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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday 30 October 2018

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Sexual Violence in Conflict

1. **Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What diplomatic steps he is taking to tackle sexual violence in conflict throughout the world. [907343]

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): The UK Government continue to lead global efforts to end the horror of sexual violence in conflict. We have developed tools to improve the chances of justice for survivors and in June secured sanctions against seven Burmese military officials. We will host an international conference in 2019 to galvanise the world into further action.

Dr Johnson: Given that the recent UN taskforce report highlighted appalling examples of sexual violence against Rohingya Muslims in Burma, I welcome the announcement that the Secretary of State made on his recent visit to Rakhine of increased support to victims of this terrible crime, but what can be done to increase the resources available to other conflict regions?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming the announcement and highlighting the work of that team of experts, who have now been deployed, I think, to 26 countries on a wide range of cases, have helped to train 17,000 people to make sure that evidence is secured and have worked extensively on this important issue in a range of situations around the world.¹

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The use of sexual violence was an ugly characteristic of the Sri Lankan civil war under the stewardship of Mahinda Rajapaksa, and now the very same man is back in office, illegitimately, as the Prime Minister of that country. Will the Minister now, and the Foreign Secretary shortly during topical questions, condemn unreservedly the turn of events in Sri Lanka and make sure we never see a return to those dark days of appalling human rights abuses under the Rajapaksas?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue, which I know has captivated the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Asia

and the Pacific. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Foreign Secretary will be calling the President today, I think, to discuss this very matter.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): What diplomatic actions are being taken to assist with the return of the 113 Chibok girls who were seized from their school by Boko Haram in 2014, four and a half years ago, and are still missing? Tragically, many of them will have suffered terrible, horrific sexual and physical violence.

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. As many will remember, that campaign is now four years old, yet 113 of the girls have still not been returned. The UK consistently offers its support for the Nigerian Government's efforts to return these girls to their homes, and we stand ready to do more if requested.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that there are many Rohingya children living in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Will she set out in more detail what she is doing to support these boys and girls, who are at extreme risk of sexual violence?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is right to widen the question to the extensive part of the population affected by this terrible crisis. He will know that, from a humanitarian point of view, the UK is contributing £129 million to address it, including through the kind of psychosocial support he refers to.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): In recent years, the UN Population Fund has operated fearlessly at the frontline of conflict, helping hundreds of thousands of girls and women who have suffered sexual violence. Does the Minister agree that it is utterly reprehensible that Donald Trump has eliminated US funding for that agency to the tune of \$700 million? Is that not one more demonstration that the current US President could not care less about women and their rights?

Harriett Baldwin: I am happy to be answerable at the Dispatch Box for the actions of the UK Government, and I can assure the hon. Lady that the UK continues to support this important work and, in fact, to do more on things such as access to safe family planning around the world.

Illegal Wildlife Trade

2. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What steps the Government are taking with international partners to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. [907344]

9. **George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): What steps the Government are taking with international partners to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. [907351]

13. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What steps the Government are taking with international partners to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. [907355]

1. [Official Report, 12 November 2018, Vol. 649, c. 2MC.]

16. **Chris Evans** (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Government are taking with international partners to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. [907358]

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): Earlier this month, London hosted the largest ever illegal wildlife trade conference, with representation from more than 70 countries and 400 organisations. Ministers from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for International Development announced additional support for developing countries to tackle IWT. I pay tribute my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) for all the work that they have done and continue to do to advance this agenda.

Neil Parish: Many of the countries where there is wildlife crime involving iconic species such as elephant and rhino are war-torn. That is a huge problem that makes it dangerous for the rangers and others who try to protect the wildlife. What more can we do to help war-torn countries? It is essential that we do so.

Mark Field: I am sure my hon. Friend is grateful that the London conference highlighted the links he has pointed out between human conflict and IWT. DFID has committed to spend at least 50% of its annual budget in fragile and conflict-afflicted states. Although that does not impact directly on IWT, it should help to reduce it. The IWT challenge fund and the Darwin fund have also supported projects in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and Sudan. Trophy hunting occurs in a few countries with well-developed tourist industries, but it is unlikely to be a major feature of war-torn countries.

George Freeman: I congratulate and thank the Ministers for what they are doing to tackle this appalling trade. Does he agree that one of the most important aspects of tackling it is to create mutual economic interest for local tribespeople and farmers to support wildlife? Does he support the work of the excellent Laikipia Wildlife Forum in Kenya, which was set up by the great British conservationist Dr Anthony King?

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. A Chatham House study presented at the London conference on transboundary green corridors supported the view that the creation of jobs and local prosperity partnerships can indeed help to protect endangered species. That is why we secured an uplift of some £6 million for the IWT challenge fund, and why DFID is committed to further such work to address these issues.

John Lamont: Now that the Government have confirmed that we will adopt a world-leading ban on the ivory trade that applies to ivory of all ages, what steps is the Minister taking to put pressure on other countries to adopt a similar measure, particularly those in the Chinese area?

Mark Field: We very much welcome China's closure of the domestic ivory market. It is, of course, the single largest market in the world. It is vital to ensure that the

ban is properly and fully enforced, and that the ivory trade is not allowed simply to relocate to other parts of south-east Asia, or indeed anywhere else. We shall continue to work with the Chinese Government and other Governments to ensure that that does not happen.

Chris Evans: The illegal poaching trade is worth £16 billion worldwide and is one of the largest organised crimes in the world. What assurance can the Minister give the House that that money is not being laundered through UK banks?

Mark Field: In specific terms, I cannot give direct assurances, but that is clearly something we will work on. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the illegal wildlife trade is very much a security issue. One of the real achievements of the conference—something for which I have pushed for some time—was that it made that clear. IWT is often the soft underbelly of the very worst sorts of criminality, not least money laundering, the narcotics trade and people trafficking.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In the media today, there are indications that China intends to lift its ban on the sale of rhino and tiger remedies. What discussions has the Minister had with the Chinese Government to ensure that the ban is retained, not removed?

Mark Field: We are aware of the announcement by the Chinese State Council in the last couple of days concerning the domestic trade in tiger bone and rhino horn. We are concerned, and we will make representations that any changes should not have a negative impact on the tackling of the illegal wildlife trade. Of course, we will raise this issue at the earliest opportunity with our Chinese counterparts.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister speak about the connection between wildlife crime and other forms of instability. Does he agree that the work that is done by several organisations to preserve not just natural heritage but architectural and archaeological heritage is essential in helping people to have the sense of identity, place and belonging that is so essential to resisting forces such as ISIS and other extremist elements?

