on youth work, youth services and related youth activity; last year we spent £358 million...a 68% cash-terms cut."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 314.]

A parent of a child who has been involved in some antisocial behaviour contacted me to ask me for help. She asked,

"Where can my child go? What services are out there? What support can I have?"

Youth services provide a vital role in supporting young people across the country. They are described by Anna Barker, chair of the British Youth Council, as

"a supportive place for young people to become a force for good in society".

When I look at incredible youth services like The Warren and Hessle youth club, I completely agree. Our youth services have been targeted for budget cuts, which have created the conditions in which crime can thrive, leaving young people vulnerable to violence and denied the opportunity to build a positive future. I am glad that Labour has promised to consult on making those services statutory. I plead with the Minister to look at doing the same.

The Minister will be pleased to know that I am not just asking for more money, but for a change in attitude through a change in policy. As a member of the Education Committee, I am deeply concerned about the increasing number of children being excluded and off-rolled from our schools. A recent study proved that dozens of schools exclude more than one in five children. Those children are not leaving school for a high-quality education somewhere else, but are often found wandering around public spaces in our cities. They have been written off by society at a young age. Is it really a shock that their anger is felt as antisocial behaviour?

The double whammy of this Government's school accountability system and school funding cuts of £2.8 billion since 2015 have the unintended consequence of driving perverse behaviour by schools to try to remove children who are less likely to achieve and more expensive to educate. A report by the Education Policy Institute found that one in four children referred to children and adolescent mental health services in England is rejected, and that school staff are required to respond to children who self-harm, despite cuts to support services. How effectively does the Minister think schools will be able to support pupils with the staffing cuts they face? What does the Minister think will happen to our children who do not get the support they need in their formative years? We need a new accountability system that values all children, and schools need the funding to support every child.

Good social work can transform people's lives, protect them from harm and help stop the increase in antisocial behaviour. Helping children and young people to fulfil their potential is a key ambition of all councils, but our children's services are under increasing pressure. They

[Emma Hardy]

face a funding gap of around £2 billion by 2020, yet demand for their services has never been higher. Councils seek to support children to live with their families where possible through family-based support and early intervention.

Early intervention is crucial, but how can councils provide it when Government funding for the early intervention grant has been cut by almost £500 million since 2013 and is projected to drop by a further £183 million by 2020? Our councils need more money for early intervention. We can never prove statistically that early intervention prevented someone from engaging in antisocial behaviour, but we can certainly feel what happens in our communities when those services are cut—problems with antisocial behaviour increase.

The Government should follow Labour's lead and make it easier for tenants and residents associations to come together to deal with antisocial behaviour in their own streets. DARTS in my constituency—each letter represents a different street off Hessle Road—is the perfect example of a tenants and residents association. DARTS is led by Peter and Trevor, who are brilliant, properly no-nonsense people who came together to tackle antisocial behaviour in their area. They get amazing results. I would love there to be a DARTS group in every area of Hull, but Hull City Council has lost one pound in every three since 2010, which has meant cuts to services. It is harder for councils to offer the support that is needed to get such groups up and running—and I am yet to work out how to clone Peter and Trevor.

The Government's short-sighted and narrow-minded obsession with austerity has created the perfect climate for antisocial behaviour to thrive. Undoing the damage that has been done to communities such as west Hull and Hessle will take time and investment—there is no quick fix. However, if the Minister truly believes austerity is over, she should properly fund and equip our police force and reverse the 31% cut to the Humberside police budget; make youth services statutory, fund them and train youth workers; fund our schools and CAMHS; change the accountability system to stop the unintended consequences of increased exclusions and off-rolling; increase funding for social workers and investment in early intervention; and properly fund councils to support local residents groups to solve problems in their own communities.

I hope the Minister does not insult me or my constituents by claiming that Humberside police have all the money they need, because that simply is not true. I also hope she does not claim that antisocial behaviour is not on the rise. I am sure she is as aware as I am of the number of dropped calls to the 101 service and the number of incidents that actually get reported. If she goes out and talks to people in the community, she will find that most of them never even bother ringing 101 to report antisocial behaviour, because they know they may be on hold for more than 40 minutes.

My constituents and I have had enough. Antisocial behaviour causes problems for nearly everyone in my constituency. We expect action and serious investment. I repeat that we need a holistic approach to dealing with this problem—its causes as well as its consequences. I am afraid we will hold the Government to account if they fail to do anything.

1.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) on securing this debate about a matter that I know is of huge importance to her and her constituents—particularly those who are suffering in the way she so eloquently described. She made a wide-ranging speech, and I will try to respond to as many of her points as I can. I hope she understands that I do not have the details of those that concern other Departments immediately to hand, but I will ask the relevant Minister to write to her about any points to which I do not manage to respond.

Anyone who represents a constituency knows just how terrible antisocial behaviour can be. The hon. Lady will never hear me diminish its impact. Individual incidents sometimes have the most extraordinary effect on communities. So-called low-level behaviour may not seem that significant, but if it develops into a pattern of behaviour it becomes incredibly wearing for those who have to live with it day in, day out. Antisocial behaviour can be anything from people running amok, swearing at people or frightening residents to drunken and drug-related harassment, intimidating behaviour, and noisy and abusive neighbours. All those things can have a profound and debilitating effect on the people we were elected to serve.

That is why the Government gave the police, local authorities and local agencies a range of flexible powers to keep the public safe through the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. We fully agree that antisocial behaviour is not just a policing issue, important though policing is in this context. Solutions must often be part of a holistic approach that draws in local authorities and other agencies. We expect those agencies to respond and use those powers flexibly to protect their communities from all types of antisocial behaviour. However, where antisocial behaviour tips over into far more serious offending that is clearly criminal—the hon. Lady will know that serious violence and other forms of criminal behaviour fall within my portfolio—we expect the police and others to use the full force of the law to bring people to justice through the criminal justice system.

The 2014 Act provides six flexible powers, which are designed to enable the police and local authorities to respond quickly to antisocial behaviour in their communities and stop it reoccurring. Those powers include court orders to stop the behaviour of the most antisocial people, powers to close premises that are a magnet for trouble, and powers to stop antisocial behaviour in public places. They also include measures such as civil injunctions, which are interesting because they do not just prohibit people from engaging in certain behaviour but can place positive requirements on perpetrators to address the underlying causes of their antisocial behaviour.

Sadly, there are themes that run through the backgrounds of many of the young people who fall into my portfolio. Domestic abuse is a particularly strong theme, and I am concentrating on protecting direct victims of domestic abuse and on the ramifications for young people who are vulnerable to being ensnared by criminal gangs of witnessing domestic abuse in the home and being desensitised to violence outside the home. The Government

and I are looking at many themes to address the background factors that feature in the lives of many young people who behave in an antisocial or indeed criminal way.

Other types of order, such as community protection notices and criminal behaviour orders, are directed at the most harmful behaviour. Local authorities also have the power to impose public spaces protection orders to protect public spaces from antisocial behaviour and nuisance, and the police can use their dispersal power to direct any individual who engages in antisocial behaviour away from a particular place.

Emma Hardy: Those powers have been used effectively in Hull, but the Minister will recall—I have spoken about this previously—that they just move the problem somewhere else in the city. We can use only so many of those orders, and they just seem to make the problem appear somewhere else. It is like a game of whack-a-mole—we do not seem to be able to whack them all down at the same time. I was heartened to hear her mention looking at the causes of domestic violence. I wonder whether she will say a little about what we are doing to prevent antisocial behaviour from happening in the first place—not just to deal with it when we see it through criminal convictions, but to look at its causes and how we can stop them.

Victoria Atkins: I was about to come to that, so I apologise for incorporating my answer into my speech. We want to give people on the ground the ability to use those powers as they feel is appropriate in their local community. The hon. Lady will understand that the challenges in her inner-city area are very different from those in my area of Lincolnshire, which is just down the road from her area but is very rural. Although we have antisocial behaviour, I suspect it takes a different form from that in a city centre, given the local geography and so on.

The Government want to give local people the powers to respond in the most effective way in their local area. Indeed, in December last year we published refreshed guidance on the use of those powers by councils, police officers and so on—we understood that some councils were using PSPOs in particular in a way that was perhaps not intended by Parliament, so we refreshed the guidance to help local councillors. A couple of months ago I spoke to local councillors at the Local Government Association to help them with that.

The hon. Lady asked me about a community response. She will know that as part of the serious violence strategy we are pulling together across all Government Departments, along with local government colleagues, the Mayor of London, police and crime commissioners and Mayors across the country, to try to have a more joined-up approach to serious violence. That will have a beneficial effect on lower-level offending behaviour as well, because if we can help young people with issues at home, mental health issues and so on, as she described, that will have an impact on their behaviour generally. That is why I am delighted that not only are we helping the Vulcan Learning Centre, a local charity in Hull, through the knife crime community fund, which will help local children who are perhaps falling into crime. There is also a bigger, national effort through the early intervention fund for young people announced in the serious violence strategy as well as the endowment

fund that the Home Secretary announced last week—£200 million that will be invested in long-term projects to help young people across the county. A great deal of work is going on.

The hon. Lady rightly mentioned concerns about children who are not in full-time education but are perhaps in alternative provision. The Government have commissioned a review by Edward Timpson, the former Care Minister, who has a great understanding on a personal and professional level of the issues facing looked-after children or those in alternative provision. He is looking at alternative provision through the schooling system to see what is working, what is not and what we need to improve. Again, through my work in other areas, I know that that can have an enormous impact on children's behaviour and their ability to lead productive lives.

If I may, I will let the hon. Lady know about the ability of victims of antisocial behaviour, or someone acting on their behalf, including a Member of Parliament, to request a formal antisocial behaviour case review—I do not know whether she is aware of this—which is called a “community trigger.” I like talking about it, because colleagues should be aware of it and they can use it if requested by their constituents. It enables victims of antisocial behaviour to ensure that their voice is heard when they believe they have not had a satisfactory response to repeated complaints of antisocial behaviour, and it forces agencies to act. The relevant bodies in a local area must agree on and publish their case review procedures. Therefore, if she believes that the relevant agencies in her constituency have not acted on reports of antisocial behaviour in Hull and the East Riding, that is a possible solution for her constituents. I note that her police and crime commissioner cited tackling antisocial behaviour as a priority in his policing plan, so perhaps she can ask him what he is doing to fulfil that pledge to the electorate.

The hon. Lady mentioned the police station in Hessle. Again, that is a decision taken by the PCC, so I hope she will forgive me if I do not comment on it. She also mentioned funding, and I think she said that we “relish” austerity. We really do not. I am always careful not to revisit history in too much detail because, apart from anything else, we should be forward-looking, but the situation in 2010 was that as a country we had run out of money and we had to start to live within our means. That meant we had to take very serious, tough decisions on funding. She will know that the then Home Secretary—now the Prime Minister—insisted that police funding be protected from 2015 onwards, and that last year, as part of the preparations for the police funding formula exercise that happens at the end of every year, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service spoke to every constabulary in the country to ask them what they needed. Through that process, with the help of PCCs, we are able to put a further £460 million into policing this year. I am pleased that that means an increase of £4 million for Humberside constabulary, and it has managed to add 153 officers to its cadre since March last year.

Emma Hardy: I am sure the Minister recognises, as everyone out there does, that the number of criminal incidents is increasing, and the cuts have not stopped yet. She talks about the Government giving with one

[*Emma Hardy*]

hand, but they are surely taking with the other, because there is still another £14 million to £17 million of savings to be found in the next few years. That will result in job losses for our PCSOs, which will have an impact on antisocial behaviour. I am sure she recognises that.

Victoria Atkins: I invite the hon. Lady to speak to her PCC—she is not just entitled to do that; it is part of all our duties to hold our PCCs to account. As of March last year—the last figures I have available—her police and crime commissioner had reserves of £34.3 million. To put that in context, the reserves as a percentage of total cash funding for 2017-18 were 20%, which is 5% higher than the average for England and Wales. She could ask her PCC what he is doing with that money.

Emma Hardy: The Minister has been generous in giving way. In fact, I meet with the PCC regularly and talked to him about the reserves only last week. They are currently being used to try to increase the number of police officers we have, to mitigate the cuts seen since 2010. I am sure by next year the reserves will not be there any longer.

Victoria Atkins: That is a matter for the police and crime commissioner. We brought in police and crime commissioners in 2012 precisely to give a local person the power to hold the police and chief constable to account and to spend the police budget in ways they feel are priorities for their local electorate.

As I say, we are injecting more money into policing this year. The Home Secretary has very much listened to the chiefs and police and crime commissioners across the country. We know that policing is changing and that pressures on the police through different crime types are developing. Ten years ago, online child sexual exploitation did not feature, but now, sadly, as the Home Secretary laid out in his recent speech, it is an incredible pressure on policing.

I am conscious of the time, Mr Hollobone, and I do not know whether the hon. Lady wishes to sum up. If she does, I will sit down in a moment. Again, I invite her and colleagues around the House to speak to their local councils about innovative ideas on how to engage young people and help young people who are at risk of falling into trouble.

Yesterday, we had the first of the Home Office's national programme of engagement events on the serious violence strategy here in London. We had a fantastic turn-out from councils across the capital, including the deputy Mayor for policing in London. I listened carefully to the chief executive of Islington Council, who gave some really interesting ideas on what it has done to protect youth services—what it is doing is really innovative. I urge all colleagues to engage in that conversation with their local councils, because there are some really innovative ideas.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid that the Minister has been badly advised by her officials. In a half-hour debate, I am afraid the Member in charge does not have the right of reply. This is now the second time I have been in this Chamber when the Minister has been badly advised. We are going to have to get some advice to Whitehall Departments that in a half-hour debate the Member in charge does not have the right of reply.

Victoria Atkins: Mr Hollobone, I feel honour-bound to say that it is my mistake. Please direct your understandable consternation towards me, not the officials. That is my fault, and I apologise profusely.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered anti-social behaviour in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

1.30 pm

Sitting suspended.

Business Banking Fraud

[Mr LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

4.30 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): Before I call Mr Wragg to move the motion, I say to Members that I will ask Back Benchers following him to take just five minutes each initially. That is not a time limit imposed from the Chair, but I ask for self-restraint, and we will see how we go so that we can get everyone in.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the investigation of business banking fraud.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. We have had many debates in both Westminster Hall and the Chamber that have focused on the mistreatment of thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises at the hands of financial institutions which, in the wake of the financial crisis, sought to shore up their balance sheets as they plundered those of their business customers.

The subject is becoming an all too familiar one for debate. Indeed, this is the fourth such debate in which I have spoken. Looking around at my distinguished colleagues from across the House I see many familiar faces who have taken part in previous debates. Many Members will be familiar with the cases of hard-working businessmen and women who have had their businesses broken up and livelihoods destroyed by acts of deliberate deception and fraud, systemic asset stripping and inflated charges and fees, all at the hands of their banks.

Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. It is sad and disappointing that this is the fourth time he has had to speak on the subject. Does he agree that it is an indictment of the Financial Conduct Authority that proper, independent redress schemes have not been set up and that, 10 years on, no one has been brought to justice for destroying many people's lives?

Mr Wragg: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. In his remarks in previous debates he has shown his personal experience, and he speaks for many on the issue. With the passage of time, the issues that are exposed only multiply rather than diminish. I have spoken before at length about my constituent Mr Eric Topping, who lost hundreds of thousands of pounds, including his home and retirement savings, when his profitable building company was forced into liquidation by the Royal Bank of Scotland. For every constituent like him, there are a thousand more SME owners across the country who were similarly victims of the widespread malpractice across the entire banking sector, and today we speak for them collectively.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that what makes it even more difficult for people is that those banks have been financed by taxpayers? They are using taxpayers' money to fight these legal cases when they know that they have done wrong but that their victims do not have the resources to take them all the way through the courts.

Mr Wragg: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. The actions of the banks are entirely indefensible. It is, I hope, for the Government to seek appropriate redress.

While the *Hansard* column inches increase, meaningful actions to properly investigate business banking fraud and seek redress for its victims have been woefully insufficient so far. I would like to turn attention to the investigation of allegations of fraud by our crime prevention agencies and regulators, to the role of financial institutions, and to the role the Government play.

As a nation, we pride ourselves on the rule of law. Above the Old Bailey stands the gilded statue of Lady Justice. She carries the sword of justice in one hand and the scales of justice in the other. She wears a blindfold to symbolise that justice is blind and does not distinguish between the powerful and the weak. Yet for those who have been the victims of the systematic fraud practised by UK banks and financial institutions, such sentiment is nonsense. The statue representing their experience of justice would be heavily rusted rather than gilded. It would wear a blindfold to avoid having to see the activities of the financial institutions whose wrongdoing has ruined individuals and families, and its arms would be firmly tied behind its back to symbolise the lack of activity by both the police and the regulators.

It is 10 years this week since the taxpayer bailed out the financial services sector, and the state continues to control a significant stake in certain institutions. Ten years on, confidence in the sector is low, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises. The nation has yet to fully recover from a decade that saw the destruction of viable businesses, jobs and thousands of individual lives as banks frantically rebuilt their balance sheets following the crash, at the expense of their customers' financial wellbeing and their own reputations. We need to be clear: the process of shoring up a balance sheet is a zero-sum game. For every winner there is a loser. The losers here were small and medium-sized enterprises, the backbone of our economy. They lost because they did not have the resource or the legal firepower they needed, or a system to support them.

We are not saying that every SME business that folded over the last decade was viable, nor that every business was the victim of fraud. But we have seen clear evidence of tampering with documents, false witness statements and the leveraging of a position of power and clout to drive many thousands of good businesses into insolvency. In a free economy there will always be legitimate failures alongside legitimate successes. Many businesses may not have been viable and may not have survived, but that did not make them fair game for mistreatment or, even worse, fraud. It just made them easy targets.

Mr Jack: Is my hon. Friend aware that in one year alone the Global Restructuring Group division of RBS made over £1 billion in profit? He says that some of these businesses may have failed, but rightly points out that a lot of them were viable and had a lot of hidden assets.

Mr Wragg: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct about the role of GRG.

Following the cases of, at times, blatant mistreatment and fraud, which we saw consistently and across the board, there is either a lack of willingness or lack of

[Mr Wragg]

capability from our investigative bodies, both civil and criminal, to pursue complaints. Instead, the victims of mistreatment and fraud are left to go round in circles making a series of fruitless complaints. The complaints are either made directly to the institutions that defrauded them in the first place, which have a vested interest not to investigate properly—as was the case with my constituent and the Royal Bank of Scotland—or referred to a series of industry-led trade bodies or the Financial Conduct Authority, which does not take on individual cases. It is simply not good enough.

The only successful prosecution for fraud thus far has been that of HBOS in Reading. That was not down to the actions of our regulator or the Serious Fraud Office relentlessly pursuing the truth to bring the perpetrators to justice. Indeed, the bank—first as HBOS and then as Lloyds, after the takeover—insisted there was no fraud, despite there being a victim with losses in the hundreds of millions of pounds.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I want to put on record my personal admiration for the police and crime commissioner for Thames Valley, Anthony Stansfeld, who personally saw to it that the fraud was prosecuted.