Mark Field: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I spoke earlier about the need globally to recognise that in the case of criminality, we live in an interconnected world. As he rightly points out, a sense of place and being is an important aspect. Many might feel that a concentration on the illegal wildlife trade is, to a certain extent, a Cinderella area, but it is an important aspect of what the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is trying to achieve through its soft power initiatives.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his work in making the illegal wildlife trade summit a couple of weeks ago an enormous success. I know he will join me in welcoming the efforts of Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and Botswana to work together to deliver the KAZA programme, a massively ambitious cross-border conservation plan linking their countries together. May I urge him to use all his diplomatic skills to support that initiative and also to ensure that DFID provides whatever support it can?

Mark Field: I should perhaps thank my hon. Friend again: not only is he very committed to this, but a huge amount of his time over the past six months was spent on ensuring that the IWT conference was such a great success. I do not want to step on the toes of my hon. Friend the Minister for Africa on these matters, but I will of course do all that I can. The other important aspect of what we are trying to achieve with elephant corridors such as the one to which my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) referred is to recognise that technology has an important part to play in clamping down on the illegal wildlife trade. That is an important aspect of where we see this issue going in the years to come.

Saudi Arabia: Human Rights

3. Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Saudi Arabia on the protection of human rights in that country. [907345]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I regularly discuss human rights concerns with my Saudi Arabian counterpart Foreign Minister al-Jubeir, most recently on 27 September and 20 October.

Gill Furniss: Media reports have surfaced this weekend suggesting that UK intelligence services were aware of the Saudi plan to abduct the journalist Jamal Khashoggi and take him back to Riyadh, and of the deployment of the hit squad to Istanbul for that purpose. May I give the Foreign Secretary the opportunity to tell the House today that those reports are categorically untrue?

Mr Hunt: I hope the hon. Lady will understand that I do not comment on intelligence matters, but, if this reassures her, I had absolutely no prior knowledge myself of the terrible Khashoggi murder and was as shocked as I think everyone else was.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): It has been reported today that 17 Filipino women are being held in custody in Saudi Arabia for the heinous crime of attending a Halloween party. How much more oppressive does the Saudi regime have to get before it loses its esteemed place as Britain's greatest friend in the middle east?

Mr Hunt: Saudi Arabia is a human rights country of concern for the Foreign Office. We have regular discussions with the Saudis about our concerns—the guardianship system, freedom of expression, the death penalty and a range of other issues—but it is because we have a relationship with them that we are able to raise these concerns both privately and in public, and the hon. Gentleman should rest assured that that is exactly what we do.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Do we have any regret about seeking the election of Saudi Arabia to the Human Rights Council?

Mr Hunt: All sorts of issues with respect to Saudi Arabia's human rights record are in sharp relief at the moment, but I think I have spoken more clearly than perhaps any other western Foreign Minister in saying that if the Khashoggi stories turn out to be true, that will be inconsistent with our values.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I was going to ask a question about Yemen, but I am afraid I have to follow up on the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), because if the allegations in this weekend's report are true they are extremely serious. It was reported that in early September our intelligence services became aware of the Saudi plan to abduct Jamal Khashoggi, and on 1 October they knew that a Saudi team had been dispatched to Istanbul for that purpose. I hear what the Foreign Secretary says that he did not know, but did the intelligence services know, and has he asked them?

Mr Hunt: I have to repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), and I am sure the right hon. Lady will understand that it is not possible for a Foreign Secretary, or indeed any Minister, to comment on intelligence matters, for very obvious reasons, but I did not know about this attack. It is very important that the right hon. Lady and the House understand that. We are as shocked as everyone else is about what happened.

Emily Thornberry: I understand what the Foreign Secretary is saying, but he must understand that these allegations are extremely serious, and I am afraid it will not do to hide behind a blanket refusal to discuss intelligence matters. So will he, first, agree to attend an emergency session of the Intelligence and Security Committee to answer these questions behind closed doors, and, secondly, if he is not prepared as a point of principle to say what the intelligence services knew, at least reassure us that something will be done about this and that Ministers will find out what the intelligence services knew at the time?

Mr Hunt: If I am invited before the Intelligence and Security Committee, I will of course consider that invitation, but the right hon. Lady must know that her desire for me to release important intelligence information to the House or anywhere else is totally inappropriate. I do not think for a moment that she would be doing that if she were Foreign Secretary. I respect and understand her concern about the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, but I wish that she would show the same concern for what is happening in Venezuela and Russia, and indeed with antisemitism. There seems to be a blind spot when it comes to countries that share Labour's anti-western world view.

Syria: Civilians

4. Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the conditions for civilians in Syria. [907346]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): Conditions remain dire for civilians in Syria. Half the population is displaced and some 13 million people are dependent on humanitarian assistance. We continue to engage with agencies and Governments to ensure humanitarian access and the use of supplies. Yesterday, I had an opportunity to meet Staffan de Mistura here in London.

Alison McGovern: As the Minister has said, civilians in Syria desperately need calm, and they need a political process to lead them out of this conflict. On Saturday, France, Germany, Turkey and Russia met in Istanbul. How will we bring the UK's influence to bear to ensure that this is a Syria-led process that puts Syrian civilians at the heart of whatever the political process brings next?

Alistair Burt: I should like to start by thanking Staffan de Matura for all the work he has put in. As the House will know, the United Nations special envoy will be standing down in November. He has devoted the past few years of his work to trying to achieve a settlement and agreement in Syria that will indeed enhance the rights of civilians. At present, he is still working on the details of the constitutional settlement. It will involve a constitutional committee, for which he has put forward various names. There is an impasse on that at the moment, but his work, and the work of the Syrian high negotiating committee, to ensure that civilians have a recognised role in the future of Syria remain a key part of the United Kingdom's contribution to these discussions.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for that response, but could he take this a little bit further and tell us what conversations he is having with his counterparts in other countries to ensure that civil society and civilians are at the heart of the post-conflict resolution and the peace and reconciliation that are so needed?

Alistair Burt: That is a good question. We as a Government are engaged in regular consultations with states that have an interest in supporting the UN process. Essentially, this is a UN process, supported by the UN Security Council, to ensure a settlement that involves civil society. All the evidence suggests that conflict will reoccur unless women, civil society and others are involved in the resolution of that conflict. The United Kingdom takes this issue forward very carefully.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): But as my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) said, the UK was not at Istanbul and it will not be part of the EU-US summit organised to take place in France next month. Is it not a source of profound dissatisfaction and, potentially, shame that the UK will not be at the table? What are the Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister going to do about that?

Alistair Burt: Yesterday, the UN small group met in London with representatives of a variety of countries and the UN special envoy in order to be part of the process that is supporting the special envoy in his work. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have been involved, and I was at a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly with other Foreign Ministers to discuss the future of Syria. We are engaged—we cannot be at every meeting, but the United Kingdom is heavily involved in backing the work of the UN and will remain so.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What update can my right hon. Friend offer the House on the resettlement of the White Helmets in the UK following the joint operation to rescue them in the summer?

Alistair Burt: The White Helmets and their families were evacuated from southern Syria under the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. That support has been delivered, and we continue to work with other countries to ensure the resettlement of the White Helmets' supporters who left Syria a short while ago.

Mongolia: Diplomatic Relations

5. **John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of UK diplomatic relations with Mongolia. [R] [907347]

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): Diplomatic relations with Mongolia are flourishing, not least owing to the efforts of the hon. Gentleman, who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on Mongolia, and his Mongolian counterpart, former Prime Minister Batbold, who I understand is in the Gallery today. I very much look forward to seeing him again on Thursday.

I visited Ulaanbaatar and the Oyu Tolgoi mine in the Gobi desert in July to promote our growing trade and investment relationship, as well as our bilateral co-operation on the environment, education, foreign policy and defence.

John Grogan: Does the Minister agree that the land of Genghis Khan is now a beacon of freedom and democracy in the region, and that its foreign policy of encouraging rapprochement between the two Koreas and developing diplomatic and economic third neighbours throughout the world beyond Russia and China is a good opportunity for the United Kingdom?

Mark Field: I understand that the hon. Gentleman recently visited Mongolia—his visit was probably more enjoyable than mine, with fewer diplomatic commitments than I have had recently. Yes, that is important. Mongolia has transformed over the past 30 years, and we want to play our part in continuing that transformation, not least because, as he knows, it is a small country by population between two giants in Russia and China, and very much sees its relationships with third countries, of which we are one of a number, as important.

British Nationals in Pakistan

6. **Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** What progress he is taking to ensure effective consular support is available to British nationals in Pakistan. [907348]

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): I cannot even get back to my seat—it is a tough old day on the Asia brief. I appreciate that this is a serious issue for the hon. Lady. We encourage all British nationals visiting or residing in Pakistan to read our travel advice and ensure they have the appropriate insurance. While most visits are trouble free, of course we have a very dedicated consular team ready to provide support to those most in need.

Mr Speaker: The Minister is much in demand, and I am sure he appreciates that fact.

Alison Thewliss: My constituent Ali Soofi has serious concerns that his nephew, a British citizen, is being held against his will in Pakistan—he has been for more than a year now—and that his life is in danger. A court order

issued by the high court in Lahore back on 15 August acknowledged Mr Soofi's poor health and recommended the assistance of the British high commission in facilitating his return to the UK for medical treatment. To date, he has not been able to return. Consular assistance seems very soft touch, I am afraid to say. Can the Minister intervene in this case to ensure that all means possible are used to ensure that Mr Soofi gets home to Scotland as soon as possible?

Mark Field: Naturally I can. I thank the hon. Lady, who has done sterling work in relation to the case of her constituent Mr Soofi. As she knows, I wrote to her on 24 October with the latest on this case and, in view of its sensitivities, offered to meet her and discuss it privately in more detail. I very much look forward to doing so once our offices have agreed a mutually convenient date.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): Many British nationals in Pakistan are involved in trade. A year ago I went to GlaxoSmithKline's factory in Karachi, which is one of its largest and most profitable in the world. However, given the size of our Department for International Development presence in Pakistan, which is the equal largest in the world, and our consular presence there, what more can the FCO do with the Department for International Trade to boost our commercial activity in Pakistan?

Mark Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. He will know that the UK shares a long-standing relationship with Pakistan. We have the strongest of cultural and historical ties and, of course, a very large diaspora. On the trade side, I have been working on trying to ensure that that diaspora plays its part in ensuring ever stronger trading connections between our two countries.

Kashmir: Human Rights Abuses

7. Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of human rights abuses in Kashmir. [907349]

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): I very much recognise that there are human rights concerns in both India-administered and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The FCO encourages both states to uphold their international human rights obligations. Any allegations of human rights violations or abuses are concerning and must of course be thoroughly investigated, promptly and transparently.

Debbie Abrahams: The all-party parliamentary group on Kashmir's report on human rights abuses, which was published this summer, reflects the UN's findings. What discussions have the Minister or the Foreign Secretary had with the Governments of Pakistan and India about those human rights abuses? Will the Minister meet me and other members of the all-party group to discuss taking forward our recommendations?

Mark Field: I am always happy to meet members of all-party parliamentary groups, so I would be glad to do so. We very much encourage the parties to keep the channels of dialogue open as a means of resolving differences. The hon. Lady will recognise that the UK's

long-standing position is that it is for India and Pakistan to find a lasting political resolution to the situation in Kashmir, taking account of the wishes of the Kashmiri people. The relationship between the two countries is very complex, as the hon. Lady will be aware. We encourage both sides to maintain good relations and make the most of all opportunities for dialogue.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): The human rights abuses reported to me by my Urdu-speaking constituents are not a complex matter; they are often simple and horrifying. Does the Minister share my concern that a lack of English language news reporting is keeping these abuses out of the public consciousness in the United Kingdom and around the world, and will he join me in calling on journalists to bring forward English language coverage so that the world can be informed?

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this matter. We persistently raise the issue of Kashmir, including human rights, with the Governments of both India and Pakistan, but my hon. Friend makes a good point about ensuring that there is at least mutually trusted media coverage of this matter. I know that the BBC's coverage in south Asia has become more extensive, and I believe that the BBC World Service is looking to extend matters further. I will make sure that that organisation is made well aware of this point.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I hear what the Minister says about the relationship with the two Governments, but, given that we are talking about two nuclear armed powers and that Delhi is increasingly belligerent with a relatively new Government, is there not something more that the Minister can do to bring the two powers together, given our historical relationship with Delhi and the Government in Pakistan?

Mark Field: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes these matters very seriously, as do other Members throughout the House who represent constituencies with large Pakistani and Indian populations; I speak for my rather silent Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), who does a lot of work behind the scenes on this matter but is obviously not able to speak on it in Parliament. The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) will be aware that it is not our place to mediate, intervene or interfere in this issue, but I hope he is also aware that I raise the issue of Kashmir at every opportunity when I see my counterparts—the Indian and Pakistani Ministers—as well as the high commissioners to London, because the matter is so close to the hearts of many hon. Members.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Last week we celebrated the Jammu and Kashmir festival, and the anniversary of the instrument of accession, whereby the whole of Jammu and Kashmir was ceded to India. Sadly, Pakistan refuses to accept this, so what is my right hon. Friend doing to encourage the Pakistani Government to dismantle the terrorist bases in Kashmir that are causing human rights abuses in the whole of Kashmir?

Mark Field: I know that my hon. Friend takes a strong view on this matter. We do all that we can to raise the legitimate concerns brought up by all Members in

this House with the Governments in both New Delhi and Islamabad. However, we believe that the pace of progress is for India and Pakistan to determine.