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that the current situation is not good enough. If the state is to fulfil its duty to protect the public from fraud, it will be necessary for the Government to find the money to equip the authorities to prosecute fraud cases without funds coming out of individual PCCs' budgets.

Mr Wragg: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. I pay tribute to the police and crime commissioner, but I also wish to pay tribute to a couple of people who I believe are here in the Gallery today. Instead of the authorities investigating, it was left to a couple of music producers from Cambridge, Paul and Nikki Turner, to crack the case. I hope they are here in Parliament. They are still fighting for compensation for other victims of the crime.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I endorse what has been said about Anthony Stansfeld.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is not just about RBS, as some people seem to think? My constituent, Mike McGrath, went out of business because of his treatment by Lloyds bank.

Mr Wragg: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct: it was systemic across the whole business lending sector. He is right to put that on the record.

The Turners' reward for bringing the case to the bank's attention back in 2007 was to be branded conspiracy theorists. The bank—first as HBOS, then as Lloyds—tried to evict them from their home 22 times, spending more on legal action than the value of the home itself. It sent a top partner from one of the country's best regarded law firms to Cambridge county court to watch the hearings. The Turnbull report, which details a comprehensive cover-up of the fraud from within the bank, notes lawyers as saying that, once the Turners were out of their home, they would have to accept their fate. This was not the pursuit of justice but a witch hunt to silence whistleblowers.

The Turners approached the Financial Standards Authority, the Serious Fraud Office and the Treasury. Indeed, there was a debate in this very room in June 2009, during which Members urged the authorities to investigate. However, all they encountered was denials and deflection. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) pointed out, the case was eventually taken seriously only after Thames Valley police recognised that a crime had been committed. The investigation took seven years to complete and the resource of 151 officers and staff, and it cost £7 million, with only £2 million eventually recovered from the Home Office. Thames Valley police stated that they could have done it in half the time and for half the money, if only the bank had co-operated fully. Unfortunately, the scale and difficulty of investigating the fraud only serves as a warning to other cash-strapped police forces: "Investigate at your peril".

The reality is that white-collar crimes such as this are expensive and difficult to prosecute, and the agencies responsible for fighting economic crime simply do not have the necessary resources to tackle complex, mid-tier banking fraud. The SFO takes on only a small number of very large cases and has a budget of £53 million. The National Crime Agency's economic crime command has a budget of £10 million, and the newly established National Economic Crime Centre has a budget of just £6 million. Compared with the sheer scale of fraud in the United Kingdom, which is estimated at more than £190 billion a year, and given the potential for consequential losses, these investigative budgets are, frankly, insignificant.

For those who may think that this is a one-off, it is important to note that the processes employed by HBOS in this case—turnaround units, business valuations and the use of insolvency—are exactly the same tactics seen in the case of other complaints that the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking has investigated. Such complaints were found to be commonplace, as the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) alluded to, across most financial institutions. The system is ripe for abuse, and we have serious concerns about it.

At this point, I pay tribute to the incredible dedication of the co-chairs of the all-party group, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). In addition, I thank the group's officers and members for their significant work in running a thorough inquiry into how so many SMEs were abused by their banks, exposing the scale of the issue and the mechanisms by which the frauds were conducted. The APPG has produced an important report that identifies the shortcomings in the current investigative tools and bodies and makes vital recommendations as to how we might start to unpick this sorry mess.

I reiterate the APPG's calls for a full public inquiry into the treatment of businesses by financial institutions. There are currently more than 10 different inquiries looking at different, isolated issues. It is time that we had a holistic approach and investigated the system as a whole.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his work in this area. Two of my constituents have been affected—one through a mis-selling of swaps by RBS and the other through the dreadful situation at HBOS that my hon. Friend has mentioned. Does he

agree that the tragedy of this case is partly the lack of transparency and independence, and that people feel that they cannot get fair redress? A decade later they are still not being treated fairly by those institutions.

Mr Wragg: My hon. Friend is spot on. The level of obfuscation by these institutions would be quite suspicious if one were to suspect them of any wrongdoing. I am sure that we can deduce our own conclusions from their behaviour.

On a civil level, the APPG's proposal for a financial services tribunal has been well received, and we look forward to the Government's response. That may at least provide a civil remedy for those who have been wronged. However, we have been asked what will happen when civil mistreatment tips over into the criminal abuse of power. Where is there to go? At this point, there is no satisfactory answer. The Thames Valley police and crime commissioner believes that we should have regional fraud squads akin to our counter-terrorism squads, funded by the Treasury via FCA fines and funds recovered from criminal gangs. We wholeheartedly support those proposals. Whatever action is taken, it requires the utmost degree of urgency, so that more and more cases do not—as has already started to happen—run into statutes of limitations, lose documents and evidence to the sands of time or see responsible and culpable individuals leave the industry and witnesses become unavailable.

I look forward to Members' contributions and the Minister's response. As I mentioned at the start, this is becoming an all too familiar debate, and I rather hope that we are not all back here in six months reliving it again. I also hope that we can resolve to agree a path of action that will see the tarnish start to be scrubbed off Lady Justice and allow her to start to uncross her arms.

4.46 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) for securing the debate. It is a pleasure to speak after him. I have raised the plight of my constituent, Mr Kashif Shabir, for many years. His case is about corporate collusion between Lloyds bank and a firm of receivers in Bristol, Alder King, which was embedded in the bank's recovery department and effectively destroyed businesses to pick up work for itself.

I led a debate here in September 2016 concerning the role of the SFO, and there was a second debate here in April 2017 about the role of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors as an adequate regulator. Both debates followed a March 2014 Select Committee inquiry into the regulation and policies of the insolvency sector. There have also been many other debates, as has been referenced. The HBOS six have been jailed, the Turnbull report has been released and many victims of quite appalling practices have come forward. My question to the Minister, therefore, is why are the owners of SMEs that were destroyed by the actions of Lloyds bank and RBS still suffering 10 years on?

My constituent's experience is a case study in the cynicism and arrogance with which Lloyds refuses to right the effects of its wrongdoing, and of the ineffectiveness of organisations such as the FCA, the police and the

regulators that are supposed to oversee and enforce the integrity and honesty of businesses in this country. Mr Shabir has been fighting Lloyds bank for 10 years. As far back as 2011, Lloyds acknowledged fault by making an offer of settlement—the bank would not pursue him for the balance of losses, which it had itself created, in return for a gagging order. Mr Shabir quite rightly refused to sign up to that.

Subsequent approaches by Mr Shabir, myself and many people working on his behalf to both Lloyds and Alder King have either been ignored or met with deliberate stonewalling tactics, because those organisations know that they hold the power in this relationship. Their actions have impoverished hundreds of businesspeople, who cannot sue, because they cannot afford to litigate. The banks and others know that and are taking advantage of it.

At the same time, Lloyds has openly stated that it will co-operate and work with the APPG on fair business banking, but we know that, in reality, the opposite is true. If the bank cannot settle with a victim to whom it has already made an offer, even if that offer is derisory, it is clear that that stance is completely disingenuous. In such instances one would expect the regulators to redress those shortcomings, and investigators and prosecutors to look at them. As we have heard, however, they have not done so far.

In the September 2016 debate, I asked the Solicitor General to look at this and explain the threshold for prosecution. He outlined the criteria and the threshold for prosecuting, and said that these cases would not reach that threshold. We know, however, that while individually none of these cases will reach the FCA's prosecution threshold, collectively they will.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) summed up the matter well in the debate in the main Chamber in January:

"We do know that 90% of GRG-administered businesses never made it back to mainstream banking...The cost is immeasurable, but we believe it to be in the tens of billions...If it is indeed that big, it may be the largest theft anywhere, ever."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 2018; Vol. 634, c. 1086.]

If that does not meet the criteria for an SFO investigation, I do not know what does. Why is it not investigating? We have heard many times that hundreds of victims of this fraud have lost large sums individually and collectively.

Mr Shabir tells me that there has never been a rejection of his complaint on the evidential merits; it has been purely on the basis of the threshold. The Avon and Somerset police economic crime team refused to investigate the case, because it said it had already been investigated by other bodies. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors turned it down. The Financial Conduct Authority and the banking ombudsman said they had no locus to investigate it. The police have refused to properly investigate this fraud. Mr Stansfeld has had to write to that constabulary to ask it to look into the case based on the evidence that he has seen.

Mr Shabir will not go away, and nor will the other victims. Whatever the shortcomings of the regulators, investigators and prosecutors, they must not detract from the main issue, which is the fraudulent actions of the banks and the question of where the responsibility for such actions ultimately lies. It lies with Lloyds bank and RBS. It is time for the people in charge of those organisations to take responsibility for their actions.

4.52 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) on raising this important issue. It is a shame that he continues to have to do so.

Several of my constituents have been adversely affected by the unscrupulous behaviour of the banks mentioned today. I want to bring attention to the despicable actions of Clydesdale bank, which has not been mentioned, under the tutelage of its parent company National Australia bank.

The NAB Customer Support Group was set up by a small group of SMEs that were crippled by long-term, fixed-rate loans made via tailored business loans issued by the Clydesdale and Yorkshire banks. Many of the businesses have closed down, but most are struggling to survive, burdened by unmanageable interest rates and unable to break from the fixed rate due to extortionate breakage penalties of up to 40% of the loan, arising from the bank's alleged signing of interest rate swap agreements with third parties.

The bank charges costs arising from exiting embedded interest rate swaps via the small print in the terms and conditions. However, with the passing of time, the bank admitted that there were no such micro-hedges, or match hedges, in place and that all interest rate risk was dealt with by the parent company, National Australia bank. The uncontrolled promotion of these products—driven, as always, by generous commissions—has caused enormous damage to the SME sector and the wider economy, especially in Scotland, including the west of Scotland.

Members of the support group are here today, including my constituent Ian Lightbody, and their objective is to bring the bank to account for the damage it has caused and to persuade or force it to apply satisfactory redress to all affected SMEs. Over the past few years, the FCA has been shown to be impotent. That must change, particularly now that some of these cases are so serious that even Police Scotland feels they merit investigation.

In June 2014, representatives of Clydesdale bank appeared before the Treasury Committee. The bank's evidence was weak and, to be frank, misleading—apparently, with the benefit of hindsight, deliberately so. It said it would investigate fixed-rate tailored business loans, but it investigated only cases where a complaint was already live or had previously been made. That meant that around 7,500 people were not contacted or given the opportunity to have their loan investigated. The bank's chief executive officer confirmed to the Treasury Committee that he did not believe that his bank's tailored business loans were deliberately designed to avoid FCA regulation. However the Committee's subsequent report, "Conduct and Competition in SME Lending", concluded:

"The lack of public oversight, minimal transparency and limited coverage of the scheme mean that the Committee cannot be confident that Clydesdale's separate internal review will deliver outcomes equivalent to the FCA review upon which it is intended to be based."

The report went on to state:

"To protect themselves against the risk of providing a TBL's hedging function, banks need to hedge the risk themselves. The FCA said that 'the bank will have entered into a separate IRHP'—interest rate hedging product—

"with a third party in order to manage its financial risk of entering into the loan'."

The Bank's CEO, Mr Thorburn,

"confirmed that this was the case for Clydesdale Bank."

Clydesdale bank subsequently confirmed that there was actually no third party and that, in effect, all the loans were self-funded. Despite that, and despite it charging and receiving substantial break costs from customers, it refused to address the devastation it caused to businesses and lives across Scotland. It charged for long-term interest rate hedges that, it can be proved, it and its parent company never matched.

Ian Lightbody's firm was informed in 2012 that to break its loan it would have to pay a 22% break cost on a loan of hundreds of thousands of pounds. It had cashed in personal pension funds and arranged alternative funding to secure the future of its companies and, in particular, of long-standing employees. Naturally, that became untenable, and it had to close several companies.

Another of my constituents, Craig Brock, had long-standing companies with loans amounting to substantial millions of pounds with Clydesdale bank. In 2012 it gave him just 30 days to refinance. It appointed BDO as administrators, and the companies were sold on to Paradigm Ltd, allegedly at arm's length. It turned out, of course, that Paradigm was another Clydesdale-funded company. The FCA confirmed to the 2015 Treasury Committee inquiry that it wanted more power to investigate Clydesdale's tailored business loans:

"The FCA has written twice to the Treasury to raise concerns about the sale of loans with embedded interest rate hedging features and the FCA's inability to address the problem under the current perimeter of regulation. However, the Treasury appears not to have responded formally to the FCA on the matter".

There can be no doubt that these products were, at best, mis-sold and, at worst, fraudulently pitched and designed to fall outside the FCA rules. The bank and these products should be investigated by the FCA without delay. Thousands of SMEs and businesspeople across the UK took these products with no proper explanation of either the conditions or costs associated. They deserve our support, and they deserve justice.

4.57 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) on securing this debate. I have to say, however, that this is the fifth debate I have taken part in on this matter in my two and half years in the House. It is disappointing that we are here again. We are not making the progress that we should be making and that our constituents deserve.

As we have heard, many colleagues have experience of many examples of serious malpractice within the banking sector. Indeed, from discussing my experiences of this issue with colleagues from across the House, it seems that the majority of cases remain unresolved. I wholeheartedly agree with my colleagues from the all-party parliamentary group that it is now time the Government provided adequate resources for these cases to be reviewed, to ensure that those who have been treated poorly receive the justice they deserve.

I would like to raise the case of my constituent Mr Alun Richards, which I have raised many times since I was first elected. This case has been going on so long that my predecessor, Huw Irranca-Davies, raised it

nine or 10 years ago. Until around a decade ago, Alun Richards was one of Wales's most successful businessmen. By the early noughties, Mr Richards's farming and property enterprises had received award recognition and his efforts soon attracted—at the time, welcome—attention from Lloyds Banking Group. Lloyds offered Mr Richards a gold star account and an interest rate of 1% over base. After weighing this up against other offers, Mr Richards accepted the Lloyds offer, and his business continued to thrive.

The financial crash in 2008 was a global turning point. Mr Richards believes that his relationship with Lloyds acutely deteriorated at that point. Suddenly, with little notice, Alun's bank managers in Carmarthen, Gwilym Francis and Ian Richards, transferred his accounts to a larger branch based in Bristol. After a short period, Alun approached his new branch and was alarmed to discover that his new bank manager, Max Meredith, was from the business support unit, which focuses on recoveries. Alun was deeply worried about this change as, prior to that, he had considered his business to be booming. Mr Meredith agreed with Alun that his circumstances were not typical for such a transfer and agreed to transfer his account back to Carmarthen. To Alun's dismay, Gwilym Francis and Ian Richards refused to accept the account back in Carmarthen.

Alun soon received a visit from Mr John Holiday and Mr Jonathan Miles from the business support unit in Bristol. During this meeting, one of Alun's accountants questioned Mr Miles's behaviour and background. Mr Miles claimed that he worked for Lloyds Banking Group, and repeated that claim for the following two and a half years. Mr Richards has since discovered that Mr Miles was a chartered surveyor, a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and a partner of Alder King. It appears that no official secondment was in place. Mr Miles even appointed partners from Alder King—Julian Smith and Andrew Hughes—as the Law of Property Act 1925 receivers. When that initially surfaced, Mr Hughes temporarily resigned. RICS has refused to take any action and, following complaints against Bristol-based lawyers TLT, so have the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Insolvency Practitioners Association.

Alun Richards's decade-long struggle has involved Lloyds Banking Group, Alder King and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Surely it cannot be right that Mr Richards, whose enterprise was worth about £5 million, has been left with nothing as the direct result of the actions of Lloyds bank and the others I have listed, as he believes.

Mr Richards and many others across the country feel that their cases have not been investigated properly, despite my appeals and those of other hon. Members from across the House to many different bodies. Most recently, we wrote to the Chair of the Treasury Committee, the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), asking her to open an inquiry into these alleged malpractices. Disappointingly, she was unable to give us that inquiry, but I sincerely call on the Minister to take action to ensure that these unresolved cases are comprehensively reviewed to ensure that those individuals who have been wronged receive the justice they deserve.

There is a real need to give the Serious Fraud Office extra funds to investigate the ever-increasing list of actions by Lloyds and those other organisations. The

FCA's line—that the alleged fraud does not reach the limits to investigate—simply will not wash any longer. There are too many cases involving large sums of money—millions and millions of pounds—for the FCA to simply say that the figure is not high enough to investigate.

Ten long years on from the crash, it can only be right that the Government provide adequate resources for these cases to be reviewed. It is their duty to investigate these malpractices to ensure that they never happen again and that constituents such as Mr Richards, and those of all hon. Members from across the House, get the justice that they rightly deserve.

5.1 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) on securing the debate. He is a great advocate on behalf of victims.

I will start with a few words in support of banks and bankers. I have been in business for 25 years, and I could not have achieved anywhere near as much as I achieved without the support of bankers, the vast majority of whom do a good job of supporting the UK economy by offering vital support to businesses. I am sure that most people in the banking world are as shocked as we are by some of the scandals of the last 10 years.

It is critical for us all to play on a level playing field—that is the free-market economy principle. We need to adhere to some basic rules, which must be the same whether someone is a businessperson or a banker. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove said, the key principles that we must all adhere to are that justice is blind, no one is above the law, and justice must be done and be seen to be done. Where we are is a mile away from that, because there is so much evidence not just of malpractice and mistreatment, but of fraud throughout the banking sector, particularly in RBS and in Lloyds and HBOS.

For a while, the accusation was that the people who were bringing forward these claims, such as the Turners, were conspiracy theorists—they had failed businesses that could not survive anyway, so it was something that we did not need to look into properly. Then along came the section 166 report into RBS, which clearly identified that RBS had mistreated thousands of businesses. Of course, that report nearly never came out, but when it did it was a critical moment.

It is the same with Lloyds and HBOS: but for the persistence of one or two individuals, the case would never have come to trial and those people would never have been convicted. They are not isolated cases; there was widespread abuse.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am quite concerned, because I have looked through the banking code of conduct and it seems to mention only banks. Is there any personal responsibility in it, so that the people who make the decisions can be brought to account for them?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I will come to. Interestingly, our campaign, which is supported by so many of the hon. Members present, is also supported by some interesting people. Gordon Brown, the former Prime Minister, has said that he fears another crash because the bankers have no

[Kevin Hollinrake]

fear of imprisonment—the personal accountability that my hon. Friend referred to. Andrew Bailey of the Financial Conduct Authority expressed real concern in a recent newspaper article that no one

“has been banned as a consequence of the financial crisis.”

My hon. Friend is absolutely right, because the problem goes beyond mistreatment. We have seen evidence of forged signatures, manipulated valuations, manufactured covenant defaults, asset acquisition opportunities being sought out, and conflicts of interest almost everywhere we look. That includes the case of Julia Davey, who is present today.