Gaza: Access to Healthcare

8. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What diplomatic steps the Government are taking to improve access to healthcare in Gaza. [907350]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): The Government remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. I regularly raise with the Israeli authorities the need to ease restrictions there. Our ambassador to Israel discussed Gaza with the Israeli authorities on 17 October. The UK supports healthcare in Gaza through the International Committee of the Red Cross, and is a strong supporter of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, which provides basic healthcare in Gaza.

Dr Whitford: As well as many breast cancer patients not being allowed out of Gaza for treatment, it is very difficult for doctors to get out to access training, so Medical Aid for Palestinians has recruited specialists to bring the training to them. But on our visit last month, I was formally denied permission to enter Gaza and two other doctors on our team never received theirs. This totally wrecked our teaching programme. Will the Minister make representations to the Israeli authorities to allow these medical projects in Gaza to continue unhindered?

Alistair Burt: First, I have already done so. Secondly, although it is of course a matter for Israeli authorities to make those decisions, the value of the visits of the hon. Lady and her team cannot be overestimated. Thirdly, we are all in her debt for the work that she does to support those suffering conditions in Gaza.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The Save a Child's Heart programme at the cardiology department of the Wolfson Medical Centre in Israel has now seen or treated around 6,000 Palestinian children. Does my right hon. Friend agree that these kind of projects—which bring together Palestinian and Jewish medics, and bring Israelis into contact with Palestinian families—are incredibly powerful and uplifting? Will he look at what more we can do to support such projects?

Alistair Burt: It is an often understated fact of the complex relationship between Israel and its neighbours that there is cross-border work, and that medical treatment takes place in Israel for those from both the west bank and Gaza—some of it is very high level and done in the most important circumstances. Save a Child's Heart is not directly supported by the United Kingdom, but we certainly support all efforts to make sure there is even more contact between the Palestinians and the Israeli authorities, particularly in healthcare matters.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): The United Nations says that international funding to tackle the humanitarian crisis across the Palestinian territories is at an all-time low, with the shortfall to meet this year's needs now standing at \$380 million. Although we warmly welcome the £7 million increase in September from the UK Government, the Minister of State must know that

it is a drop in the ocean. Will he instead do what we have been calling for since January, convene an urgent global funding conference and treat this as the pressing emergency it is?

Alistair Burt: The support we give to UNRWA continues to be considerable, and we have brought forward support that would have come in the next couple of years, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that, compared with the loss from the United States, it is only a small amount. We lobby other states directly on this, and there has been an increase in funding that will see us through a relatively short period of time. After that, it is essential that the issues surrounding UNRWA are dealt with and that funding is found for those who are in need. Ultimately, the issues that UNRWA deals with will only be resolved when we get the final agreement for which we are all searching. In the meantime, we do encourage, and we have seen a response from, other states following the United Kingdom's generosity.

Salisbury Attack

10. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What recent diplomatic steps he has taken in response to the Salisbury attack. [907352]

15. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What recent diplomatic steps he has taken in response to the Salisbury attack. [907357]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Following the 4 March Salisbury attack, the UK co-ordinated action among 28 countries and NATO that led to 153 Russian diplomats being expelled, which we think is the largest mass expulsion in history.

Steve Double: Because of recent events, Russia is not currently sitting in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. There are those who seek to change the rules governing the Council of Europe to make it easier to readmit Russia. Although we all want to see Russia welcomed back, does the Secretary of State agree that it is not the Council of Europe but Russia that needs to change its ways?

Mr Hunt: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Russia should pay its dues to the Parliamentary Assembly, it should pay interest on its arrears and it must follow the rules.

Chris Davies: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing agreement among our European allies for EU sanctions against senior Russians in charge of Russia's spy networks following the Salisbury attack, but what further action can now be taken in respect of cyber-related attacks, given the growing menace of Russia's targeting of other countries' computer networks?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we looked at a map of Europe showing all the places where there have been Russian-inspired cyber-attacks, we would see it is a very busy map indeed. We need to create a new international red line that says these cyber-attacks are unacceptable, which is why it is very positive news that,

on 15 October, the EU agreed to set up a sanctions regime for cyber-attacks, but that is just the first of a number of steps.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): We need to keep up the pressure on Russia. There is no point in just referring to what we have already done. When will the Government bring forward their first list of people caught by the new Magnitsky legislation in this country? Would it not be a good idea for us now to include those who are gangsters, rather than just those who have abused human rights?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. As he knows, the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 only comes into effect after Brexit, because it depends on us taking trade measures, which is what has to happen. Ahead of that, however, we are talking to the EU about whether it should introduce a sanctions regime for human rights abuses, and that is relevant not just to Russia but to many countries.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Can the Foreign Secretary update the House on any discussions he has had with NATO partners and allies in relation both to the Salisbury attack and to the rise in cyber-attacks?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that for the right hon. Gentleman. NATO Foreign Ministers recognise collectively that we are starting to see international norms being breached in an extremely dangerous way. One of those breaches is on chemical weapons; we should never forget that the Salisbury attack was the first use of chemical weapons on British soil, and it is extremely serious from that point of view. The other is on cyber, with the general undermining of confidence in democracy when people think that hostile state actors might be trying to interfere in our elections. We need to stop both those things.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend have a word with his successor as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ask why the NHS—Pharmacy2U, to be precise—is advertising on RT and so is lining the pockets of Putin's mouthpiece?

Mr Hunt: I am very happy to have a word with my excellent successor, but of course this affects us in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as well. With the unexplained wealth orders and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, we are starting to tighten the net on people from unfriendly regimes who are financing activities that are against our values.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): In reaching the sanctions agreement he referred to, I am sure the Secretary of State was grateful for the support of the former eastern bloc countries, which he welcomed to Chevening before the summit. Did he take the opportunity to apologise to them for comparing their experience under Soviet domination to membership of the EU?

Mr Hunt: We had a very enjoyable time, including when getting a little lost in the maze. Let me answer the hon. Gentleman's question directly: I stand by exactly what I said, which was that a club of free countries that was set up, in part, to stand against the Soviet Union

and totalitarianism should not, in way that is inconsistent with its values, seek to punish someone who wishes to leave.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): It was deeply impressive how many states stood by the UK in the aftermath of the Salisbury attack, not least those that know fine well what the Moscow regime is capable of. So I am going to give the Foreign Secretary the opportunity: what message does he have for those states that have thrived since independence in the EU but were deeply offended by his crass remarks comparing the EU with the former Soviet Union?

Mr Hunt: I think those states agree with what I am saying, which is that a club of free nations should not be seeking to punish someone who wishes to leave. They have been among our strongest supporters in the Brexit process.

Stephen Gethins: I will give the Foreign Secretary a second opportunity, but before I do, let me read out some quotes. The Latvian ambassador said:

"Soviets killed...and ruined the lives of 3 generations, while the EU has brought prosperity, equality, growth, respect."

The Lithuanian European Commissioner was born in a gulag—I want the Foreign Secretary to reflect on that—and he said:

"I was born in a Soviet gulag and was imprisoned by KGB". He has offered the Foreign Secretary a history lesson. Will he take the Lithuanian Commissioner up on that?

Mr Hunt: I will happily send him a copy of my speech so that he can see exactly what I said. What he will see is that I said it was very important that the UK and continental Europe work together to stand against precisely those totalitarian regimes.

Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan

11. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the proposed (a) content and (b) timeline for a US-brokered peace plan for Israel and the Palestinians. [907353]

12. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What assessment he has made of the implications for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process of the Human Rights Watch report, "Two Authorities, One Way, Zero Dissent: Arbitrary Arrest and Torture under the Palestinian Authority and Hamas", published in October 2018. [907354]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): I discussed the proposed United States peace plan with the US President's middle east envoy, Jason Greenblatt, on 28 September in New York. The Foreign Secretary discussed this with the special adviser to the US President, Jared Kushner, on 22 August. The UK remains committed to a negotiated settlement leading to a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I am glad the Minister has made that commitment, but does he agree that the time really has come for a re-energising and reinvigorating of

a two-state solution? Will he personally take a lead in that? Surely what the world expects from both sides is restraint and statesmanship, with Hamas stopping the constant rocket attacks and Israel drawing a halt to the west bank settlement programme?

Alistair Burt: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's questions. The need to keep the middle east peace process at the forefront of the world's mind is perhaps greater than ever. Just because it has gone on for so long, that is no reason why it should slip away. I absolutely assure my hon. Friend that, everywhere I go and in every conversation I have in the region, they know that the middle east peace process will come up because the United Kingdom must not let it be as it is, because there will no peace or security for either the state of Israel or its neighbours unless the issue is finally resolved.

Mr Hollobone: After a comprehensive two-year investigation, Human Rights Watch has concluded that "Palestinian authorities routinely arrest people whose peaceful speech displeases them and torture those in their custody."

Will my right hon. Friend condemn that deplorable abuse of power and make appropriate representations to the Palestinian Authority?

Alistair Burt: We read with great concern the report that my hon. Friend quoted. We do not provide any funding to the agencies mentioned in it, although we do support other areas of the security sector. We have raised our concerns about this issue with the Ministry of Interior and continue to encourage the Palestinian Authority to respect human rights and to ensure that complaints of mistreatment or arbitrary detention are properly investigated. We continue to work with the authority to improve the performance of the security sector.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Minister considered the political implications of the recent tragic events at the Gaza border, where Palestinians are encouraged to believe that they have a right of return within Israel's internationally recognised 1948 boundaries? That makes a two-state solution impossible.

Alistair Burt: What I can and should say to the House is that it has been clear in recent weeks that Hamas has much greater control over the demonstrations at the border than it had at the start of the summer. Hamas has in effect completely taken over the committee that was responsible for the protests and the march on the right to return, and it is now taking people, including children, to the border. That is a practice that must end. The situation at the Gaza border is very grim. It will take both sides to realise that there can be no future unless Gaza and the west bank are included in the overall settlement for which we work so hard.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Is not it incredible that earlier we had a discussion about the terrible situation in Gaza in which the word "Hamas" was not mentioned once? Is not it the case that the only way in which that terrible situation will be alleviated and improved is through progress being made on a peace process, and that the only way that that is going to happen is when

Hamas lays down its weapons, stops using resources that should be used to build houses, hospitals and schools to dig tunnels and to make rockets to fire at civilians in Israel, and stops the incendiary attacks that have caused 1,000 fires on the border?

Alistair Burt: As the hon. Gentleman knows, although very often Members on one side of the House or the other tend to raise issues of greatest concern to themselves and ignore the other side, the United Kingdom Government have been clear about the responsibilities in Gaza. I just mentioned Hamas in my previous answer—but I understand the point—and it is very clear that Hamas has significant responsibility for the events in Gaza. None the less, Israel also has some responsibility for the restrictions and the issues in Gaza, which is why, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, none of this will be settled by one side or the other; it will be settled only by the comprehensive agreement that we are all working so hard to achieve.

Yemen

14. Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the political and security situation in Yemen. [907356]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): The situation in Yemen is tragic and we are deeply concerned by the humanitarian impact. We play a leading role in efforts to find a peaceful solution by supporting the UN special envoy Martin Griffiths, calling a special session of the UN Security Council, and pressing all parties to join peace talks.

Gavin Newlands: In the past three years, the UK has granted military export licences to Saudi Arabia worth a total of £5 billion. Given that the Saudi-led invasion has pushed Yemen to the brink of famine, with thousands of civilians killed in the process, does the Minister feel any guilt that those arms sales have helped to enable the Saudi regime to perpetrate war crimes? Or, as with the American President, does money trump ethics for this Tory Government?

Alistair Burt: I shall say two things. First, on arms sales, which have been discussed comprehensively in this Chamber and elsewhere, every licence is considered on an individual basis. A very comprehensive set of controls are gone through and the United Kingdom sticks to that process. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman referred to an invasion by the coalition. Let me be clear: an insurgent movement usurped a legitimate Government, who were then backed by the UN in order to relieve that Government, and the coalition responded to that call to take action to protect the Government and to protect the civilians in Yemen, who are being comprehensively abused by the Houthi insurgency. The hon. Gentleman should not refer to it as an invasion, as that is just not what it was.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Has our new Foreign Secretary had a chance to review the position of the British Government at the United Nations in respect of Yemen? Will he move from a position of supporting the Saudi coalition where Britain is complicit in creating a famine, to one of constructive neutrality to

secure a ceasefire and meaningful constitutional negotiations, as the UN special representative, Martin Griffiths, is consistently urging and trying to secure?

Alistair Burt: On 15 March, the UK proposed and co-ordinated a United Nations Security Council presidential statement, which called on the parties to agree steps towards a ceasefire. That remains our position. Calling for a nationwide ceasefire will have an effect on the ground only if it is underpinned by a political deal between the conflict parties. Given the lack of agreement between those parties, passing a ceasefire resolution risks undercutting the UN envoy's efforts to reach a political deal and undermining the credibility of the Council. As soon as the right opportunity arises, we will bring forward a resolution.

Topical Questions

T1. [907368] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Since the last oral questions, I have attended the United Nations General Assembly in New York, addressed a special Security Council session on North Korea, joined a meeting of Foreign Ministers on the tragedy in Yemen and convened a roundtable on Burma.

Tommy Sheppard: Last week, the UN special rapporteur, Michael Lynk, produced his report on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. He concludes that the problem is not with the clarity of international law, but with the unwillingness of the international community to uphold it. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with that assessment and, if so, what action will his Government take to ensure the rule of law in the middle east?

Mr Hunt: We are very concerned about a number of the things that have been happening in the occupied territories. We will study that report extremely carefully. Indeed, we are talking closely to the Americans about their middle east peace plan, which we hope will be launched soon.