Julia Davey is one of the most successful businesspeople in the UK, but Lloyds and KPMG forced her into the business support unit. David Crawshaw of KPMG was the independent reviewer of the business, the consultant advising the business and the administrator to the business. How can that be right? That multimillion-pound business was taken down by a £100,000 utility bill, when there were ample moneys in the bank. That money was used to pay the advisers, not the debt. It is outrageous.

The banks’ default position has been denial all the way. When Lawrence Tomlinson first established that there was abuse, they tried to withdraw the funding for his business to keep him quiet, which is a disgrace. Throughout the section 166 report, there is clear evidence of malpractice that goes beyond simple mistreatment and into fraud. The same is true for Lloyds and HBOS. The regulators’ attention was drawn to the fact that the abuse was going on thousands of times, but there has still been no action.

The FCA still says that the banks must be trusted to run their own internal redress schemes for the abuses. At Lloyds, the Griggs review is an internal scheme with no independent verification of the settlement that is made. At RBS, the situation with Sir William Blackburne’s review is similar. I do not dispute the fact that they are honourable people, but how can justice be seen to be done if these matters are decided internally? It cannot be right. What if those people, who are working internally for those banks, find evidence of fraud in their investigations? Would they put it in the shredder or would they hand it to the police? I will leave that for those in the Chamber to decide.

We need action. We need regional fraud squads and a twin-track approach, so that the Serious Fraud Office works with the Financial Conduct Authority, as happens in the US. There has to be criminal liability for the failure to prevent economic crime, as we have for the failure to prevent bribery and tax evasion. We need to introduce conduct of business rules to SME banking, so that regulators have a basis on which to judge a claim. We need our financial services tribunal and a public inquiry. There are 12 separate inquiries and counting into various parts of the banking system—a piecemeal approach to a systemic problem. We need cultural change. We need to restore faith in the system. Justice must be blind. No one is above the law. Justice must be done, and justice must be seen to be done.

5.8 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) on securing the debate. He is right that we have discussed

the subject many times, as the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) also mentioned. We look to the Minister, who understands the issues that we bring forward very well, for a substantial response. I am grateful to other right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions to the debate about the mis-selling of interest rate hedging products since 2001.

It is important to say, as the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton did, that my relationship with the banks has been good. My mother and father’s relationship with the banks was also good, because in those days banks were easier to get on with. The borrowing of money was probably very simple. To be fair, the sums involved then were not the large sums that are involved today. Nevertheless, as elected representatives, issues and complaints come forward to us, and in the Gallery behind us there are many constituents who have been wronged, abused and disenfranchised by the banks, and we are here to put their cases forward.

Some of my constituents have been appallingly and despicably treated. I will mention a couple of them, without giving too much detail, just to put their cases on the record. As Members will know, the Democratic Unionist party has consistently said that there is a role for a financial services tribunal and a competent ombudsman service for banking complaints, which would follow the parliamentary intent that such cases should be treated fairly and reasonably, and with timeliness.

In Northern Ireland, we use the terminology of “keeping people’s feet to the fire”; we do not want them to get burnt, but we want people to feel the heat of what we are saying in this Chamber. So I look to the Minister to ensure that the people involved feel the heat, and will thereby respond and look after the people in the Gallery today, as well as my constituents who have been disenfranchised despicably.

The small and medium-sized enterprises are the ones feeling the pain. I will name two in particular in my constituency: the Armstrongs and the Semples. Their cases have been recorded in *Hansard* before and in the short time that I have today I could not do either of them justice, but *Hansard* will record the fact that I have put their cases in the main Chamber on two occasions in the past.

The Semples are large dairy farmers who had borrowed a lot of money. They were then squeezed to the point where they had to pay back almost a million pounds. The Armstrongs had made some land acquisitions, but the banks involved squeezed them. They offered them the money and then squeezed them to a considerable extent. The effect on these people’s health, their families and their relationships has been absolutely enormous—we cannot begin to understand that. Without mentioning the person specifically, one of the people I have referred to has serious health issues. Family relationships become strained or break down; they do at the best of times.

Very quickly, I just want to say that we believe that in the discussions about this issue a broad consensus has emerged, similar to that concerning the Financial Conduct Authority consultation.

I will refer to the issue of compensation, because it is very important that the Minister takes it on board. An upper level of £600,000 is appropriate where the complainant is still trading and has a choice of which route they wish to pursue. Latterly, a few people sought

the view of the DUP and that of a few other parties on the idea that there should be lower and upper limits of compensation. After much research and reflection, we now believe that Her Majesty's Government should consider that claims of less than £25,000 should only be eligible for an ombudsman-type service and that the upper limit should be £600,000, which is the figure I mentioned earlier. For those affected businesses that are still trading, the lower limit for a financial services tribunal should be £25,000 and the upper limit should be £5 million. Those are the changes we ask the Minister for in respect of compensation.

For those businesses that are now insolvent as a result of alleged bank conduct and behaviour, the upper claim limit should be £10 million and of course such cases can only be dealt with by a financial services tribunal. In all cases where there are claims above that sum, it should be a matter for the commercial courts.

We have met the Minister who is here today, and tomorrow the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton will meet the Chair of the Treasury Committee. I met a former Chair of the Treasury Committee some time back, and we have met the FCA and the Financial Ombudsman Service as well. We have done all the door-knocking that we can possibly do and what we need, with respect to all those people we have met, is not to hear words; we need to see action and that action has to come from the Minister who is here today.

Once again, I will just reiterate our view in the DUP that all legacy complaints should be the subject of a voluntary review in the first instance by the bank concerned, with priority given to those complaints that Members of Parliament have already brought to the attention of the House—every Member in this Chamber today has done just that—or to the attention of the FCA or the FOS, as set out in early-day motion 1162 in April 2017.

We need accountability in this process; we need those who have been guilty of criminal acts, as has been alleged, to feel the punishment for their wrongdoings; and I believe that the responsibility that I have as the Member of Parliament for Strangford is to speak up for the Armstrongs, the Semples and for many others in my constituency. There are at least half a dozen others who I cannot mention because they are embarrassed; they are in business and they do not want to have their names mentioned. People should be sure that when we mention names, it is like an iceberg, with nine tenths of the people affected not being mentioned, and they are not being mentioned because of the embarrassment. The enormity of this issue must not be underestimated. However, I have already spoken for too long, Mr Robertson.

5.14 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), who secured this debate, for an excellent and powerful speech.

I will refer straight away to the speech made by Andrew Bailey of the Financial Conduct Authority at its annual public meeting just a month ago, in which he said the following, which I find quite shocking:

“Given the serious concerns that were identified in the independent review it was only right that we launched a... investigation to see if there was any action that could be taken against senior management or RBS.”

He was talking about the Global Restructuring Group, or GRG. He went on to say:

“It is important to recognise that the business of GRG was largely unregulated”—

what a telling statement—

“and the FCA's powers to take action in such circumstances...are very limited.”

Surely that is where we have gone wrong—commercial lending to businesses was “unregulated” to the extent that those businesses were vulnerable to the indiscriminate action of the banks. I will leave the rest of that statement unread.

I also thank my hon. Friend for his fitting use of the metaphor of Lady Justice to represent the dire situation that so many business owners face. Indeed, I suggest that Lady Justice is not only blind and has her arms tied firmly behind her back but is gagged and silenced. Onerous gagging clauses were incorporated into confidentiality agreements, with the effect of silencing witnesses and ensuring that justice is never done. The use of those gagging clauses ensures that organisations responsible for wrongdoing can not only conduct an operation of denial and obstruction of justice but use the clauses as a tool of abuse, to suppress any evidence of criminal behaviour. We are aware of several instances of gagging clauses that specifically state that an individual is unable to voluntarily approach the police or regulators with concerns about potential criminal activity. Let us be clear: that is unacceptable.

At this point we need to turn to the solicitors who are, quite frankly, aiding and abetting concealment of potential criminal activity by writing contracts that contain such onerous gagging clauses. In essence, they are bullying victims into silence and preventing them from discussing their case with those who are there to protect them: the police, Members of Parliament and regulators. That is a deeply troubling fact.

One pertinent example of such practice, cited on numerous occasions by the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), is a constituent of hers who accused Lloyds Banking Group plc and the Law of Property Act receivers, Alder King LLP, of a fraud that robbed them of their business and their livelihood. Once the allegations were made by the individual to the bank, Lloyds Banking Group plc proposed to forgive the constituent's indebtedness, which had ultimately been caused by the actions of the bank and Alder King LLP, in exchange for the signing of a confidentiality agreement that would have prevented any further discussion of the case. Thankfully, the constituent declined the offer, making it possible to discuss their case here today. It will be clear to everyone in attendance today that that tactic was used by the banks and their solicitors to hide abuse and allegedly criminal activity.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority, which is the regulatory body for solicitors in England and Wales, has a duty to society, and I encourage it to issue very firm guidance to prevent solicitors from contractually silencing allegations of criminal conduct.

Jo Stevens: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for his reference to my constituent, Mr Shabir. In Mr Shabir's case, not only was a gagging order presented to him, but he also has a legal opinion from Queen's counsel saying that a criminal fraud has been committed against him. That is exactly the sort of circumstance that the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Stephen Kerr: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. She made the point that I was just about to make, namely that it is not possible to contract out of criminal behaviour, and it may be that these gagging clauses are in fact unenforceable. However, that is not the point. Such clauses serve the purpose of instilling fear and effectively silence concerns, and potentially suppress valuable evidence. The all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking and finance has found dozens of cases like that one, and people are scared.

Time and time again in this House, we call for transparency and we hear a lot of lip service about the industry's commitment to it, but there can be neither transparency nor fairness if people are being subjected to onerous confidentiality agreements that prevent the investigation of allegations of criminal activity and obstruct justice, stopping it being served.

This issue should be deeply troubling for all Members of the House. Greater scrutiny must be applied to the use gagging agreements and the role they play in the concealment of criminal activity.

5.19 pm

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your stewardship, Mr Robertson. I thank the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) for raising this issue, which is very important, particularly for our small and medium-sized enterprises, which work extremely hard to build their businesses, and which want to move forward and contribute to their local communities, employing people in the process.

One of my constituency cases is to do with HSBC. The director of a company that was not failing—it had a huge number of assets—was asked to sign over to a new loan agreement, but he was attending his dad's funeral in India so the agreement was signed on his behalf by someone in the bank. Someone faked his signature on the document. On his return, he was told he had no choice but to proceed. The loan was offered to the company without its asking for it, to invest further in the capital assets into which it wanted to expand its business. It was forced into the position of having an additional loan and, because of the terms and conditions of that loan, the company was offered restructuring. So a company that was fluid in its assets and able to function normally was forced into restructuring. The personnel initially involved in the restructuring—those who were forcing the company into that corner—then turned into the recovery personnel, so there were people in the bank with the dual role of restructuring and recovery.

The company has fought the case for more than 10 years. It has fought extremely hard, despite the main director having lost his father and the huge stress caused throughout the family. There has been continuous suffering. The company was bound into a non-disclosure agreement and was stuck for many years. Through a lot of hard work and pain, with my office and one of my senior advisers dealing with the case, we have managed at least to get to the stage where the NDA has been removed. Yet the company cannot get any recourse for the losses incurred, let alone the initial debt problems that the bank caused, which put the company in such a predicament. Those are the problems we have; that is what these banks do.

There are two of my constituents in that position with HSBC, and two in that position with Lloyds. Both banks operate in exactly the same way. Another constituent who is involved with Lloyds bank had the bank decide to call in the receivers on a Friday at 5 pm, so it was not possible to have recourse through lawyers or anyone else to stop the injunction. That was someone rich in assets being closed down and locked into this process. The modus operandi of these banks is clear. All four of my constituents who have been dealt with in this way were fluid in their asset base—they were not struggling for money—yet, at the moment, one of them is unable to go to another high street bank because of what the people in HSBC have put them through. That is where the real issues are.

I have another constituent, Mr Elliott, who is here today. He has a significant number of companies that are doing well. He fought his case and managed to get to the court stage. Two weeks before the trial, he got an order from Lloyds saying that it would sue him for £1 million a day for every day the trial took place. Having taken that huge step, it was fundamentally difficult to tolerate that sort of pressure.

The individuals involved must be held criminally responsible for their actions. It is high time that the Government took charge and that all such businesses, which bring huge benefits to our local communities, were protected from the sharks and the way in which they operate.

5.25 pm

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) on securing the debate and commend him for his tenacity in maintaining the focus on this issue.

I want to raise the issue of the resources and expertise of those investigating the usually very complex cases of business banking fraud. We are seeing a huge increase in financial crime in our country. Some of it is well known—most of us will have residents who have been scammed out of money by transferring huge sums. That straightforward fraud is hard enough to pursue, but much harder again is complex business fraud.

One such case that has been raised with me has been discussed in this place twice before, in 2013 and 2015: that of the successful, growing and profitable business, Premier Motor Auctions. The detail of the case and the role of the various players was highlighted by the former Member of Parliament for Great Grimsby, Austin Mitchell, and can be read in *Hansard*. He did an excellent job highlighting the extreme closeness of the working relationship between Lloyds bank and PricewaterhouseCoopers. I do not intend to go over the details of the case in the time allowed; I simply refer Members to that debate, which was clearly feisty and shows just how long Members have been concerned about banking practice.

I have now taken up the case, and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and I wrote to West Yorkshire police asking it to commence a criminal investigation. It has decided not to do that, citing the scale of the resources required and the fact that the victim pursued civil recourse—though in fact that was a case taken by the liquidator, which was

dropped under extreme pressure from Lloyds bank and PWC. I understand that that pressure was the threat of being sued for £1 million a day—real David and Goliath territory, though with a less satisfactory outcome. The other point the police made was that the case would be more suitably investigated by another body. I am a strong supporter of our police services and I can see their point of view—resources are under pressure. The case referred to here today, which has been investigated by Thames Valley police, took 150 dedicated officers and cost £7 million.

West Yorkshire police has a point when it says that other bodies could be better placed to carry out the investigations, which leads to the underlying question I would like to ask the Minister: do we, in the UK, have the right people investigating the right cases, and are they working as closely as they could be with regulators? That is the two-track approach that my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton highlighted. Do our regulators have enough teeth and are they using them? Who is looking at the relationship between banks and accountants? Are local police services the right bodies to be tackling complex corporate cases? Such cases are difficult and require specialist knowledge. If the decision is taken that the local police service is the right body, can more specialised resource or extra funding be provided to help it undertake the work?

It is not at all clear to me that we have this right. I think we need to reconsider it. I can see the challenges the police service faces, but I also see cases, such as that of Premier Motor Auctions, where questions need clear answers and victims need and deserve those answers. It is the underlying national issue, brought into perspective by the local cases, that needs consideration, and I ask the Minister to consider that as he reviews whether our financial system serves our country as well as it could and whether it has addressed the wrongs of the past.

5.29 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I think I have spoken in all four debates on this subject, and I am beginning to feel like my colleagues: we are voices crying in the blooming wilderness. We have asked for something to happen, and nothing is happening. It is wrong. It is scandalous that decent people have been so incredibly robbed by banks. I cannot understand why we have not been able to get a grip on this matter and sort it out. It is wrong, and we are meant to be the people who sort these sorts of problems out.

One part of National Westminster is particularly to blame. One of my constituents, Dean D'Eye, started an association with that bank's Romford lending branch in 2000. For eight years, it was all great. That association worked well, and both the bank and the business were profiting, but just after the banking crisis 10 years ago, the destruction of Mr D'Eye's investment and property development business began. At that time, his company was worth about £11 million and had a debt of about £5.8 million. All his interest payments for debts were on time, and he had a gearing ratio of 60%, which was pretty good.

However, in September 2008, Mr D'Eye began to be inundated with requests for information, which took up a great deal of his team's time and stopped them doing business. Then, in December, the National Westminster bank suddenly robbed £139,000 from the company's

business accounts, without any reference to Mr D'Eye and despite letters from the bank saying that money could be used by the company. In early 2009, the demands for more information continued, and Mr D'Eye's group was placed under the watch of that wonderful organisation called the Global Restructuring Group. The situation then grew rapidly worse: suddenly, in April 2009, the bank appointed administrators, who appeared to investigate the business. On 28 May 2009, NatWest formally cancelled Dean D'Eye's overdraft. Considering the size of the businesses, that overdraft was pretty small, at £40,000.

Within a week, on 1 June, all Dean D'Eye's loans were called in. By 10.17 am on 5 June, administrators had full control of his companies and were effectively running those businesses from his offices. That decision meant the group lost its cash flow, which in turn created a default with the Dunbar bank, owned by the Zurich insurance group. Dunbar bank has a pretty bad reputation, and is often more ruthless than anyone else.

My constituents, the D'Eye family, have lost their family home, and Mr D'Eye has lost his father's house as well. Mr D'Eye continues to hope that he can get litigation funding to take NatWest to court for the way it has ruined his business. Who can blame him? A generation ago, banks usually encouraged and supported their customers, giving them a fair shake. How tragic is it that that is no longer the case for so many people?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. He said earlier in his remarks that Mr D'Eye was not behind on his payments when the bank first took action. My hon. Friend may be aware that Australia has brought forward a royal commission because of similar abuses there, and one of the changes that has come out of that process is that a bank cannot take action against a business if that business is not behind on its payments. Does that not underline the need for a full public inquiry?

Bob Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend for that very good point. Of course it does. We need to get on and sort this matter out.

In the 18th century, highwaymen used to stop coaches, get people outside them and say, "Stand and deliver. Your money or your life." Those guys had a choice. Now, the 21st century equivalent of highwaymen—some in the banks—shout, "Your money or your lifestyles", and they take both. Thank you, Mr Robertson.

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): I am grateful to hon. Members for their self-restraint and to Opposition Front Benchers for offering to make slightly shorter speeches.

5.34 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) for being here. I am not going to say it is a pleasure to take part in this debate, because I do not think we should still be having these debates. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) is absolutely correct: this subject has been discussed in the House so often, because so many of us have been approached by constituents, that we should not still be at this stage.

[Kirsty Blackman]

A number of hon. Members have raised issues that their constituents have brought to them and that, to me, scream of illegality. People have had things signed against their will, bank accounts opened in their name, or money taken from their bank accounts. Companies have been gone after because they are asset-rich; in Scotland, that particularly affected agricultural businesses, for example, because they had large assets that the bank could chase after. It baffles me that there have not been convictions in relation to those things, because I do not understand how they are not illegal.

Given the number of Members who have come forward about this matter, not all of our constituents can possibly be coming to us with falsehoods. So many people have been affected by this that it absolutely must be true. That was one of the most difficult things for individuals to come to terms with: I heard people talking about the fact that they were going through a total nightmare, and they did not understand how this could possibly be happening to them. In fact, they believed it could not be happening to them and that something must have gone horribly wrong. That has not helped to make sure that many people can come forward.