T4. [907371] **Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): What assessment have the Government made of extremely alarming reports of internment camps for Uyghur Muslims in China?

Mr Hunt: We look at those reports with a lot of concern. We had our own diplomats visiting the Xinjiang province in August and they concur that those reports are broadly accurate. I raised it with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, when I went to China and we continue to be extremely concerned about what is happening.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Burmese Reuters journalist Wa Lone has still not met his 11-week-old daughter. She may be seven years old before he finally sees her. He was jailed for seeking to report accurately the Rohingya crisis. Does not the fate of Wa Lone demonstrate that the Government's position is too weak in expecting the Myanmar Government to investigate

themselves? Will the Foreign Secretary adopt the UN recommendations and refer Myanmar's military leaders to the International Criminal Court?

Mr Hunt: I share the hon. Lady's concern about what is happening. With respect to Wa Lone and to the other Reuters journalist, Kyaw Soe O, I have raised concerns directly about due process in their case with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and she assured me that she would relook at whether due process had properly occurred, but we are very concerned about that and indeed about the situation in Rakhine, where there has to be accountability. However, we have made some progress. We had the strongest ever condemnation of what happened by the Human Rights Council on 27 September. I convened a meeting at the UN General Assembly about this. The fact-finding mission has now come before the Security Council and there are lots of things that are happening.

T8. [907375] **Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): The Government can be proud of their world-leading commitment to ensure protection of 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, but can the Foreign Secretary confirm that the forthcoming international oceans strategy will have that goal at its centre and that it will set out a plan for ensuring that our own blue belt of marine sanctuaries is set to the global gold standard?

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his tireless championing of this agenda. I can confirm that the UK will be supporting it. I can also confirm that we are on course with the blue belt programme to deliver over 4 million sq km of maritime protection around the UK's overseas territories by 2020.

T2. [907369] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I am sure that most of us will have viewed the outcome of the Brazilian presidential election with some alarm in terms of the implications for human rights and the rule of law. How are the Government going to approach their future relationship with the Bolsonaro Administration?

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): It is important to remember that President-elect Bolsonaro received a clear mandate from the Brazilian people, and we will of course endeavour to work with his Administration. However, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, our view on racism, homophobia and misogyny is clear—it would never be acceptable. We will remain the strongest of champions on human rights on the international stage and will not shy away from expressing that view where we disagree with other Governments, including our closest allies.

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): I declare an interest as the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Tunisia. Yesterday the Tunisian capital, Tunis, was the target of a suicide bombing—the first attack in the country since 2015. What support are my right hon. Friend and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office providing to Tunisia in the wake of yesterday's attack to ensure that its tourist economy, strengthened by UK holidaymakers, does not falter as it is starting to gather speed?

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): We have already expressed our condolences to Tunisia for the attack yesterday. The security situation in Tunisia has been worked on quite intensively by the Tunisian authorities since the attack in Sousse some years ago. We remain in close contact with Tunisia. We constantly update our travel advice to keep people in touch with the situation. We will continue to work with the Tunisian authorities to improve the security situation still further.

T3. [907370] **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): For at least nine months, the Met's war crimes unit has been assessing material from the Rwandan authorities relating to five men living in the UK likely to have committed genocide offences in Rwanda in 1994. Their extradition to Rwanda was blocked in 2015. How much longer will these men evade justice?

Harriett Baldwin: We are well aware of the reports to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I can assure him that, should there be any issues in terms of action that the UK can take in this regard, it stands ready to do that, should the situation require our intervention.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): May I ask the Minister for Africa what diplomatic support the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can give to the English-speaking community in Cameroon, which is being quite widely oppressed at the moment?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important situation. I was in the Anglophone region of Cameroon earlier this year. We are following with great concern the reports we are hearing that the situation has not got any better since I visited. We are urging the President, who has recently been re-elected, to follow through on his assurance that he would engage in meaningful dialogue to address the concerns of the people living in that region.

T5. [907372] **Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): The human rights situation in Tibet is deeply worrying. It is difficult to know how many Tibetans have been imprisoned unjustly in China. The situation will continue to deteriorate without transparency. What steps are this Government taking to facilitate independent observers' immediate and unhindered access to Tibet in order to accurately address the human rights situation on the ground?

Mr Hunt: I completely share the concerns that the hon. Lady has raised. This is one of a number of human rights issues that we raise regularly with the Chinese Foreign Minister, and I will continue to do so.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): When my right hon. Friend speaks to the President of Sri Lanka later on in the week, will he point out that his recent actions are in direct contravention of the 19th amendment to Sri Lanka's constitution, that the international community continues to recognise Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe as the legitimate Prime Minister, that this can only be changed by a vote in Parliament, and that Parliament must be recalled as a matter of urgency in order that such a vote can take place?

Mr Hunt: I will certainly be making those points when I talk to President Sirisena. I know that a number of Members are concerned about the safety of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, and we are watching the situation with a great deal of concern.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The independent international fact-finding mission has recently spoken of the "enduring catastrophe" in Myanmar. Has not the time come to put forward a UN resolution referring this to the ICC and bringing public pressure to bear, to try to prevent it from being vetoed?

Mr Hunt: I completely share the hon. Gentleman's concern. As I said to the House at the last oral questions, the issue with the ICC referral is that it has to go through the Security Council, where we think it would be vetoed by Russia or China. We are looking at alternative solutions. We are absolutely clear that there has to be accountability, because without accountability, the Rohingyas will not feel safe to go home.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): Further to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), will the Foreign Secretary confirm that Britain's position will be to back the rule of law as a guiding principle in Sri Lanka and elsewhere?

Mr Hunt: I am absolutely happy to confirm that—and, indeed, upholding the constitution in Sri Lanka.

T6. [907373] **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): The Saudi-led war in Yemen is causing what could be the world's worst famine in 100 years, with 14 million people at risk according to the UN. This war is dependent on the UK Government's assistance and support, and it could not be waged without UK arms and military assistance. What crimes does the Saudi regime need to commit before the Government finally stand up for human rights and bring forward that resolution?

Alistair Burt: The most important thing in Yemen is to bring the conflict to a conclusion. Over the weekend, I spoke to representatives of the UN, the United States, the coalition and the Government of Yemen. Intensive work is going on to make every effort to bring the conflict to a conclusion, and the United Kingdom will play a full part in that.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Following the terrible Salisbury attack, the United Kingdom Government expelled 23 Russian diplomats, and about 20 other countries did the same. Given the evidence that has emerged since then—for example, the attempted hacking of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons—does the Foreign Secretary agree that there is a case for the UK to go further in degrading the Russian state's ability to commit espionage on our territory, by expelling more Russian diplomats?

Mr Hunt: We are absolutely going to go further. As the Prime Minister said to the House, we will seek to degrade the GRU's capabilities and will work with our allies to do that.

T7. [907374] **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): Given the concern expressed across the House about Kashmir, will the Foreign Secretary commit to raise that issue at the Security Council, of which we are a permanent member, the next time he addresses the United Nations?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He may not have heard it, but I said earlier on that we are making it very clear that it is not our place to intervene or interfere in this matter, but clearly it is a concern. The UN report on human rights has rightly been referred to. We very much take note of former high commissioner Zeid's presentation to the Human Rights Council in June this year and the clear recommendations for the Governments of India and Pakistan. We hope that those will be adhered to.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): In the light of recent worrying developments in Sri Lanka, will the Foreign Secretary urge the Government there to make good on their promises to deliver justice for the Tamil people and accountability for war crimes committed against them?

Mark Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for her question. I was in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the month, and like the Foreign Secretary, I am deeply concerned by the fast-developing political situation there. As I say, not only do we want to stand up for the constitution, but my right hon. Friend is right to say that we need to continue to urge Sri Lanka to implement fully the commitments it has willingly made to the UN Human Rights Council.

T9. [907376] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What are the Government doing to secure the release of South Sudanese civil society activist and Cambridge PhD student Peter Ajak, who has been detained without charge for 94 days in the notorious Blue House prison in Juba?

Harriett Baldwin: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's work as vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Sudan and South Sudan. This is a serious situation. We continue to advocate the freeing up of political space and the freeing of political prisoners, as some of the cost-free things that the Government of South Sudan could do to show willing in terms of the peace process declared on 12 September.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): While the nation and the international community rightly focus on the situation in Rakhine state in Burma, I recently met people from Karen and Chin states, and they told me some horrendous continuing stories. I am also hosting a delegation from Kachin and Shan states—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a busy man—we are all well aware of that—but what is the question?

Paul Scully: Will the Foreign Secretary tell me what we are doing to tackle the situation in the whole of Burma?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his interest, and he is absolutely right. The fact-finding mission said that there were mass exterminations and mass expulsions in the Kachin and Shan areas as well, and we raised all those issues with Aung San Suu Kyi when I saw her.

Mr Speaker: I know the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) very well. He has many commitments, he is a very busy man and he has a very full diary. There is no need to advertise it to the House; we are all aware of what an indispensable public servant he is.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. For over 70 years, the sons and daughters of Kashmir have been subjected to persecution, oppression and human rights abuses, yet it seems that our position continues to be that this is a matter for India and Pakistan. How many more innocent men, women and children have to die before we at least facilitate peaceful talks between those countries to find a peaceful resolution?

Mark Field: I do understand the passion and the genuine sense of outrage that the hon. Gentleman feels. Ultimately, there can be a solution only if India and Pakistan work together. It cannot be our role to intervene, not least because, as I think the hon. Gentleman will understand, we will be seen by one or other side as intervening on that side rather than on the other. We will do our very best, as I have already mentioned, as far as the UN is concerned—given that a UN report is on the table—to try to bring the parties together. However, on the notion that it is in any way the place of the UK Government to intervene on this matter, I am afraid that we have quite rightly maintained such a position for over 70 years.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Twenty-five years ago, I was part of a British, Han Chinese and Uighur expedition that crossed the Taklamakan desert in western China for the first time. Today, Xinjiang is not a happy region, and there are worrying, wide-scale reports of abuses of the human rights of the Muslim Uighur population. Does the Minister believe that this is something we should be raising at the human rights talks in Geneva?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is a great expert in Chinese matters. I think this issue is of very great, and growing, concern. We will raise it in all appropriate forums, and that may be a very good thought.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State consider all options we have at EU level to prosecute and impose sanctions on those who have committed atrocities against the Rohingya people in Myanmar?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that the EU has already introduced targeted sanctions against seven Burmese generals. We are in discussions with the French, as the other EU permanent member of the Security Council, as to what further measures we can take.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): What steps have been taken to counter the rise of Russian influence inside Libya?

Alistair Burt: Increased Russian military activity has been noticed in Libya, and we continue to monitor that. We would reiterate that there is a UN arms embargo in relation to Libya. It should be the role of all parties to work constructively with the efforts of UN special

envoy Ghassan Salamé, and Russia should direct its efforts to encouraging parties to work with that process to bring the conflict to a conclusion.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are running late, which is not exactly novel, but I could accommodate more colleagues if each was kind to every other. I am sure Mr Stewart Malcolm McDonald will volunteer just a sentence.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): What discussions have the Government had with the Government of Ukraine regarding internally displaced people and food insecurity, particularly in the illegally occupied Donbass region?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman was there recently, I understand. He will be aware that, through the Department for International Development, we do have a programme of humanitarian assistance there, but Russian aggression continues to destabilise the area. In fact, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary recently spoke to Foreign Minister Klimkin to emphasise our commitment to and support for Ukraine, including through Operation Orbital.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Given the extraordinary declaration by the Argentinian Foreign Minister that Argentina will seek to enhance its claims to the Falklands if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, will my right hon. Friend confirm that—deal or no deal—there will be no question whatever of undermining the status of the Falkland Islands as a British territory?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to confirm exactly that.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources is meeting now in Hobart. What progress has the UK delegation made in securing a marine protected area for the Weddell sea, which is absolutely vital to stop run-away climate change?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the important talks that are taking place. The UK is very much a co-proponent and keen advocate of the proposal currently under discussion. We strongly support this marine protection work, not just in the Weddell sea.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I have recently returned from Abu Nuwar, a village close to Khan al-Ahmar. There, I asked some of the mothers about their hopes and expectations. They said their hope was to remain in their village; their expectation was that, if Khan al-Ahmar is demolished, they would be next. What hope can the Minister give the mothers of Abu Nuwar?

Alistair Burt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, both for his visit and for his continuing interest in this issue. As he knows, and as the House knows, we have made significant representations in relation to Khan al-Ahmar and other Bedouin communities in recent times. There has still been no decision to demolish the Khan al-Ahmar village; that is currently paused—a decision by the Israeli authorities that we welcome. We continue to hope that a resolution will be found that does not involve demolition. The United Kingdom will remain closely involved.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): If President Sirisena will not back down on the apparent return of Mahinda Rajapaksa—a man with a terrible human rights record in Sri Lanka—what further steps will the Foreign Secretary take with our European allies to demonstrate the seriousness of Britain's concern about this matter?

Mark Field: We very much hope that President Sirisena will back down and will adhere to the constitution, which of course means bringing back Parliament at the earliest opportunity. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, when he alludes at least to this, that we are actively co-ordinating our response within the international community. We believe that a concerted international response will have the most effect.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): During the events that followed the Salisbury attack, the incompetence of the Russian operatives was there to be seen, but so too was their malevolence. Our EU friends were hugely helpful in thwarting their ambitions. Can I have an assurance that Her Majesty's Government will continue in the future, whatever the future holds, to work closely with our European friends in thwarting this kind of threat?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary understand the complete terror and horror of my Tamil constituents at the idea that Mahinda Rajapaksa may be coming back? There can be no justice in Sri Lanka; these people will not find out where their disappeared relatives went nine years ago. What is the Foreign Secretary really going to do to support them?