I will raise a few issues that the Scottish National party is asking to be addressed. I will focus a little on GRG, because that is the organisation that the majority of Scottish constituents have been hit by, but we have also had constituents hit by HSBC, Lloyds and Clydesdale. We believe that the UK Government need to pick up where the FCA has failed in relation to the comprehensive review of banking culture. The FCA produced a discussion document, but that is not enough. If the FCA cannot do these things comprehensively, the UK Government can step in, take action and make sure that positive changes are made to banking culture, because it is not the case that banks are now perfect.

The SNP will continue to call for the UK Government to create a permanent commercial financial dispute resolution platform to alleviate the suffering of victims of mis-selling. Given the issues that have been raised today, we will continue to say that asking victims of mis-selling to take the banks to court is totally inappropriate, and financially unworkable in the vast majority of cases. If the Government could step in and create that commercial financial dispute resolution platform, individuals would welcome that.

The UK Government have had a significant stake in RBS, and could have done more to highlight the issues there have been in that organisation and to ensure that RBS has told the truth. The internal resolution mechanisms that RBS has put in place could have been stronger and easier for individuals to navigate—particularly given the consequential loss issues involved, it has been very hard for constituents to access justice.

As the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) said, it is vital that banks lend to small businesses, both for our economy and for those small businesses. These issues have had an economic impact on growth, because businesses have not been able to grow and be successful. There has been a huge impact on individuals' lives. There has been homelessness, there have been marriage breakdowns and there have been suicides. I have spoken previously about my cousin and her family. She, her husband and their four children

were made homeless as a result of what RBS GRG did to them, because they had an agricultural farm, and that farm was an asset that could be taken from them. A constituent also came to me who had suffered huge personal tragedy, as well as financial tragedy, as a result of what happened specifically with RBS GRG.

I have already said that people do not come forward. That is because of the confidentiality clauses that they have had to sign, because they are embarrassed, as has been mentioned, or because they are suffering from financial ruin and have enough to worry about without trying to take on a massive financial institution as an individual. More could be done so that those individuals get justice.

To conclude, we should have a comprehensive review of banking culture and a permanent commercial financial dispute resolution platform. The Government need to take action now so that this can never happen again.

5.40 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, thank the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) for securing today's debate. Colleagues will know that he and I are constituency neighbours. The powerful case study that he gave on behalf of his constituent could quite easily have been on behalf of one of mine. I first became aware of the scale of the issues through constituency examples. Every Member who has spoken in today's debate has presented those testimonies extremely well. I also thank the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking and finance, especially for the efforts of its chair, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), who gave an authoritative and powerful account of some of the problems that have come to the group's attention.

Many of us have participated in similar debates before, but as we mark the 10th anniversary of the financial crisis it is a good time to consider the relationship between businesses and their banks. All of us in the Chamber, even though we have come today with powerful case studies of inappropriate behaviour, want to see a strong relationship between businesses and banks. Having a good relationship between banks and businesses is critical to our economic growth, prosperity, employment and much more.

Unfortunately, research shows that frighteningly low numbers of small businesses trust their bank to do the right thing for them. That is unsurprising given some of what we have heard today. We have to improve that. We have to look at why that is, and how we can change it. We have to restore confidence that the regulatory system is fair, and crucially that there will be a level playing field for businesses when they find themselves in conflict with their bank, especially if their bank is suspected of having committed fraud, as we are discussing today.

The central premise of today's debate and of all the speeches has been that there are insufficient resources available to tackle business banking fraud. Colleagues will be aware that I agree with that premise. The National Crime Agency, the Serious Fraud Office, local police forces and the Financial Conduct Authority do not have sufficient capacity, either individually or collectively, to look into the matter with the attention that it deserves. I am sure that the Minister will refer to the new National Economic Crime Centre—the NECC—a new unit of the National Crime Agency. An initial budget of £6 million

does not seem sufficient when compared with, as I think the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) mentioned, the £7 million cost of the Thames Valley police investigation into HBOS in Reading, and given the scale of the issues raised today.

I want to say quite a bit more, because I do not think that we can simply say, “This issue requires more resources and that will solve the problem.” It is about how we can change the culture that has led to such outrages happening time and again. I will talk about three different ways in which I believe we could contribute to achieving that. First, we could launch a full public inquiry into recent business banking scandals. Secondly, we could introduce an independent tribunal system for small and medium-sized enterprises to resolve disputes. Lastly, we could put in place a more robust system to better protect and enable whistleblowing.

The first step has to be securing proper redress for SMEs that have been mistreated by their banks. Scandals such as GRG and HBOS mis-selling have been outrages, and have seriously dented business and customer confidence. The shadow Treasury team has consistently called for a judge-led independent inquiry into RBS GRG and other small business banking scandals, so that victims can get proper redress. I know that several colleagues in the Chamber have argued strongly for the same measure. There is clearly cross-party support for that to take place.

Such an inquiry would not just get to the bottom of the case studies that have been raised today; it would establish whether there is further criminal liability to be addressed, and examine the wider systemic issues that have allowed such events to take place. We are talking about people’s livelihoods, homes and relationships. Some people have simply been ruined. These issues are too important for us to sweep under the carpet, with the risk that such events could happen again. We have to be able to go out from a debate such as today’s and promise constituents that this will not happen again. In my view, a full public inquiry is required to do that.

Secondly, in terms of disputes, part of the problem is that it is well recognised that the gap between the financial ombudsman for individuals and the full legal process for very big firms is just too great. I support the all-party parliamentary group’s proposal to establish an independent tribunal to help create a level playing field between businesses and the banks in order to fill that gap.

We all await with interest the outcome of the UK Finance independent review, chaired by Mr Simon Walker, into complaints handling and alternative dispute resolution for SMEs. I have met Mr Walker and I understand that he will report very soon. The review will examine dispute resolution processes in different sectors and countries, and provide some evidence-based conclusions on how we can meet the needs of businesses for larger or more complex disputes.

Other initiatives are under way that will hopefully progress the situation. In July 2017, 20 banks signed up to the new standards of lending practice for business customers, which outlined what businesses should expect from their bank when in financial difficulty. Although such moves are welcome, my view is that ultimately we cannot rely on the industry to self-regulate. Look at the RBS GRG complaints resolution process as evidence. Concerns are being raised about how the goalfposts have

been moved regarding compensation, and how the process has been subject to quite a lot of individual discretion. That is why an independent tribunal system is necessary.

Lastly, an answer could lie in exploring a change in our approach to whistleblowing in financial services in this country. Whistleblowing will never be a substitute for effective action by regulators, but it can play a part. That is especially important in a time of scarcer resources as a result of public spending cuts. The Dodd-Frank Act in the US, which was introduced as a central piece of post-financial crisis legislation in 2010, is a demonstration of how much more robust the whistleblower protection framework could be. Whistleblowers in the US are entitled to awards where their information leads to enforcement action. The framework is structured in such a way as to disincentivise false reports, but to provide protection in the event of dismissal.

The UK legislation, on the other hand, is much weaker. Although the Financial Conduct Authority can assist whistleblowers under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, it has not been enshrined in regulation in the way the Dodd-Frank Act has been used in the US. There is a case for examining how we could introduce specific financial services whistleblower protection in order to seriously improve conduct in banking. I have encountered significant support for that within the sector itself. I think the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton mentioned that many good people are working in the sector who want to see such issues improved so that today’s debate does not have to happen again.

Having a banking system that we can trust is essential to our economy. Entrepreneurs who have taken the risk of setting up their own businesses deserve to know that there will be proper redress if they have been the victim of unscrupulous practices. SMEs are the backbone of the British economy. If they cannot trust the financial institutions that are meant to serve them, we will all pay a price.

If we are to begin to restore trust to UK business banking, there are two outcomes we have to achieve. The first is to ensure that the victims of the GRG and HBOS banking scandals get proper redress for the damage done to their businesses and livelihoods, and individuals, as well as the institutions they worked for, must face sanctions for their actions. The second outcome is that we must create a framework in which such a flagrant abuse of the bank and business relationship can never happen again.

With the combination of a full public inquiry, the establishment of an alternative dispute resolution mechanism and a radical rethink of how we treat whistleblowers, we could begin that process. These businesspeople, many of whom are in Parliament today, were badly let down. We must all commit to less talk and more action to get them the redress that they deserve.

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): I would like Mr Wragg to be left a minute to wind up at the end. I call the Minister.

5.48 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. This has been the fourth such debate

[John Glen]

since I was appointed on 9 January. In each of those debates we have had a number of passionate contributions from Members across the Chamber. Today has been the same. We have had 10 speeches, each of which has contained compelling evidence of a situation where banks have failed small businesses. We must be honest and true to the reality of the experiences of the many people who have come to the House today to challenge me, as the Government's representative in this area, over what can be done to achieve proper redress.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for his campaigning on the matter and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), who set out powerfully the case that justice needs to be blind, that it needs to be done and that it needs to be seen to be done.

My deliberations will reach a conclusion imminently; I have not been putting the matter off. As has been discussed, a series of pieces of work are being undertaken, two of which will report in the next few weeks, and I will then make a judgment about the best way forward. Financial sector fraud has had a severe impact on SMEs—we heard today about several individual cases in which lives have been destroyed and families ruined. This is not a subject that I treat lightly; I have been very focused on it over the past nine months.

Bob Stewart: The Minister is a decent and honourable man. Will he please, please concentrate very hard on getting redress for the people who have lost so much money and so much of their lifestyle?

John Glen: I am very grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend for his contributions, which I shall address in a moment. I will also set out some of the changes that have taken place, but let me say from the outset that the cases that have been raised today all demonstrate that, whatever mechanisms we have implemented—from the tripartite regulation of banks and the financial system to the redress schemes of recent years—the banks need to deal with the very real legacy of this issue. Simon Walker's review for UK Finance must listen to what has been said today about that legacy, which will not go away unless the banks face up to and take responsibility for what happened in the past.

Tackling fraud is a Government priority. I want to reflect on a new theme raised today: access to justice and the mechanisms by which it is delivered. The decision to investigate a crime rests solely with law enforcement; I cannot make it myself. Like any Member of Parliament, I can refer a crime to the relevant chief constable, but they will take account of available resources and the likely eventual outcome. It is the chief officer of the local force who is ultimately responsible for such operational decisions, and it is the responsibility of police and crime commissioners to set the budget for local forces, which the chief officer must take into account. Forces can apply for special grant funding to help meet the cost of unexpected events, but I know from conversations with my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton that there is sometimes a gap between the costs covered and the actual costs accrued. These are real matters that need to be addressed.

Mr Khalid Mahmood: The point is not whether the funds can be squeezed out of current budgets—police budgets are under huge stress at the moment. This is not a one-off; it is a long-standing issue about criminal activity by the banks, and resources need to be available to deal specifically with it.

John Glen: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, and I listened to his earlier remarks. I think that this is about co-ordination and the appropriate configuration of resources.

Kevin Hollinrake: The Minister rightly mentions resources, which are always tight, but does he see a potential opportunity here? HBOS has not yet been fined for its scandalous abuses of 2007 and 2008, which tore apart many businesses. Would it be appropriate to use that fine to pump-prime a crime agency to deal with these issues? That agency could then be self-funding, because it would constantly be levying fines for abuses.

John Glen: We clearly need to find an effective mechanism to deal appropriately with the scale of the unaddressed challenges, and I will look at all options for that.

The City of London police have secured funding from the Home Office police reform and transformation fund to provide training for 600 investigators across police forces. There is also now a national register of fraud specialists; I acknowledge that the sentiment in this Chamber is that that is insufficient, but I should point out that it exists.

The regulatory framework has changed considerably since the events of the crash 10 years ago. I will not go through the whole history, but we have now established a network of robust and specialised financial regulatory bodies, each with a clear mandate and a set of responsibilities. However, I understand the concern about the reach of those bodies to deal with outstanding historical matters that our constituents are still raising with us. As part of that network, the Financial Conduct Authority is focused on ensuring that the conduct of firms and the interests of consumers are placed at the heart of the regulatory system and given the priority they deserve. That statutory objective will continue to guide the FCA's work as it ensures that the highest possible standards are applied to the sector.

On SME lending, I am acutely aware that concerns remain about past cases of misconduct, the effects of which are still being felt today. There has been a great deal of justified anger within Parliament and beyond about cases such as those of the RBS Global Restructuring Group, HBOS Reading and the mis-selling of interest rate hedging products. I have been clear that the inappropriate treatment of SMEs by RBS GRG was unacceptable; I have made that point personally to the chief executive of RBS. The issues surrounding RBS GRG are firmly on my radar in the Treasury and I continue to work on the matter. The case of HBOS involved criminal activity, and it was right that those responsible were brought to justice. RBS and Lloyds, which now owns HBOS, have rightly set up compensation schemes for businesses affected by GRG and HBOS Reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and other Members raised gagging clauses and the need for transparency. I am very sensitive to the pattern of settlements being offered that are effectively gagging clauses, such as in the case of Mr Shabir that

the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) raised. That does not seem an honourable way of dealing with legitimate complaints, so I will examine the matter carefully before I report back.

I am glad that to say that in response to direct loss claims relating to the GRG scheme, 978 outcome letters have been sent to customers and £15 million has so far been paid out in redress, on top of £115 million in complex fees. Offers have been also made to more than 90% of customers within the scope of the HBOS Reading review, and more than 85% of customers have accepted.

I am acutely conscious of time, but I think that it is important that I give a succinct update of what I will be doing over the next few weeks. I firmly believe that by increasing the emphasis on individual accountability, the senior managers and certification regime will prove hugely important in improving conduct standards in the financial services sector and allowing regulators to deal effectively with cases such as that of RBS GRG. The regime will be extended to the insurance sector in December and solo-regulated businesses will come in next year.

I look forward to Simon Walker's review because it will allow me to reach a conclusion about what needs to happen. The Government have done a lot of work, but I accept that more is required. I have spoken to Andrew Bailey, to the retired High Court judge Sir William Blackburne, to Ross McEwan, to the chief executive of Lloyds, to the chief executive of the Financial Ombudsman Service and to UK Finance, and I have met members of the all-party group. I am keen to give my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove the opportunity to reply, but let me confirm that there will be action and that I will come back in a matter of weeks.

5.59 pm

Mr Wragg: Thank you for chairing the debate, Mr Robertson. *[Interruption.]* I can hear the crowds outside protesting at the thought that I will be back in six months' time to make the same speech—I hope that I will not be.

I thank the many members of the public who are watching from the Gallery. They are the people we are fighting for across the country, so it was good to hear contributions from all four nations of the United Kingdom today.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that action would come “imminently”, at least from the Treasury—a drastic improvement on the “very soon” that he promised before. That action cannot come soon enough.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the investigation of business banking fraud.

Cost of School Uniforms

[SIOBHAIN McDONAGH *in the Chair*]

6.1 pm

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the cost of school uniforms.

Ms McDonagh, this is the first time I have spoken under your chairmanship, so not only is today's debate really important, but it gives me real pleasure to serve under you. I am sure that view is going to be shared by everybody, including the Minister, for whom I have some really good news. I am hoping to enlist him in a twofold campaign. One part of it is that all of us who want to intervene should approach the Chancellor and ask him to lift VAT on school clothing—full stop. We should also ask him to give a direction to school governors in a way I think is going to emerge during the debate, and I will touch on that as well.

We are facing an open goal, because the year that the Minister came into the House of Commons, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) introduced a Bill saying how absurd it was that there was a 14-year cut-off—a point some of us may come back to. He pointed out that, for an average-sized 14-year-old, it means that VAT is applied where their collar size is over 14½ inches and where they wear jumpers with a 34-inch chest and upwards, trousers with waists of 28 inches and upwards or skirts with a 26-inch waist and upwards.

The key person supporting my hon. Friend—I will call him my hon. Friend because I agree very much with his views—was the Prime Minister. She was not then the Prime Minister; she was a Back Bencher. This was a topic dear to her heart, so I hope, when all of us together make an approach to the Prime Minister, and through her to the Chancellor, that we are going to get a massive amount of support for my hon. Friend and a constructive response.

I am hoping for a twofold response. The first part is that we scrap VAT on school clothing. If people can provide evidence that it is for a child at school, that will exempt the actual product, just as people with disability get some VAT exemptions when they can prove the status of their disability. Secondly, we want the Minister of State who drives schools policy to give a commitment that he will write to school heads and governors and ask them to do several things. First, school governors should undertake a pricing each year in local stores or wherever they request parents to shop on the cost of the school uniform. Secondly, there should be standard items from many suppliers rather than just one or, if lucky, two. Thirdly, if the school wants to distinguish itself from others, it should do it by standard colours that can be bought in many shops, not by specific blazers that are only to be bought in certain places.

I think other Members may want to come in on the actual costs of games kits, and I will quickly touch on all those issues. However, I also want to thank people from Birkenhead and beyond, because we had the most extraordinary response from there and from around the country about today—I did not know people wanted to follow a Facebook link to Birkenhead—and those people wrote in with their comments about the horrors.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): I know how well this debate will be received in my constituency, where one parent contacted me to tell me about the extortionate £135 cost of their children's school uniforms. The fact is that parents should be allowed to go to the high street, the supermarket or anywhere to get a school uniform. That is what happened under the last Labour Government—it was stated in the guidance, and it should be reintroduced.

Frank Field: That is a suggestion for the Minister. It could be guidance; I would love it to be stronger than guidance—that schools must do this. I will come back to that.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate. I raised this issue when I was first elected last year, because a constituent had similarly come to me with the cost of uniforms. I was surprised that the Government committed to legislate to ensure schools did the right thing back in 2015. I received a letter from the Minister last month saying they are not going to do this until the next Session, which means at least five years since the first commitment was made. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the increasing costs of living that parents have to bear, a five-year delay to do something that the Government committed to do back in 2015 would be a pretty poor show?

Frank Field: It is a very poor show. There is a myth going around that we have no time to legislate because of Brexit. Ms McDonagh, I am sure you would think that the rubbish we debate in the Chamber would not be suitable for Westminster Hall and would just be filling up time. The Prime Minister believes we are all very busy with important legislation; we are simply not. I am really grateful to my hon. Friend. Why can the Cabinet Legislative Committee not give us time to introduce a Bill?

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am really grateful to my right hon. Friend for securing the debate. Millthorpe School introduced a new school uniform this summer and it has meant that children have been excluded from class. When the Minister is writing to heads, perhaps saying that no child should be excluded—this is doubly stigmatising a child because they are poor and because they cannot afford the right uniform—will he also instruct all schools that they must recycle uniforms, not just on cost grounds but on environmental grounds, to ensure that a school uniform is affordable for absolutely everyone?

Frank Field: It is very good giving way, because these are points that I would have made otherwise. I merely underscore the point my hon. Friend has just made about how it may not be a one-off set of costs but an increasing set of costs through the year. Of course, if someone has young lads, who are all too often separated from their uniform and their games kit, the costs mount tremendously.

In preparing for this debate, we had a Feeding Birkenhead meeting a couple of weeks ago, and we talked about this debate. There were 22 mothers in the room who support Feeding Birkenhead. Practically all of them were either grandparents or parents. They all said, “We can actually give you examples,” and all of them have given me

examples. There have been examples on Facebook—the House of Commons Facebook for these matters has got a huge number of responses from parents. I said that, during this debate, I would do what Ernest Bevin did when he appeared before the wages committee for dockers, where he laid out how much food the dockers would get from their wages and asked the independent panel if it thought that was adequate. One mother listed the cost of the uniform—I will hold the document up so the camera can see it. I will give it to the Minister afterwards—I do not expect him to read it now, but I jolly well hope it is going into the camera.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, and I congratulate him on securing this important debate. I, too, have had a number of examples from across my constituency. A school uniform often costs in excess of £120 in Barnsley East. Does he agree—I know he does—that that is totally unacceptable? We need to look at ways to bring down the costs. Perhaps one way to do so is for governing bodies and local authorities to use their power to bulk buy.

Frank Field: All these ideas are here for the Minister to pick up and run with, particularly given that he has the Prime Minister's support on this issue.

Some of the parents who wrote to me from Birkenhead and beyond have bills that are £300-plus for a school uniform, and they also face the devastating cost of games kits. I hold up another document from a mother, listing a games kit. When my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) saw it, she jumped and said, “Look at that—emblems are being put on the items, which adds enormously to the cost.” That parent—a young woman—has a child in school who has to have two different games kit cases to bring the stuff to school.

Rachael Maskell: I was absolutely horrified about that. I met the staff of one school and asked why they put labels on trousers and skirts. They said that, previously, they tested girls' trousers by pulling them away from the leg. Clearly, that is completely inappropriate. We need to set guidance to ensure that uniforms can be bought from standard retailers, so that badges are not put on trousers, skirts and other bits of kit.

Frank Field: Again, I see the Minister busily rewriting his speech—[*Laughter.*] We are laughing, but I know that nobody outside will mistake that: our comments are dead serious. I have heard horror stories about parents going without food to provide uniforms. They do not want their children to look different from other children, and they wake up at night worrying about it. This is an incredibly serious debate, but we are making some of our points as humorously as possible because we know we have got the Minister on our side.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way, and I congratulate him on securing this really important debate. The points he has been making are really serious. Buying school uniforms potentially plunges parents into poverty, but it also forces them to pick certain schools over others because of the expense of the uniforms. The previous Labour Government introduced a statutory school admissions code that explicitly required schools

to prevent the cost of school uniforms from getting in the way of admission. Perhaps the Minister will consider reintroducing it.

Frank Field: It is really great that all my best points are being taken. The Government say they are concerned about social mobility, but school uniform costs affect parents' choices about which school they send their children to, irrespective of where they come not in the 11-plus selection but in the selection of schools. I thank my hon. Friend for that immensely important point.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I am a Welsh MP, and these issues are devolved to the Welsh Government. There is a different way of doing it. I urge my hon. Friend the shadow Minister and the Minister to look at what the Welsh Government are doing on school uniform grants. In Wales, a £1.7 million fund is available for children on free school meals. Parents can apply for a £125 grant, which can be spent not just on school uniforms but on sports kits, school trips and technologies. There are better ways of delivering, particularly for the least well-off children. If they are on free school meals, their parents can apply for that grant, which is worth up to £125. It is for reception children and children aged 11 who are going into year 7, so it is across the age range. I am sure my right hon. Friend would agree that there are better and different ways of supporting the least well off.

Frank Field: That is a particularly good one, isn't it, Minister? The Prime Minister has told us that austerity is coming to an end, so she will want ideas about how to bring it to an end. Copying a proven model—we are not making up something that may not work—seems an admirable way to advance.

I am going to conclude, because the spokesman on our side—if I can still refer to him like that—has quite a bit to say, and we all wish to quiz the Minister. We have heard about the huge cost and about how arbitrary the 14-year cut-off point is. Will the Minister tell us when it was last reviewed? One person wrote on Facebook:

"Our son is 14, going into year 10, 6ft 4, size 12 feet, 48 inch chest!"

He has to have men's shirts with very long arms so he can feel part of his school. It is very important that we get promises about improving the situation, not just for some but for all. There is a really important issue behind many of our contributions: we should be able to buy uniforms in many shops. For the many, not the few shops—that is what the policy should be.

The Minister should think about how he will lead us in approaching the Prime Minister. I say that in all seriousness, because we actually want to help him with this deadly serious topic. We want to help him with the instructions he will give to schools about, for example, costing their uniforms every year, getting supplies from standard suppliers, and the absurdity of the price for a games kit. If people want a uniform to be distinct, they should pick a colour that is commonly available and different from other school uniforms, rather than one that is available only from a single supplier.

I am really grateful to the Members who have turned up to the debate. We have been surprised by the number of letters, emails and phone calls that we have received. We have clearly just been through a horrendous period for parents, and I hope that they will not have to face that for another year.

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb) rose—

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Order. I was going to call the shadow Minister, but I have been corrected by the Clerk. The Opposition spokesperson cannot make a speech in a half-hour debate.

Frank Field: What I might do, if you are tolerant, Ms McDonagh, is take a few interventions from the shadow Minister so he can make a few points.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Frank Field: What a surprise!

Mike Kane: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I attended his constituency fundraiser in 2010, and I am reminded of the event because—

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Order. This is my error, and I apologise, but I understand that you cannot make a speech.

Frank Field: Can I just rewind? I had spoken with the Opposition spokesman, and we were under the impression that he could speak. I would have allowed him to intervene before I sat down. Could I say that I had not sat down, Ms McDonagh?

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): I would like to do anything I can to facilitate the right hon. Gentleman, but the guidance I have been handed states that during a half-hour debate, neither speeches nor interventions from Opposition Front Benchers are permitted, as is the rule in the House. I apologise.

Mike Kane: Can I speak from the Back Benches?

Frank Field: I hope my hon. Friend will be able to intervene in the debate from the Back Benches.

6.19 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for my quick shuffle to the Back Benches. The previous occupant of the shadow Minister's seat was my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds). I remember attending his constituency event in 2010 at St Anselm's, with the former Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, who was the guest speaker. I point out to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), in his current state of exile, that St Anselm was exiled twice by William II and Henry I, so I suspect that whatever happens in his political career in the weeks, months and years ahead, he will be a champion for people in poverty.

The debate is really about eight years of austerity and Government policy. Universal credit is failing and driving people into debt, hunger and even destitution. Over 4 million children are growing up in poverty and a million people are forced to go to food banks. The Government should be hanging their heads in shame that families cannot afford to buy school uniforms for their children. A number of hon. Members have pointed out that we have a system in which children are sent home from school because their parents cannot afford to meet the dress codes.

I think my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead will agree that we need to know what the Minister is doing to ensure that children do not lose time in school

[Mike Kane]

because their parents cannot afford to meet unrealistic school uniform demands. When will the Minister ensure that the Government pledge to make school uniform guidance legally binding, and what are the Minister and the Government doing to address the ever-increasing challenge faced by parents to pay for the basics to enable their children to attend and participate in school? As my right hon. Friend rightly said, people are putting off buying food because they have to buy uniforms.

Finally, will the Minister pledge to end, once and for all, the perverse situation in which poverty acts as a barrier to children attending school because of uniforms?

6.21 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh, and to hear the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) speaking from the Back Benches, which is where all the best people in the Labour party sit. It is also a real pleasure to hear the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) lead this important debate on the cost of school uniforms. I pay tribute to him for his work with the all-party parliamentary group on hunger, and for his local work with Feeding Birkenhead, which has benefited thousands of children with meals and activities during the school holidays, as well as school breakfasts during term time.

The Department strongly encourages schools to have a uniform as it can play an important role in contributing to the ethos of a school and setting an appropriate tone. It is common for a school to have a dress code, and the overwhelming majority of schools require pupils to wear a uniform. For pupils, uniforms can remove competition to keep up with the latest fashion trends. For teachers, uniform can support discipline and motivation among pupils as part of a wider behaviour policy. For parents, uniform means they do not need to worry about what their children are wearing or the costs associated with buying the latest fashions or brands. A school uniform can also help foster equality among pupils and support the development of a whole school ethos.

One of the primary purposes of a uniform is to remove differences between pupils. With a standard uniform in place, it is harder to discern a pupil's background; instead, what is important is their character and personality. In these ways, uniforms can play an important part in helping pupils feel safe at school. While decisions about school uniform are made by headteachers and governors—it is right that they continue to make these decisions—we always encourage schools to have uniform policies for those reasons.

In 2015, the Department commissioned a survey on the cost of school uniform, which provides the most recent information the Department holds on the matter. It indicated that the average cost of most items, except the school bag, decreased between 2007 and 2015, once adjusted for inflation. Moreover, most parents were pleased with the overall cost and quality of their child's uniform. Over two-thirds of parents were happy with the cost of uniform and PE kit.

As was expressed in the debate, it is important that we are not complacent. While school uniform can have a hugely positive impact on a school in terms of providing

cohesion and community, it may present—as we have heard—a financial burden on some, particularly lower-income families. In the same survey on the cost of school uniform, nearly one-fifth of parents reported that they had suffered financial hardship as a result of purchasing their child's school uniform. The cost of uniform should not act as a barrier to obtaining a good school place. We want all children to be able to attend a school of their parents' choice wherever possible.

Sarah Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Nick Gibb: I will not because of the time; I am sorry.

No school uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling unable to apply to or attend a school. One hon. Member raised the issue of the admissions code, which explicitly sets out that,

“Admission authorities must ensure that...policies around school uniform or school trips do not discourage parents from applying for a place for their child.”

It is for the governing body of a school to decide whether there should be a school uniform policy, and if so, what it should be. It is also for the governing body to decide how the uniform should be sourced. However, governing bodies should give cost considerations the highest priority when making decisions about their school's uniform.

The Department publishes best practice guidance on school uniform, the latest version of which was published in September 2013. That guidance makes it clear that when schools set their policy on school uniform, they should

“consider the cost, the available supply sources and year round availability of the proposed uniform to ensure it is providing best value for money for parents”,

and on the important issue of games or PE kits, that schools should

“ensure that the PE uniform is practical, comfortable and appropriate to the activity involved, and that consideration is given to the cost of compulsory PE clothing”.

That is non-statutory guidance for schools.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead is right to draw attention to the issue of school uniforms and VAT. EU law allows the UK to have a zero rate of VAT on clothing and footwear designed for young children which is not suitable for older people. Therefore, clothing designed for children under 14 years old has no VAT on it. Over time, as children grow, their clothing becomes indistinguishable from that of adults. HM Revenue and Customs needs to operate size limits for the VAT relief to comply with EU law. The limits are based on the average size of 13-year-old children, using data provided by the British Standards Institution. It is inevitable that some children within the intended age range—such as the child cited by the right hon. Gentleman—will require larger articles of clothing or footwear that do not qualify for the relief. The Government are unable, under EU law, to extend the relief to encompass children beyond the average size. That is one of the reasons that our guidance is so firm in saying that schools should ensure their school uniform is affordable. I know the right hon. Gentleman has strong views on the EU and he may well get his way on this issue in due course.

Our existing best practice guidance emphasises the need for uniforms to be affordable. In fact, we advise school governing bodies to give the highest priority to cost considerations when making decisions about their

school uniform. Most schools already ensure that their uniforms are affordable. However, for the minority of schools that may not, the Government have announced their plan to legislate to put the school uniform guidance on a statutory footing to send a clear signal that we expect schools to ensure uniform costs are reasonable.

The hon. Member for Ogmores (Chris Elmore) raised the issue of financial help and school funding grants. In England, some local authorities provide discretionary grants to help with buying school uniforms. Local authorities that offer such grants set their own criteria for eligibility, and schools may offer clothing schemes, such as second-hand uniforms at reduced prices. Schools may also choose to use their pupil premium funding to offer subsidies or grants for school uniforms.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) raised the issue of recycling, of games kits in particular. I remember that I wore a second-hand rugby kit in some of the years at my school, and that was significantly cheaper than buying the kit brand new—I was not a particularly good rugby player, so it would not have been money well spent.

To conclude, I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead for raising this issue and to other right hon. and hon. Members for contributing to the debate. Important issues have been raised. I hope that he is content to some extent that the Government echo his concern and content about the steps that we have taken to underline the importance of the cost of school uniform in helping the most disadvantaged members of society to access to a good school place and a good education. We want to ensure that the cost of uniform does not act as a barrier to getting a good education and a good school place.

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): I apologise to Members for my mistakes in chairing the sitting. The faults were entirely mine.

6.30 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Modern-day Slavery

6.30 pm

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered tackling modern-day slavery.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. Before I progress with my short speech, I need to place on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who cannot be present this evening because he is away at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. His chairmanship of the all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking and modern slavery does so much to ensure that this issue is always at the top of the political agenda.

I also briefly place on the record my thanks to the Co-operative party for pursuing the matter so vociferously. The Co-operative party has ensured that modern slavery is now taken exceptionally seriously both inside this place and outside. As a result of its vociferous campaigning, 30 local authorities have signed up voluntarily to a modern slavery charter that takes them above and beyond the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which I shall talk about later. Clearly, a concerted political effort can ensure that we get safety for people fleeing horrible circumstances.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I apologise for intervening on the hon. Gentleman so early on, but I wanted to put something on the record as well: the great contribution made in the other place by Alastair Redfern, the Bishop of Derby, as we took the Bill through both Houses to become the Act. Without his dogged determination, we would probably not be sat in this Chamber today having this debate. He has actually just retired as Bishop of Derby, at the end of August. I am sure that putting that on the record will be well received by him and the people who worked with him.

Gareth Snell: It is true that where we are today is the result of a collective effort and political will across not only this House but Parliament as a whole. That is demonstrated not only by the number of Members present today but by how the matter has been pursued through APPGs, private Members' legislation and amendments to various other Bills.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Before my hon. Friend moves on, may I add another name to the list of the illustrious? Home for Good, a Christian charity, has been working so hard to raise the profile of the real dangers of certain institutions that look as though they are orphanages but are actually involved in the trade. Separation of children from parents—even from one parent—is a dangerous activity. Will he look at the Home for Good report and study it carefully? He will find it very helpful?

Gareth Snell: I thank the hon. Gentleman—

Mr Sheerman: Hon. Friend!

Gareth Snell: Indeed, he is my friend, but he is now only the second most famous person from Huddersfield following the debut of the new Dr Who. I do not know whether he has a sonic screwdriver, but we can sort one out for him.

[Gareth Snell]

My hon. Friend is right. A number of organisations and charities sent me briefing notes, and what I found interesting as all that information came into my office was the sheer volume of work being done quietly and diligently to ensure that this issue of our young people and others being abused and exploited is tackled. If we look at the work and try to quantify it, we can see that in addition to the efforts of Government and Parliament, civil society is once again demonstrating that it is a force for good.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): This is a timely debate. Has my hon. Friend's all-party group looked at the legislation that was passed some years ago after the tragedy in Morecombe bay and the problems with gangmasters? Has he any comments on that? I am surprised that we still experience modern-day exploitation—for want of a better term—in all age groups.

Gareth Snell: My hon. Friend must be somewhat prescient, because he has read ahead in my speech before I have managed to get to that point. I shall touch on it later.

I welcome the announcement by the Government of the review of the Modern Slavery Act, which will be ably chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), as well as the noble Lady Butler-Sloss. That is a triumvirate of expertise if ever there were one. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for being present this afternoon.

I want to talk about the processes in the Modern Slavery Act. It was a step forward in properly attacking and dealing with some of the horrible situations people find themselves in, but it also contained important preventive measures that helped to reduce modern slavery in all forms, whether sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labour or criminal exploitation.

For me, one of the most important parts of the Act is section 54, which requires large companies with a turnover of £36 million or more to place on record transparency in their supply chains. Such modern slavery statements are a welcome process to deal with these problems but, if we are honest and up front, the implementation is simply not working properly. At a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, on which I sit, the Home Office confirmed that it does not compile a list of companies that may be required to make a declaration, does not have a list of those that have done so and, importantly, does not maintain the database. Any further analysis of the information in the declarations is made by non-governmental organisations.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): On that point, will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating TISCReport, which was developed and is based in Bristol? It has looked at the 18,000 companies with revenue of more than £36 million, and it is the only organisation that maintains a database of the companies that comply with section 54. The database is now searchable via a zoomable map. Will he encourage the Minister to engage with TISCReport and to allow it to help the Home Office in its endeavours?

Gareth Snell: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. NGOs are doing some excellent work but, fundamentally, I believe that such work should be done

by the Home Office and by Government—because we are talking about something set out in statute—rather than relying on the benevolence of third-party organisations.

Despite the work of the organisation in my hon. Friend's constituency, and even though the matter has been progressed, I know that the Minister is aware of concerns about how section 54 is being implemented. Back in April I asked a question in the Chamber of a Department for International Development Minister, who confirmed that a hub was being set up. Will the Minister present today confirm what progress has been made on that hub?

What is really worrying, however, is that an investigation by *The Guardian* demonstrated that of the companies that had made a modern slavery statement, more than two thirds had failed to refer specifically to the risk of modern slavery. They had made a declaration, but it did not comply with the requirements of the Act. More worryingly, only 19% of all agricultural businesses that should be making a statement have done so, and that is an area in which exploitation could be rife.

Unfortunately, because everything is being done by third-party NGOs, the ability to compel necessary information simply does not exist. Until the Government introduce something on a formal statutory basis, more and more organisations will seek to put aside their responsibilities. The Co-operative Group, which I shall talk about later, has estimated that it is cheaper and easier for organisations simply to ignore the requirements than it is for them to produce the statements and submit them. There is no validation and so no penalty for failing to make a declaration.

The section 54 requirement also applies only to commercial organisations. The public sector, however, is a huge spender of money—billions and billions of pounds are spent in procurement—yet no public authority is required to make declarations to demonstrate their actions to reduce modern slavery. Were we to extend section 54 to cover public bodies and authorities, that might not stop certain aspects of modern slavery happening, but we would be able to have oversight of where the billions of pounds in public procurement are ultimately being spent, and Members could look for the impact on modern slavery.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that smaller businesses ought to be included in the overall remit of the Act? After all, they include nail bars and people working on tips. If we had a system whereby when a licence was granted by local authorities, businesses had to tick a box on their compliance with modern-day slavery rules, that would be a real step forward.

Gareth Snell: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The current scope of section 54 is well meaning, and in some ways if it was implemented correctly it would have a huge impact on large organisations. But if we are being honest and up front, most of the places where modern slavery is perpetrated in the UK are small businesses that are not properly regulated. It is tied employment, with people living in a room above a shop and being told that their rent and board is all paid for as part of their salary but, “By the way, you can't ever leave us.” Local authorities having a remit would be a way of tackling that. However, we must be clear that if we are

to give local authorities new responsibilities, new funding must come with that, because simply asking local authorities to do more with their depleted amounts of money simply will not do.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend accept that modern slavery sometimes happens at an individual level? I have a case where someone was brought to this country for work, to look after someone's care needs. Yet when the care was no longer needed, they got rid of them and refused to pay the money they owed, and that person is now completely rootless and needs support in this country. Does he see that as a particular problem?

Gareth Snell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I will touch on individual cases later on, where there should be greater support and strength for victims of modern slavery.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for making the important point about the contribution of local authorities. Local authorities are under incredible financial pressure, as he rightly outlined, but 40 local authorities have still signed up to the charter, one of which is my council, Liverpool City Council. In the spirit of the cross-party attendance at this debate, does he agree that it is vital that councils, no matter their political make-up, debate and adopt that charter as quickly as possible?

Gareth Snell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It is sad that the council that I used to lead, which is now not run by our political party, decided not to adopt the charter because it is worried about being too political. I am not sure how we can be too unpolitical in tackling modern slavery, but unfortunately there are still some organisations and local authorities that see the issue as partisan. If only they looked at Parliament, where partisan issues have been put aside and everyone looks at this issue collectively to find ways of dealing with it across both Houses and across parties, they could learn some valuable lessons from us. My hon. Friend is right that where local authorities are going above and beyond they are making a real difference to individuals whose existence would otherwise be one of daily toil and exploitation. The more we can do to tackle that, locally or nationally, the better.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Does he agree that for victims of modern-day slavery, rebuilding their lives is a challenge in itself? I pay tribute to the Co-operative Group and other businesses that are offering paid work placements for victims of modern-day slavery.

Gareth Snell: My hon. Friend is right; the Bright Future project, which the Co-op Group runs, is a demonstration of the tangible activities that ethically minded organisations can carry out to give people fleeing modern slavery a real opportunity.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab) *rose*—

Gareth Snell: I give way to my right hon. friend the Member for Spellar—

John Spellar: For Warley!

Gareth Snell: They will name it after you one day, I suppose.

John Spellar: My hon. Friend mentioned the role of local authorities in providing a lead. The role of my own council, Sandwell, has been recognised with a public award, precisely for working with other agencies to tackle this menace. Councils and public bodies also have to be receptive to information; many people who live next to the places involved and sometimes go in and work in them provide information. The authorities—whether the police, the Home Office or the local authorities—have powers, but they need to be receptive to the information and use the powers they have, even though they need more.

Gareth Snell: As always, my right hon. Friend is absolutely spot on. I would add that local authorities have struggled with their existing requirements. If we are to give them more things to do, and I think we can, that has to come with the required funding. This is too important to do half a job badly; I would rather we did all the job properly. Once again, Sandwell Council in the west midlands demonstrates how that can be done. Having heard my right hon. Friend's intervention, I am sure that other councils will look to Sandwell as a model to follow in future.

I will move on to one of the things that the Government could do to actively address all the points being raised. Baroness Young's Modern Slavery (Transparent Supply Chains) Bill would extend the section 54 clauses to cover almost everything that has been discussed. The Bill would allow for local authorities, public bodies and smaller organisations, including commercial organisations, to be covered by the requirement to make declarations. The more information we have, the easier it will be to tackle this scourge. I ask the Government to do slightly more. They can no longer rely on non-governmental organisations and charities to enforce the will of Parliament as expressed through the Modern Slavery Act. There has to be direct Government responsibility for the collection and analysis of the data that they have asked to be produced.

I ask the Minister to update the House on the process for appointing the new Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner. That role has been empty since May. According to the Home Office documentation, a meeting should take place this week to shortlist candidates. I wonder whether we are still on track for that. Given the comments of Kevin Hyland about his independence as he left that post, I ask the Minister to reassure us that those comments have been taken on board and that the new Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, whoever that may be, will have the powers, responsibilities and independence they need to do the work that we all know and agree is needed.

To move on from the processes, behind every statistic, case and referral there is an individual whose life has been turned upside down and torn apart because of modern slavery. The Walk Free Foundation estimates that there are 136,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK alone. To put that into context, that figure is equivalent to the population of West Bromwich, Gloucester or Worcester being enslaved in the UK. We should all

[Gareth Snell]

be worried about that, because unless we tackle this root and branch, we cannot hold ourselves up as a compassionate society.

There is also an international element to the issue: £14 billion of goods are imported into the UK. We can all be pretty much guaranteed that some of those products will be made by slaves or people in servitude. Everyone here and watching at home—I am sure there are millions of them—can be almost certain that something in their home, wardrobe or car will have been made by a slave. Statistically, it is likely that at some point, every single one of us will have an item of clothing made by a slave, if we do not already. We must take that very seriously, because our obligations do not rest domestically; we should set the standard around the world. As our post-Brexit trade negotiations take place, we should ensure that an ethical trade policy that tackles modern slavery here and overseas forms part of our trade policy. If we can use our purchasing power to make the world a better place, we have a duty to do so.

The National Crime Agency statistics from the national referral mechanism suggest that roughly 1,600 referrals are made each quarter. In the first quarter of this year and the second quarter of last year combined, just over 3,200 referrals were made. Although the victims predominantly came from the United Kingdom, they spanned 87 different countries. In the UK, people of 87 nationalities made a referral to the national referral mechanism. What is good about the Modern Slavery Act is that the perpetrators are being prosecuted. Only last week, Zakaria Mohammed was prosecuted under the Act for drug dealing using children and county lines. Although the act of drug dealing itself should be punished—I do not think anyone would object to that—the fact that the use of exploited children in a servitude role was prosecuted sends a message that we are taking this seriously.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the fact that some very wicked people organise this trade, and they are clever. People up and down the country—this is true even in the case of my pet subject of orphanages that are not really orphanages—are gulling ordinary, good people in this country into donating money for things that will be used for an evil purpose.

Gareth Snell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The people who perpetrate these crimes do not do so in a cack-handed way. They are organised individuals who exploit the most vulnerable people in our society purely out of greed. The more we do to prosecute and make examples of them, the more we will do to demonstrate that we take the issue seriously and to put people off.

Another recent case is that of Josephine Iyamu, who sex-trafficked workers from Nigeria to Germany. Because she was a UK national, we prosecuted her in this country under the Modern Slavery Act. Again, as internationalists—as a country that looks out to the world—our responsibilities do not rest at our doorstep. We have a responsibility for people around the world. In Leeds, the Cisar family were caught trafficking people for work and exploitation. Thirty-seven people were found in an enslaved situation, working on building sites for £5 a day. Some of the families had to spend

their evenings begging for food because they simply were not able to provide food for their children. One of those 37 people was a one-year-old. If we are serious about tackling this issue, we should start with situations like that.

Another problem, which I am sure the Minister will be able to help us with, is what happens once someone has been identified as a victim of modern slavery. The national referral mechanism is non-statutory. Someone who gets a positive conclusive grounds decision has no legal status. They are simply someone we have almost taken pity on—we support them out of benevolence, not because there is a requirement in law for us to do so.

The Government promised last October to increase the duration of support for people who receive a positive conclusive grounds decision from 14 days to 45 days. I understand that that is still in the process of being worked up—it is not actually being implemented. Again, if the Government wished to demonstrate that they take that promise seriously, they could easily announce that they will bring it forward as soon as possible.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): As I have told my hon. Friend, I will have to leave the debate to talk about sanctions in a moment. When we—Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords—scoped the original Modern Slavery Bill, the most stunning and terrible evidence we took was from people who had been enslaved. The idea that people get over such bondage easily was knocked sideways by all that. We were in tears listening to the evidence of people who had been broken by modern slavery, but the Government have only just begun to think about that issue.

Gareth Snell: We can see from that thoughtful intervention why my right hon. Friend is absolutely the right person to co-chair the review of the Modern Slavery Act. As I said, every statistic is a person whose life has been turned upside down. At the moment, an individual who is found to have been through modern slavery gets 14 days' support. I do not know about anyone else in the Chamber, but that does not seem sufficient to me. In fact, 45 days really is not enough. The Government made that commitment last October and they should implement it now, but I ask that they do so as an interim step. As my right hon. Friend the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee says, that would be a step forward, but it would not be enough to establish a pathway for recovery.

There is something the Government could do today to give some semblance of an impression that they want to do something about this issue. They could announce that they will support Lord McColl's Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill, which has been through the House of Lords and has its support. If they guaranteed Government support for that Bill so that it could proceed in Government time sooner rather than later, I am sure that it would get cross-party support and be one of the fastest pieces of legislation to pass the House of Commons.

That Bill would extend support to 12 months—it would give people who have been through horrendous situations a year's support. Someone who comes out of modern slavery and needs help should receive it because the state and the people want to give it to them, not because of benevolence and charity. Charity is a cold thing—it is self-selecting. The state should be there to provide help and support. I am sure the Minister will be

able to indicate one way or the other whether the Government have any interest in supporting Lord McColl's Bill. I am sure Opposition Members would be happy to vote with the Government if they did support it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) pointed out, there are organisations doing work in this area. I am going to talk again about the Co-op Group's Bright Future partnership. That organisation has brought together charities, providers and first responders to give people who have been through modern slavery a way into paid employment—a route back to dignity without waiting for charity. By 2020, more than 300 victims of modern slavery will have been given their lives back through that project. We should commend the Co-op Group for leading the way with that work. I know many other companies are looking at the Co-op Group's work. All I can say to them is, "Go and ask, and help. They will help you become part of this life-changing partnership."

We need to prevent people from falling back into slavery. The 45-day period does not give those who are entitled to be in the UK enough time to apply for the required benefits, and it does not give those who are not entitled to be in the UK time to apply for leave to remain. It simply sets them up to fail on day 46. As a society, we simply must not allow that.

I am conscious of the time, so I will wrap up with some very quick points. I am aware that the Minister has a file of information to inform her reply, but I ask her to focus on six very simple areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): Just the six?

Gareth Snell: Just the six, yes. I have written them down, so it is very easy. Will the Government consider expanding section 54 to cover public bodies and smaller corporates? That would be a good step. Will the Minister update us on the Government's role in creating a database to properly enforce and actively police modern slavery declarations? Will she update us on where the Government are with the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner post and guarantee that person's independence? Will she, as an interim measure, implement the 45-day support that her Government promised in October 2017? Most importantly, if she confirmed that the Government were willing to support Lord McColl's Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill, we could all leave this place very happy people.

Several hon. Members rose—

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Order. As you are aware, there are many Members here and there is not much time left. I will call first those who informed the Chair that they wanted to speak, and you will have just over two minutes each. I call Fiona Bruce.

6.57 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I will focus chiefly on the support that is available to victims of trafficking to help prevent them from being left homeless, destitute and at risk of being re-trafficked. I support the proposal that the Government should adopt the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill.

Mention was made of the proposal to extend the move-on period from 14 days to 45 days. At the moment, that period is inadequate. It does not give people time to establish stable building blocks for their future. It is not long enough for non-UK nationals to apply for and be granted discretionary leave to remain, which gives victims access to housing benefit and other services. Extending that period to 12 months and offering victims accommodation and financial and other support, according to their needs, would enable victims to establish much more secure futures.

I know that the Government are concerned that that might prevent the removal of foreign criminals, but the Bill makes an exception for sexual or violent offenders who pose a genuine, present and serious risk to members of the public. The Government may also be concerned about cost, but the number of eligible victims each year would be very low. In 2016, just 1,133 people were confirmed as victims of trafficking with a positive conclusive grounds decision, so that proposal is unlikely to have a great impact on immigration.

Another concern is that people may self-identify as enslaved, but it is accepted that the opposite is ordinarily the case. Victims are often reluctant to come forward, for fear of retribution by their traffickers or fear of the authorities, or due to a perceived lack of long-term protection, which the Bill would address. In addition, victims cannot refer themselves to the NRM—that can be done only by a designated first responder organisation.

Finally, the proposal that the Government should offer six-month drop-in support, although positive, is inadequate. That period needs to be longer so that people can establish their futures.

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Well done.

6.59 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms McDonagh. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) on securing this important debate. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce).

It is only right that those who have experienced the appalling practice of modern slavery are provided with the support, tools and skills they need to get on in life. That is why I will focus my brief comments on Northern College in Barnsley and its "Free Thinking" programme, which is the first course of its kind. Earlier this year, it supported 14 survivors on a 10-week course, helping them to adapt to their freedom with tutoring in subjects such as English, maths and IT, and helping to restore qualities such as self-confidence and trust in humanity.

It was a privilege to visit the course and moving and inspiring to meet the survivors and hear their stories. Their own words speak of its success. One said:

"I've got more confidence... I can notice myself getting better and better every week that I come here."

Another said:

"I feel that I have really achieved something and that when I leave Northern College, I will feel able to apply for more...education. I am trying to move on from my past. This is a big step."

Others have spoken of its impact on their families. There is an on-site crèche that allows parents to take part in the course, which has a positive impact on the children too.

[Stephanie Peacock]

Northern College has pioneered the course, but not without facing obstacles. Some survivors may meet the requirements for funding but struggle with complex rules. Others have no access to transport. The Home Office's immigration bail regulations had been prohibitive for many survivors but, following my question in the House earlier this year, I am pleased that the guidance has been changed. I thank the Secretary of State for meeting me.

The "Free Thinking" course provides a blueprint for how we can make progress in addressing the terrible injustice of modern slavery here in the UK. I will end with the words of another survivor on the impact of the course:

"Sometimes I get down, but I'm very lucky to still be here. If I wasn't here, my story would just be in the past tense."

7.1 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Centuries after Wilberforce abolished the slave trade, it is a disgrace that around the world today some 27 million people are in modern slavery. I have had three big instances of it in my constituency on Traveller sites. In the first, 24 people were released from slavery. Some of them had been there for a decade or more, and 19 of them were British citizens. It is horrendous.

The NHS in particular can do a lot more—it is not as good as it should be at spotting victims of modern slavery. The all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking and modern slavery met the parents of a young, English learning-disabled man who was taken to a Welsh hospital to have his leg reset after he had fallen off a horse while being held captive. He was taken back again, and no one thought to ask any questions about why he was brought in with a group of Irish people who were not speaking with the same accent as him.

Good work is going on in some Welsh academic institutions to ensure that training on modern slavery becomes compulsory in undergraduate and postgraduate settings and for all healthcare staff. It should have the same priority as child protection training within the NHS. That would make a huge difference, because the "Provider Responses Treatment and Care for Trafficked People" report by King's College London showed that one in five victims of modern slavery comes into contact with healthcare professionals.

Last month, the Australian House of Representatives passed a modern slavery Bill that recognised orphanage trafficking, which has been defined as

"the active recruitment of children from families and communities into residential care institutions in overseas countries for the purposes of foreign funding and voluntourism."

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) is right to raise this point. We need to be world-leading and to take on what the Australians have demonstrated.

7.3 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for calling me in this important debate, Ms McDonagh. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) on his brilliant presentation. This debate is timely, with Anti-slavery Day coming up on the 18th of this month.

The tragedy of slavery is that it is a condition of human making, driven by greed and a pernicious desire to profit from excessively cheap labour, happening in plain sight. Sadly, my constituency has not been immune. In 2015, we had our first—I hope it is our last—conviction for modern-day slavery. Hungarian workers were promised good jobs and somewhere to stay, working in bed manufacturing, but on arrival they were shoved into dilapidated houses, some with up to 42 men living in two-bedroom properties, forced to work 10 to 16 hours a day, five to seven days a week, sometimes for as little as £10 a day, making beds for John Lewis and Next. It is a vile, disgusting crime, preying on workers desperate to forge a better life for themselves and their families. Thankfully, after excellent investigation work by local police, the owner was rightly convicted and sent to prison.

I am proud that the parent company of my local biscuit manufacturer, Fox's Biscuits—I worked there in my teens—2 Sisters, has signed up to the Co-op's Bright Future anti-slavery campaign. That scheme has worked with more than 30 victims of modern-day slavery who are now in employment and able to rebuild their lives.

Of course, we all have a part to play. As consumers, we have a duty to prevent exploitation by realising that if something looks like a ridiculous bargain, somewhere around the world someone has been exploited. We must step up and be accountable, empower those vulnerable to slavery, promote access to decent work and support trade unions. I also encourage anyone watching who feels they have seen or heard something to use the modern-day slavery helpline if needs be. The most vulnerable are relying on us.

7.5 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I take a particular interest in this topic because the police lead of the modern slavery taskforce is based in Exmouth in Devon, paid for from the police transformation fund. I commend the work it is doing, which I have been to see, to try to gather data and best practice and to share that. All credit to the Government for setting it up.

I have a couple of broader points. Modern-day slavery is very different from the old days of individuals in chains. It is less visible and tends to be psychology first—break the spirit and then the body. However, while everyone would say that slavery is a bad thing, people do not believe that it is happening in this country. There is a big challenge in getting the Great British public to accept that it is here; they cannot keep saying that it is not. Perhaps we need a Jamie Oliver to champion this cause.

The public have no idea what to look for. We have police guidance about looking for drawn curtains, but frankly if I were to knock on the door of every house in my constituency with drawn curtains, that would be quite a number. We need to do better. The reporting mechanisms do not include how charities and others, who are often more likely to come into contact with such individuals, can have a voice. That is an area to look at.

To get this right, we need clarity on what the Modern Slavery Act covers, because some economic crimes are better dealt with under employment and tax legislation, and other things are better dealt with under domestic legislation.

Businesses must recognise that there is a brand issue. Philips has been phenomenal in what it has done to unearth modern-day slavery issues. There are many programmes to help, but only the willing come forward, so more must be done to ensure that that changes.

We must move towards a victim-focused and less crime-focused approach, with not just the police and immigration authorities but others getting involved. Good job so far, Government, but there is more work to be done.

7.7 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) for securing this important debate and for introducing another six tests to remember. I support every single one of them.

I will make a very short speech—not least because I have only two minutes—about the unintended priority that this became as a consequence of being the new MP for Bristol North West. I grew up and have lived in my constituency for most of my life, but I never knew that modern slavery was taking place on my doorstep; it was not until I was elected that I came face to face with it, both through constituents in my surgeries and as a result of raids in Bristol thanks to the excellent work of Avon and Somerset police. I now understand about Bristol's excellent history with Unseen, which provides the national modern slavery helpline, which was established and is based in Bristol.

TISCreport, which I have already mentioned, is looking at supply chains' compliance with the Modern Slavery Act. I should add that even though I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central that the Home Office should have a statutory responsibility to ensure that data is used properly, that does not mean that it cannot work with non-governmental bodies to ensure it is done in the best possible way.

In my final minute, let me say that this is not just a domestic issue but an international one. We in the United Kingdom have something to be proud of in our work at home as well as abroad. I had the pleasure of being in Nairobi for 36 hours with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association during the summer recess, where I saw at first hand the impact that British money is having on the ground in Kenya not only in aid but in security. British police officers were working with Kenyan police officers to massively increase the enforcement potential in investigation on the ground, although interestingly there was a lack of resourcing for victim support—something that was pledged to change as a consequence of the CPA organising meetings between non-governmental organisations and Kenyan politicians.

My one question for the Minister—I am sorry to be the one to introduce the Brexit word—is whether the projects on the ground in Kenya and other countries that are co-funded by the European Union and the United Kingdom will continue to be funded in a no-deal scenario.

7.9 pm

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. I am extremely grateful to take part in it.

I was present in the 2015 Parliament, and I can attest to the Modern Slavery Act being a great leap forward, but it was an Act with a hole at the centre. I understand

why Ministers at that time made the judgment they did, but achieving the Government's ambition will be impossible unless we tackle the demand driving sex trafficking in our country, a form of modern slavery that almost exclusively targets women. As the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and I can attest, in Bedfordshire alone 53% of modern-day slavery cases over the past four years have been about sexual exploitation. The majority of women who are put through the national referral mechanism are trafficked into this country for sex.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on prostitution and the global sex trade. In our most recent report we demonstrated just how prolifically and how often women, mostly from eastern Europe, are trafficked around the UK, in a network of properties, in a revolving door of sexual exploitation organised by gangs to evade police detection. We talked about that in a previous debate. In that context, it is really difficult to understand why the review does not specifically target that point—perhaps the Minister can say something about that.

We know what we need to do: we need to support victims properly; criminal sanctions for soliciting on the street should be removed, to support women subject to street-based sexual exploitation in seeking help and exiting it; and demand needs to be tackled by making paying for sex a criminal offence in England and Wales. We should also target businesses that are profiting from the trade. Many countries around Europe have taken that approach, and we have seen the benefit. I hope that the Government will reflect on that as the review goes forward.

7.11 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I would like to endorse pretty much everything that everyone has said, but particularly the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell). I will not repeat anything he said, but I will make three quick points.

First, we need to be aware that investigating modern slavery is enormously resource-intensive for police forces. We have heard reference to the entirely appropriate use of resources in relation to the disgusting county lines phenomenon, which sadly affects my city of Oxford, as well as many other places. We had a large trial associated with modern slavery in Oxford, Operation Rague, but the processes needed to build up the right evidence for trials involve intensive and expensive use of police resources. We need to acknowledge that, particularly in the context of such significant cuts to policing. In that regard, we also need sustainable funding for innovations such as the independent trauma advisory service, commissioned by Thames Valley police and operating in Oxford and Reading. It is working well but needs to put on a sustainable footing.

Second, we need to spread examples of good practice more widely. Sadly, my city had to learn about some of the problems the hard way. After Operation Bullfinch we learned quickly that agencies had not worked together in the way that they should have done to protect vulnerable people. That has led to the hotel watch scheme in Oxford and extensive training for city council officers. Other places should not have to go through that in order to learn from the experience.

[Anneliese Dodds]

Lastly, we need to acknowledge that private sector reporting is good for the companies that engage in it. The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre has shown that investors want this information and companies such as Marks & Spencer have shown that reporting is good for them and their customer base—people want to know about it. We need to make sure that the public sector is complying too, for example in its uniform suppliers.

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Order. We have managed to get all the Back Benchers in. I have put a squeeze on the Front Benchers' contributions, so I would be grateful if they were all mindful of that.

7.13 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) for securing the debate. It is a timely opportunity to start contributing to the welcome review that the Government have announced. I congratulate all hon. Members for covering so much ground in so little time—I will try to do a little bit of justice to the debate.

I pay tribute to the work of the all-party parliamentary group. It is not just the chairs who have incredible expertise and commitment. At the few meetings that I have attended all the members have contributed fantastically, as has been illustrated by hon. Members' speeches. It is also good to see that the Minister and officials are engaging. I think everyone is genuinely committed to doing their best to try to tackle this horrendous issue. Hon. Members have, quite rightly, paid tribute to the huge range of individuals and institutions that are doing tremendous work on this issue. We are dealing with horrible offences, as the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) eloquently and powerfully set out.

The question we have tried to cover is how we can improve some of our response. The first issue raised was support for victims. There have been calls to put support on a statutory footing, as has happened in equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland and Scotland. The Government here may now want to do that. We have also talked about extending of the period for which support is in place to 45 days. After consultation with victims and NGOs in Scotland, the Government there have extended the period from 45 days to 90 days. We have to be evidence-led, and it may well be in due course that that is shown to be insufficient—the Government here may want to look at that as well.

That brings us on to the immigration rules. I used to be an immigration solicitor. I have to say, I find it incredibly difficult to understand what the status of victims is after they have been through the national referral mechanism. There is definitely a need for clarity and simplicity. I agree with the recommendation of the Work and Pensions Committee of an automatic period of leave, which could be for up to a year.

A number of hon. Members raised issues about training and the resourcing of frontline staff who will encounter victims of modern slavery. We heard about the police, and we have had reports from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary as well as the Haughey review. There is

a lot of work to do around sharing best practice from forces that do a very good job, such as Greater Manchester police. Some forces are doing it well, but can we expand that work? Other hon. Members mentioned local authorities and the health service as well.

Finally, there are a couple of issues that I will just mention in passing. We need to look again at the stage at which victims of modern slavery are entitled to legal aid, because they have big decisions to make before they have access to important legal advice. Finally, one or two hon. Members touched on Brexit. We could have a whole separate debate on the implications of Brexit for ethical trade, justice and home affairs co-operation and all sorts of other things, but I will leave it to the two other Front Benchers to expand on some of those points.

7.17 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I will be really brief. I apologise to my staff, who spent hours writing my speech. I would rather the Minister actually responded to some of the issues.

I congratulate everyone who has spoken today. All I would say to the Minister is that we have heard the passion and concerns throughout the debate from right across the House, and the numerous briefings that we have all received are testament to the gravity of this dreadful situation. I urge the Minister to reflect on today's debate, consider the depth of feelings and the emotions, listen to the concerns, make the appropriate safety net, and offer support for those who are not a commodity to be bought, sold and traded, but are human beings. We owe them the respect and dignity of ensuring that we provide for them.

7.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms McDonagh. Perhaps this is the new model for how we should do business in this House—we have had incisive and effective speeches in two minutes.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell). I thank him and all the members of the all-party parliamentary group who are here today, as well as those who are not with us but are dedicated in their wish to help us all tackle this terrible crime. I also pay tribute to the Bishop of Derby, who retired in the summer, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup), and thank him very much for all the work that he has done on this important cause, not just in recent years but when the Bill was taken through the House. I am told that there is an application for a Backbench Business Committee debate on this subject. The Committee has not yet confirmed that there will be a debate, but I suspect after today that there will be. I do not want to prejudge the Committee, but I think the House has shown how important it views this issue as being.

I hope the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central and other colleagues will forgive me if I do not manage to answer every point in the time I have, because I want to leave time at the end for him to sum up. If I have not responded to some points, I will of course write to him and place a copy in the Library.

We have heard today the cross-party understanding in the House of the horrors presented by modern slavery. This terrible crime can be committed in various ways, yet every time we are told of another case of slavery I am surprised by the range of offences and the ability of human beings to be evil to one another. We saw the case this week of the gentleman who was found in Cumbria. It is beyond my comprehension, and everyone else's, I am sure, how that person could have been treated in that way.

The Government are really proud of our introducing the Modern Slavery Act 2015, with the consent of Parliament. We are determined to ensure that that legislation remains world-leading in the face of the evolving threat, which is why we have commissioned an independent review of the Act to examine what is working well and what more can be done to improve its implementation. I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and Baroness Butler-Sloss for leading that work.

On the support that we give victims, I hope hon. Members will forgive me for taking this opportunity to announce that the independent child trafficking advocate service will be extended to children in the west midlands next week, on Anti-slavery Day. These advocates provide invaluable specialist support to child victims of modern slavery, and new regional co-ordinators will help local areas to identify and support UK victims. That will be followed by a further roll-out in the east midlands in January and in the London borough of Croydon in April, meaning that advocates will be available in one third of all local authorities in England and Wales.

Next week, I will launch the UK's day of action for the AMINA project, which aims to safeguard children from being trafficked across European borders. The project, in partnership with End Child Prostitution and Trafficking UK and Missing Children Europe, is a joint initiative between law enforcement, civil society and Government, and brings together agencies from across six countries to keep safe children on the move.

We continue to make significant progress in reforming the national referral mechanism, about which colleagues have expressed concerns today and in the past. The reforms will make a tangible difference to the experience of victims. We are already working with six local authorities to test ways to improve the pathways from central support into local communities, increasing victims' resilience to future exploitation.

Victims get a minimum of 45 days of assistance before a conclusive grounds decision. The extended move-on period after a conclusive grounds decision—from 14 days to 45 days—will begin in early 2019. By April 2019, the new expert caseworking unit will manage all NRM cases, with independent multi-agency assurance panels reviewing its negative conclusive grounds decisions, and a new digital referral and caseworking system will underpin the improved decision-making process to make it easier for those who work on the frontline.

Andrew Selous: I welcome the fact that child advocates are coming to some areas of the country, but I find it curious that the Government seem to roll out a range of public services in only some areas of the country. We should evaluate the roll-out and, if it is worth doing, we should do it everywhere.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend knows the Government's commitment to this issue. The new advocates will focus on UK victims because, as we have tested the ground with these schemes, we have discovered that the needs of children trafficked into the UK—from Vietnam, for example—are different from those of children trafficked within the UK and who are already UK citizens. The pilots in those three areas are aimed at seeing whether we can improve the system for children who are not from the United Kingdom while also helping children who are. That is particularly relevant with the development of county lines and children being used within those gangs, which has been referred to today.

Finally on the NRM, the new victim care contract will come into effect in April 2020. It will include additional support, such as places of safety in advance of entering the NRM for those removed directly from situations of exploitation by law enforcement, as well as drop-in centres for victims for up to six months after they have left the NRM, because we understand that people need time to make the important decisions on how they want to be treated.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central rightly raised transparency in supply chains, on which we have world-leading legislation. I recently chaired a meeting of the business against slavery forum, which draws together chief executives of some of the world's largest employers and organisations. We discussed what they are doing, what more can be done across business and how the Government can help with that. The forum includes organisations such as the Co-op, HSBC, Sky, Unilever, Vodafone, WPP, Barclays, BT, Associated British Foods and others, and there is real enthusiasm and energy in that group to help the UK tackle modern slavery.

However, too many businesses still fail to meet their basic legal obligation to publish transparency statements, or have shown that they are not taking serious action to tackle modern slavery. The Home Office will therefore over the next month write directly to the chief executives of 18,000 businesses considered to be in scope of the obligation. Those that persist in flouting their obligations can expect to face tougher consequences. The Government are also committed to tackling modern slavery in our own procurement. We are developing tools and guidance for contracting authorities in the public sector to help buyers mitigate risks of modern slavery and to take action where modern slavery is identified.

Law enforcement is a vital part of this picture. We want to successfully investigate and prosecute those who ensnare human beings in their gangs or slavery networks. We have invested £8.5 million to transform the police response through the modern slavery police transformation unit. That unit has established the intelligence base to target perpetrators and has developed bespoke training for frontline and senior detectives.

We are seeing encouraging results, with more than 950 live investigations currently under way, which, to put it into context, is up from 188 in 2016. There have been some very good convictions recently, as has been referred to, including last week the first conviction under modern slavery legislation of a county lines exploitation gang involving children. We want the message to be loud and clear: if a criminal gang leader exploits children in that way, they are guilty of grooming and should suffer the social stigma that that conveys.

Anne Marie Morris: Will the Minister consider extending the transformation funding to the Exmouth unit, which does such excellent work but which I suspect will not have finished doing what is needed by the end of its current grant?

Victoria Atkins: I will write to my hon. Friend on that. She will appreciate that the workings of the police transformation fund certainly cannot be explained in just two minutes.

I will move on to the international picture. The Prime Minister launched the global call to action to end modern slavery at last year's UN General Assembly, with more than 80 countries now endorsing that pledge. It is an extraordinary, worldwide commitment that shows that those countries are determined to join us in tackling this terrible crime. We are supporting our international efforts with more than £200 million of UK aid, and we work closely with the countries from which the highest number of victims are trafficked to the UK. Later this week I will meet the Albanian Minister for human trafficking to build on our co-operation and to agree how we can continue to work together to tackle this abhorrent crime.

To answer the questions asked of me, first, Mr Hyland always struck me as being very independent as our Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner; I am always amused when it is suggested that he was not.

Our recruitment of his successor is ongoing, and we are obviously keen to get the right person for the job as quickly as possible.

I am conscious of time, so if the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central will forgive me, I will write to him on the other points. I thank him for securing this important debate, and I very much hope that we will have the chance to debate this issue again soon in another Chamber.

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Gareth Snell has about 30 seconds to wind up the debate.

7.29 pm

Gareth Snell: I am good at winding up, Ms McDonagh. I thank the Minister for announcing that she will write to those 18,000 people. That is a good development, so far as I am concerned. I will write to her to try to pin her down slightly more on the early 2019 date; as we know, this Government think that autumn goes up to Christmas eve.

The appetite is there and the need is clear. The only thing holding us back is our political will. By our collective efforts, we can make a real difference in tackling modern slavery, particularly during this month.

7.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 9 October 2018

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Business Update

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): Last week I published a Call for Evidence seeking views on the extent and impact of late payment and measures to go further in tackling the issue. This follows the commitment made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his 2018 spring statement that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy would lead on a call for evidence to ‘eliminate the continuing scourge of late payments’.

Since 2012, the overall level of late payment debt owed to SMEs has fallen substantially, to £14.2 billion last year, down from £30.3 billion five years ago according to BACS, the payment service provider. While the halving of late payment debt is welcome, I am determined to see this reduce still further.

Alongside this publication, I announced that the Government would take immediate action to tackle late payment, by introducing the following measures:

A new, tough and transparent compliance regime to underpin the prompt payment Code. The Small Business Commissioner will join the code’s compliance board to provide independence from industry and the board will report on all cases of signatories being removed from the Code. Further reform to the Code will be considered through the call for evidence, including whether the Small Business Commissioner should have a greater role in its Administration.

The Call for Evidence will also consider the best way to ensure all companies have responsible payment practices in their supply chains, including whether all company boards should give one of their non-executive directors responsibilities for prompt payment.

The Call for Evidence will be open until 29 November and I encourage businesses of all sizes to respond; I want to understand the impacts, experiences and reasoning’s for particular payment practices and views on what more can be done to enhance the payments process.

I will be depositing copies of the Call for Evidence document in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS971]

Labour Market Update

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): I am writing to inform the House that over conference recess I announced the Government’s intention to: legislate to ban employers from retaining tips earned by their staff; consider creating a duty for employers to advertise all jobs as flexible unless there is a good business reason not to; and to consult on whether large employers (those with 250 or more employees) should be required to publish their parental leave and pay policies.

Tipping

The Government will introduce legislation to ban employers from making deductions from tips, ensuring tips go to the workers providing the service. While most employers act in good faith, in some sectors evidence points towards poor tipping practices, including excessive deductions being made from tips left in good faith by customers.

This legislation will give consumers reassurance that the tips they leave are going to the staff, as they intended. It follows a consultation which found a majority of respondents in favour of preventing any employer deductions from discretionary payments, except those required under tax law.

The Government will announce further details in due course, including measures to ensure employers are able to continue to distribute tips via independent and staff-run “tronic” systems.

Flexible working

The ability to work flexibly enables people—both men and women—to balance their work and home lives more effectively. Moreover, flexible working gives employers access to a wider talent pool and enables better matching of applicants and jobs. Employee engagement, performance and productivity are also improved.

However, flexible working is still relatively uncommon, which sometimes holds people back from requesting it. The Government would like it to be clearer from the outset whether flexible working is an option. Research indicates only 9.8% of quality job vacancies are advertised as open some kind of flexible working, yet many more are likely to be.

The Government want employers to consider whether a job can be done flexibly, and to make that clear when advertising. There are many good reasons why a job might not be suitable for flexible working, but where it is, signalling this at the outset will encourage interest from a wider range of candidates and enable both sides to take full advantage of the flexibility.

Transparency on parental leave and pay

Statutory entitlements to parental leave and pay enable mothers who want to return to work earlier to do so and enable more fathers and partners to be their child’s main carer where this is best for the family. Statutory entitlements are also important in closing the gender pay gap, by providing parents with more opportunities to remain in work and to progress their careers.

Many employers offer enhancements to the statutory entitlements, but surprisingly few publicise these policies. This means that job applicants have to ask specifically about these policies—which some may be reluctant to do.

Mandatory gender pay gap reporting, introduced in April 2017, already provides a clear incentive to large employers to review their policies and recruitment procedures and to publicise those that enable them to recruit and retain female talent. The Government want to accelerate that improvement by encouraging large employers to publish their parental leave and pay policies, and will consult on a proposal to require large employers to publish their parental leave and pay policies.

[HCWS977]

CABINET OFFICE

GOV.UK Verify Programme

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): I want to update the House on the GOV.UK Verify programme, on the creation of a digital identity market, and the provision of a digital identity service to Government.

Since its inception, GOV.UK Verify has sought to create an effective standards based digital identity market in the UK. International examples point to the challenges in successfully creating a secure digital identity framework for the public and private sector. I am proud that the UK is regarded as a global leader in this space, and that the innovative assets and standards created by the GOV.UK Verify programme have been utilised by numerous international Governments.

GOV.UK Verify is now sufficiently mature to move to the next phase of its development. The private sector will take responsibility for broadening the usage and application of digital identity in the UK.

I can confirm that contracts have been signed with a number of private sector identity providers, for an 18 month period, and with capped expenditure. These commercial arrangements formalise the transition to a private sector led model.

The Government have an immediate and growing need for digital identity. As such, I am pleased to confirm that the GOV.UK Verify programme will continue providing a digital identity service to the public sector.

Poorly secured services are vulnerable to attack from cyber crime and other hostile activity. GOV.UK Verify enables citizens to securely prove that they are who they say they are to a high degree of confidence when transacting with Government online. It is a major enabler and a critical dependency for Government's digital transformation.

The Government will continue to provide state backed assurance and standards to ensure there is trust and confidence in the emergent digital identity market. The Government expect that commercial organisations will create and reuse digital identities, and accelerate the creation of an interoperable digital identity market. This is therefore the last investment that the Government will provide to directly support the GOV.UK Verify programme. It will be the responsibility of the private sector to invest to ensure the delivery of this product beyond the above period.

The approach announced today ensures that GOV.UK Verify will continue to protect public sector digital services from cyber threats, including identity fraud, and other malicious activity. In addition, the contracts enable the private sector to develop affordable identity assurance services that will meet future private and public sector needs.

I am pleased that the Government can continue to support the creation of a digital identity market, and the work of the GOV.UK Verify programme.

[HCWS978]

DEFENCE

Airborne Warning and Control System

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): I am pleased to inform the House today that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has begun discussions with Boeing about the potential for the E-7 Advanced Early Warning and Control "Wedgetail" aircraft to replace the current Sentry fleet.

Since the 2015 strategic defence and security review, the MOD has undertaken significant work to understand the best way to invest in and improve the RAF's airborne warning and control capability. As part of that work, we have considered the defence requirement and rapidly evolving threat environment, conducted market analysis, and held discussions with our close allies, so we could fully understand the options available to us.

It has become increasingly apparent that an upgrade to the existing UK E-3 Sentry aircraft will not offer best value in meeting the UK's capability requirement. As such, the E-7 Wedgetail, which has been proven on operations and is already in use by the Royal Australian Air Force, is likely to be the best option to provide "eyes in the sky" surveillance for UK forces.

The MOD is now taking forward single source discussions with Boeing. This does not, however, represent a final decision; any purchase will be subject to the MOD'S usual acquisition approval processes.

As discussions are still at a very early stage, it would not be appropriate to provide detailed information on the industrial and economic impact that a final procurement decision could have. The MOD understands, however, that Boeing is in discussions with a number of UK suppliers and is expecting to make significant use of the UK supply chain to undertake the conversion and through-life support of these UK aircraft.

The decision to begin single source engagement with Boeing has only been taken after a full consideration of potential options in the market, balanced with a pressing capability need. While the UK remains committed to the principle of open competition to fulfil defence requirements, in this instance, the potential procurement of E-7 represents the lowest risk and is likely to offer best value for money for the UK. It will also provide our armed forces with a highly-effective, world-leading capability.

[HCWS974]

Type 26 Frigates Base-Porting

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Today I am confirming our plans to base-port the Royal Navy's Type 26 Frigates at HM Naval Base Devonport in Plymouth. This decision is judged to be in the best interests of the Service and to provide greater stability for Service Personnel and their families.

Navy Command and the Defence Equipment and Support organisation will continue to work closely with our industrial partners to ensure that the transition from the current anti-submarine Warfare Type 23 Frigates to the new class is effectively managed.

There has been much interest in this subject from hon. Members representing both Plymouth and Portsmouth who have spoken passionately in support of their respective bases becoming the home of the Type 26 Frigates. This decision should in no way be seen as a reduced commitment to Portsmouth; both naval bases will continue to support the Royal Navy, allowing the Service to continue to meet the tasks we ask in countering the threats we face and protecting the nation's security.

[HCWS975]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU Exit

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Dominic Raab): As announced by the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on 18 July 2018, the Government are publishing a series of technical notices during August and September. On Thursday 23 August, we published 25 of these notices, and on Thursday 13 September, we published a further 28. During parliamentary recess on Monday 24 September, we published a further 24 technical notices. These notices are designed to inform people, businesses and stakeholders about steps they may need to take in the event of a no-deal scenario.

Notices were published on the following areas:

- Registration of veterinary medicines
- Regulation of veterinary medicines
- Accessing animal medicine IT systems
- Exporting animals and animal products
- Importing animals and animal products
- Flights to and from the UK
- Aviation safety
- Aviation security
- Trade marks and designs
- Patents
- Copyright
- Exhaustion of intellectual property rights
- European Territorial Cooperation funding
- Generating low-carbon electricity
- Regulating chemicals (REACH)
- Manufacturing and marketing fertilisers
- Producing and labelling food
- Importing and exporting plants
- Taking your pet abroad
- Operating bus or coach services abroad
- Commercial road haulage in the EU
- Buying and selling timber
- Vehicle insurance
- Geographical Indicators

Notices are being published on gov.uk. These can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/how-to-prepare-if-the-uk-leaves-the-eu-with-no-deal>.

Copies of notices have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses to ensure all Members have access, and we will continue to ensure that technical notices are made available to Members.

[HCWS970]

General Affairs Council, 18 September 2018

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting on 18 September in Brussels. A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found on the Council of the European Union's website at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2018/09/18>.

Multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-27

The presidency provided Ministers with an update on the Commission's proposal on the MFF. Ministers discussed the extent to which EU policy priorities and the allocation of funds to different policy areas were reflected in the MFF proposal. The Commission reiterated its intention to reach consensus on the proposals ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections. I did not intervene in the discussion on the basis that, while the UK had an interest in participation in some programmes, it was for other member states to discuss and agree the overall priorities and funds allocations for the next MFF.

Presentation of the priorities of the Austrian presidency

The presidency indicated that it intended to prioritise managing migration, removing overregulation in the digital single market and creating stability in the western Balkans.

Legislative programming

The Council discussed the letter of intent issued by the Commission on 12 September which set out its legislative priorities for 2019. The Commission will consider member states' views on the proposals as it finalises its work programme. The programme is expected to be published in October and will be discussed by Ministers at the General Affairs Council meeting on 12 November. The presidency also highlighted the need to complete important legislative files before the end of the current Commission President's term in 2019. Ministers continued their discussion on legislative programming over a working lunch where I intervened to reiterate the UK's support for policy areas, such as the digital single market, trade and external security, in which the UK is looking to build a new relationship with the EU following our exit.

Preparation of the October European Council on 18 October 2018

Ministers considered the annotated draft agenda for the October European Council. Leaders are expected to discuss migration and internal security. There were no interventions from member states on this agenda item.

Rule of law in Poland/article 7(1) TEU reasoned proposal

The Council held a second hearing under article 7(1) TEU on the rule of law in Poland. The Commission reiterated its concerns in this matter and presented the reasons behind its decision in July to start infringement proceedings against Poland in response to the lowering of the retirement age of Supreme Court judges from 70 to 65. In reply, Poland delivered a presentation on the evolution of its judicial reforms and argued its right to make changes which were consistent with the Polish constitution. The UK was among 16 member states which did not intervene in the hearing. The presidency indicated that Ministers would return to this matter at future Council meetings.

[HCWS973]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Clinical Waste Update

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): This statement is to update the House on an issue concerning clinical waste collection and disposal for hospitals and other public services.

On 31 July, the Environment Agency notified central Government of an issue concerning clinical waste collection and disposal for hospitals and other public services provided by the company, Healthcare Environmental Services (HES). In this instance, the primary concern was that too much waste was being held in a number of waste storage and treatment sites by a contractor, Healthcare Environment Services (HES). While the waste was stored securely, it was not being processed and disposed of within the correct regulatory timescales. At no point has there been an impact on public health or any delay to the ability of the NHS to carry out operations.

The Department of Health and Social Care, DEFRA, the Cabinet Office, NHS England, NHS Improvement and the Environment Agency have worked together to resolve these issues. From the outset, the Government's priority have been to ensure measures were put in place so that trusts could continue operating as normal should there be any disruption to waste collection and disposal. This objective has been achieved. The Department of Health and Social Care has worked with the NHS to help trusts put these contingency plans in place. A major part of these contingency plans concerned contractual discussions with HES and other providers which were commercially sensitive.

Following the Environment Agency's issuing of a partial closure to HES's Normanton site, on 3 October the regulator, NHS Improvement, issued a letter to HES to advise them that they had concerns in respect of services provided to trusts. To give HES an opportunity to set out how it was complying with its legal and contractual obligations, NHSI gave HES 48 hours to provide evidence that they were operating within legal and contractual parameters and set out a number of threshold levels. NHSI concluded that HES failed to demonstrate that they were operating within their contractual limits. Consequently, 15 NHS trusts served termination notices to HES formally to terminate their contracts at 4 pm on Sunday 7 October. In parallel, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Cabinet Office, NHS Improvement and the affected trusts have negotiated a new contract with Mitie to step in and replace this service. This contract was enacted, following the termination of the contract with HES, and Mitie have been fully operational across all affected trust sites from Monday morning.

Throughout, the Government's priority have been to ensure measures were put in place so that NHS trusts can continue operating as normal. No gap in service provision has been reported and we are working to ensure that this remains the case.

The Environment Agency are taking enforcement action against HES to clear the excess waste from their sites and bring the company back into compliance with their permits. As part of this enforcement activity, the Environment Agency have partially suspended the company's permit at their Normanton site. This will prevent HES from accepting any more incinerator-only waste, as the company focuses on clearing the backlog of waste on-site. The Environment Agency are also progressing with enforcement action at the other non-compliant sites. This includes following up the first enforcement notice for the HES Newcastle site. If the site does not become compliant, the likely next stage is a partial suspension to prevent the acceptance of incinerator-only waste at Newcastle. It is the company's responsibility to clear its sites and operate legally.

I am updating the House on this situation now, given that new contracts have been signed following the conclusion of the commercially sensitive process. I can confirm that NHS services continue to operate as normal. We are ensuring that there are contingency plans in place in case of any disruption, and that there is absolutely no risk to the health of patients or the wider public. The Government are working with the Environment Agency and NHS to ensure lessons are learnt, and we are reviewing how contracts will be awarded in the future.

[HCWS972]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Safety Update

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): My Department published a consultation earlier this year on a proposal to introduce a ban on the use of combustible materials in the external walls of high-rise residential buildings.

I would like to update the House to confirm that the Government will take forward this ban for all new buildings over 18 metres that contain flats, as well as new hospitals, residential care premises, residential schools and student accommodation above 18 metres.

This ban will be delivered through changes to building regulations and will limit materials available to products achieving a European classification of Class A1 or A2. The Government will publish the consultation outcome and ensure the regulations are brought forward as soon as possible later this autumn.

[HCWS976]

Petitions

Tuesday 9 October 2018

OBSERVATIONS

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Football club ownership

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 financial 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 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.—[Presented by *Chi Onwurah*, *Official Report*, 24 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 984.]

[P002251]

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):

The Government note the petition of 24 July, and make the following observations:

The Government welcome the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised over the ownership of professional football clubs and in particular that of Newcastle United FC, one of our oldest and best supported clubs.

In order to take up a controlling interest in a club, individuals must prior to becoming an owner, and then annually, pass an Owners and Directors test (formerly fit and proper persons). The Test is an assessment of who is legally fit to own a football club. It is based on a set of objective criteria, such as whether an individual is banned from being a company director or has been involved in more than one administration at a football club since 2004.

The football authorities have agreed to keep the Owners and Directors Test under regular review and to listen to supporters' concerns. This commitment is set out in the Government's Expert Working Group's report on Supporter Ownership and Engagement published in early 2016.

The Premier League has additional, wide-ranging rules in the areas of club ownership and finance. Under League rules, the ultimate beneficial owners of all clubs must be publicly disclosed. The full chain of ownership must also be disclosed to the League. Prospective new owners have to meet the Premier League Board and provide extensive detail on the sources and sufficiency of funding they have in place.

Clubs must also submit information on the financial structure of any proposed investment, and a business

plan demonstrating that all liabilities can be met for at least 12 months ahead; submit independently audited accounts to the Premier League each season; and submit quarterly reports demonstrating they are up to date with PAYE and NI payments to Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs.

The Government wholeheartedly recognise that football clubs are valuable to their local communities, and the utmost care should be taken by their owners and stakeholders to protect their long-term future. Further, the Government recognise that fans have every right to ask questions of those that run their clubs. It is essential we have healthy football clubs, and owners who care for and respect their tradition and fan base.

The Government have invested significant time over the last few years to find ways to improve supporter engagement beyond the customer relationship, into recognising them as an integral part of clubs' success. A key recommendation (which is now enshrined in football's rulebooks) from the Government's Expert Working Group on football supporter ownership and engagement is that all clubs in the top four divisions must ensure there is open dialogue between club owners/senior executives and their supporter groups on the matters of most importance to the running of the club. These meetings lead the way in ensuring fans are better informed and consulted on club activities, including its financial standing, future plans; and other matters of real importance. The Government believe this structured engagement is helping to build relationships over time.

Turning specifically to Newcastle United FC, the Government are not aware of any failing by the current owners to meet the Premier League's requirements to ensure facilities are maintained to the required standard, to comply with the financial reporting and ownership criteria rule outlined above, nor the requirement to meet with supporters to discuss matters important to the running of the club. The Government, however, have noted the concern among supporters that has led to this petition and would encourage the ownership of Newcastle United FC to review the way they currently engage with fans to see if more can be achieved in this area.

The Government will continue to hold the football authorities to account for ensuring there are regulations in place that encourage good governance, sustainable investment and ensure there is dialogue with supporters.

EDUCATION

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of Brighton Pavilion,

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 Caroline Lucas, *Official Report*, 12 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 23P.]

[P002266]

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.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Funding cuts to North Lincolnshire Citizens Advice Bureau

The petition of residents of North Lincolnshire,

Declares that the decision of North Lincolnshire Council to cease their core funding for North Lincolnshire Citizens Advice Bureau is putting the long-term future of the Citizens Advice Bureau at risk, and means that service provision will be adversely affected and jobs will be lost at an outstanding organisation which has served the North Lincolnshire community so well for such a long time.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to intervene with North Lincolnshire Council to keep the funding for North Lincolnshire Citizens Advice Bureau.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Nic Dakin, *Official Report*, 17 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 374.]

[P002216]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):

The Government recognise the important role that councils play in helping to support community services, which is why the 2018-19 Local Government finance settlement sees a £1.3 billion increase in resources to Local Government over the next two years.

Our fair and sustainable financial settlement gives local authorities the ability to protect important local services. As democratically elected organisations, local authorities are independent of central Government and are responsible for managing their budgets in line with local priorities.

The Government expect local authorities to take on the challenge of making savings, while continuing to provide a range of high quality services to local communities.

WALES

Park Rangers in Wrexham County Borough Council

The petition of residents of Cefn Mawr in Clwyd South,

Declares that nature parks are an important part of our environmental heritage; further that they provide an area in which residents and visitors can enjoy nature and open spaces and play a vital role in the conservation and protection of nature; and further that local country parks including Ty Mawr Country Park, Nant Mill Country Park and Alyn Waters Country Park are well used by the community and attract visitors to the area, therefore helping to support the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to urge Wrexham County Borough Council to reverse their decision to

reduce funding for Park Rangers, whose role is vital to the continued existence of unspoilt country parks in Clwyd South constituency.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Susan Elan Jones, Official Report*, 18 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 377.]

[P002133]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):

Local government in Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for the UK Government to comment on this issue.

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 9 October 2018

TREASURY

Household Debt

The following is an extract from Treasury Questions on 11 September 2018.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): British families are currently spending considerably more than their disposable income and, as a consequence, debt levels in relation to income are rising back to crisis levels. At the same time, France and Germany have big savings surpluses. Which is the most sustainable of the two options?

John Glen: What is sustainable is that real household disposable income is up by 4.6% since 2010. I acknowledge that there are those who are experiencing challenges, and that is why I have set out the measures the Government are taking and are determined to take to assist those in a vulnerable position.

[Official Report, 11 September 2018, Vol. 646, c. 586.]

Letter of correction from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable).

The correct response should have been:

John Glen: What is sustainable is that real household disposable income is up by 3.4% since 2010. I acknowledge that there are those who are experiencing challenges, and that is why I have set out the measures the Government are taking and are determined to take to assist those in a vulnerable position.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Defined-benefit Pension Schemes

The following is an extract from a debate in Westminster Hall on Defined-benefit Pension Schemes on 10 July 2018.

Guy Opperman: For the avoidance of doubt among everyone reading the debate, the PPF compensation scheme ensures that individuals receive at least 90% of their pension benefits.

[Official Report, 10 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 330WH.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman).

An error has been identified in my response to the debate.

The correct wording should have been:

Guy Opperman: For the avoidance of doubt among everyone reading the debate, the PPF compensation scheme ensures that individuals **initially** receive at least 90% of their pension benefits, **subject to an overall cap**.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Topical Questions

The following is an extract from Women and Equalities Topical Questions on Thursday 13 September 2018.

T5. [906885] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): It is extremely important that the injustice suffered by the WASPI women is not allowed to slip off the political agenda, because many women in my constituency are suffering terribly as a result. Will the Minister stand up for women and commit today to urging the Chancellor to put in place transitional arrangements at the autumn Budget?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady will be aware that £1.1 billion of concessions have been made, and it is really important to note that as a result of our reforms, more than 3 million **more** women will receive £550 a year more by 2030.

[Official Report, 13 September 2018, Vol. 646, c. 866.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson).

The correct response should have been:

T5. [906885] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): It is extremely important that the injustice suffered by the WASPI women is not allowed to slip off the political agenda, because many women in my constituency are suffering terribly as a result. Will the Minister stand up for women and commit today to urging the Chancellor to put in place transitional arrangements at the autumn Budget?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady will be aware that £1.1 billion of concessions have been made, and it is really important to note that as a result of our reforms, more than 3 million women will receive **on average** £550 a year more by 2030.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 9 October 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
JUSTICE	2	JUSTICE—continued	
Bailiffs.....	2	Offenders and Employment	4
Burglary and Custodial Sentences.....	18	Private Prosecutions.....	3
Court Experience for Victims and Witnesses.....	16	Probation Services.....	6
Court System	15	School Exclusion.....	18
Employment and Education: Reoffending		Sentences: Reoffending Reduction	8
Reduction	14	Sport and Recidivism	10
Law Centres	17	Topical Questions	19
Mobile Phones in Prison	13	Violence in Prisons.....	12

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 9 October 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	5WS
STRATEGY	1WS	EU Exit.....	5WS
Business Update.....	1WS	General Affairs Council, 18 September 2018.....	6WS
Labour Market Update.....	1WS		
CABINET OFFICE	3WS	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	7WS
GOV.UK Verify Programme	3WS	Clinical Waste Update	7WS
DEFENCE	4WS	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL	
Airborne Warning and Control System.....	4WS	GOVERNMENT	8WS
Type 26 Frigates Base-Porting.....	4WS	Building Safety Update	8WS

PETITIONS

Tuesday 9 October 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	1P	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL	
Football club ownership.....	1P	GOVERNMENT	4P
		Funding cuts to North Lincolnshire Citizens	
		Advice Bureau	4P
EDUCATION	2P	WALES	4P
Home Education: draft guidance and the		Park Rangers in Wrexham County Borough	
consultation	2P	Council	4P

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Tuesday 9 October 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
TREASURY	1MC	WORK AND PENSIONS	1MC
Household Debt.....	1MC	Defined-benefit Pension Schemes.....	1MC
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES	2MC		
Topical Questions	2MC		

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 16 October 2018**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 9 October 2018

List of Government and Principal Officers of the House

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 2] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Justice

Food Labelling and Allergy-Related Deaths [Col. 25]
Answer to urgent question—(David Rutley)

Dangerous Waste and Body Parts Disposal: NHS [Col. 34]
Answer to urgent question—(Stephen Barclay)

Government Overseas Aid Commitment: Private Investment [Col. 42]
Answer to urgent question—(Penny Mordaunt)

EU Exit Negotiations [Col. 51]
Statement—(Dominic Raab)

Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences) [Col. 74]
*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Alex Norris)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time*

Backbench Business

Baby Loss Awareness Week [Col. 77]
Motion—(Antoinette Sandbach)—agreed to

Business Rates: Small Retail Businesses [Col. 113]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Oil and Gas Industry [Col. 1WH]
Antisocial Behaviour: Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire [Col. 24WH]
Business Banking Fraud [Col. 33WH]
Cost of School Uniforms [Col. 58WH]
Modern-day Slavery [Col. 66WH]
General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 1WS]

Petitions [Col. 1P]
Observations

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 1MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