Mark Field: I hope the hon. Lady will recognise that we do a lot already to support them. As I mentioned, I visited Colombo at the beginning of October and made these points to Foreign Minister Marapana. I also met the Tamil National Alliance leader and a number of human rights and other civil society activists. We will continue to do that work. I entirely agree with the hon. Lady, and I am as alarmed as she is. It is absolutely essential that we get Sri Lanka back to the table to ensure that it adheres to its UN Human Rights Council obligations.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): When will the Government formally recognise Palestine as a state in its own right and a full member of the UN?

Alistair Burt: The United Kingdom reserves the right to acknowledge and recognise the state of Palestine when it is in the best interests of the peace process to do so.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Why are the Government not doing more to help UK citizens in Yemen who wish to leave?

Alistair Burt: We have no current presence in Sana'a, so we have no consular staff or anyone available. When people can get to a border, we can offer support, but we cannot physically offer support in Yemen. I know that the hon. Gentleman has a continuing case, and we have done our very best to support him and his constituents in very difficult circumstances. We will continue to do so, but the conflict makes our assistance extremely difficult.

Tobacco

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

12.43 pm

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to report on means of requiring tobacco companies to meet the costs of smoking cessation services; to make provision about the advertising and marketing of products that are alternatives to tobacco; to require tobacco companies to publish information about their activities in relation to such products; to create an offence of selling tobacco without a licence; and for connected purposes.

In 1990, almost one third of adults in Great Britain smoked. The most recent figures show that this has almost halved—the prevalence rate is now 15.8%. The Government's ambition, set out in the tobacco control plan last year, is to reach 12% or less by 2022, with a longer-term aim of achieving a 5% prevalence rate. Despite that relative success, the UK still has 7.6 million smokers, which means that more than 200 people a day still die from smoking-related illnesses that could have been prevented, and that smoking is estimated to cost our economy in excess of £11 billion a year.

In 2017, local authorities cut their budgets for stop smoking services in half. Separately, the number of smokers using NHS stop smoking services has decreased from a peak of 100,000 in 2011 to 40,000 in 2016. The Bill aims to highlight what a package of measures could do to accelerate the decline in smoking prevalence. At the heart of this new approach is the creation of a new fund that would be used primarily to supplement local authorities' cessation expenditure, while simultaneously encouraging cigarette companies to shift away from combustible products to less harmful alternatives.

I know many are very wary of those products and the fact that many are produced or funded by tobacco companies. We must recognise that the tobacco companies have been extremely dishonest in the past about the harm caused by smoking. Tobacco companies have made a fortune selling cigarettes and they have got the country into this mess. I believe it is only right that they get us out of it. We should and must follow the simple principle of the polluter pays. They have the resources and the customer base to help smoking cessation tools get straight to the people who need them most.

The proposed tobacco transition fund would work in a similar way to the carbonated drinks industry fund, providing incentives for both individual consumers and the tobacco industry to change their behaviour. Over the next decade or so, such a fund could raise up to £1 billion, which would be spent primarily on cessation services in the areas with the highest smoking prevalence. The fund would be paid for by the major tobacco companies according to their market share. The fund would remain at the same level, regardless of the number of smokers in the UK, thereby making it increasingly costly for any company that wished to continue selling cigarettes as the number of smokers declined. The vast majority of the fund would be passed directly to local authorities to fund cessation services, with a particular focus on those with the highest rates of prevalence.

The fund could also provide extra ring-fenced money to Public Health England to promote switching by funding independent research, with the aim of promoting

popular understanding and awareness of non-combustible products. The final element of the fund would be to support trading standards in its ongoing efforts to combat illicit trade in combustible tobacco, with the investment based on Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' assessment of local need and impact. The fund would need a robust and independent governance structure to oversee spending by the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and local authorities. It would also require accurate reporting by the manufacturers of their efforts to switch consumers. This could include publication of sales data, and research and development spend.

The Bill would also need to find a way to encourage more smokers to switch. It is apparent that the Public Health England endorsement, which states that e-cigarettes are 95% safer than smoking, has been insufficient in persuading smokers that the alternatives are safer. In a survey last year, 26% of adults thought e-cigarettes were as harmful or more harmful than smoking, up from 7% in 2013.

We also need a new approach to help people receive the required information and support to quit. That must include a new approach to the rules on advertisements. We must recognise that e-cigarettes and other non-combustible products are very different from products that tobacco companies are better known for. It seems ridiculous that it is possible to advertise these products on outdoor billboards, but the same information cannot be provided using the internet, even with restrictions to limit its audience to adults only. Manufacturers of reduced harm products would adhere to a marketing code similar to that which applies to other highly regulated products, such as alcohol. The Advertising Standards Authority would monitor and enforce the code.

We must also look at reducing access to harmful tobacco products that are still being sold. At the moment, there is no requirement in England to have a licence or to register with a local authority to sell tobacco. Scotland has a model that requires registration, which is relatively simple to complete and free for retailers so that it does not hit small businesses. Introducing a register in England would strengthen tobacco control, making it a criminal offence to sell tobacco without being registered. If retailers sell illicit tobacco or sell to minors, they could then be struck off the register altogether.

I truly believe that if the industry is willing to commit to a future based on e-cigarettes and other reduced-harm products, we should take it up on the offer and allow Government and local authorities to partner with it for the financial and technical help needed to help smokers to quit. I am sure we would all agree that we want a smoke-free society as soon as possible. Hon. Members on both sides of the House and even some tobacco companies are now saying this as well, so the Government could not ask for a better opportunity. The challenge now is to make sure that the reality lives up to those ambitions, and I believe that the measures I have set out give us the best opportunity to do this. I commend the Bill to the House.

12.51 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): To be clear, while I rise to oppose the Bill, I do not intend to divide the House. I do not intend to speak for long either, as I know that

[Philip Davies]

many hon. Members want to speak in the Budget debate, but it is important to put the Bill that the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) proposes into some context. I commend his dogged determination to reduce the number of people who smoke, but my fear is that, with this Bill, the points that he raises are either unwelcome or largely not necessary.

Yesterday the Chancellor again increased the tax on tobacco products by a rate above inflation, which means that the tax on some products is now more than 90% of the retail price. Around £12 billion of excise revenue is raised from tobacco products in the UK each year, and that does not include VAT. Each year the Government increase the level further above inflation. It was supposedly Louis XIV's Finance Minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who famously said that the art of levying taxes is to pluck the goose so as to get the maximum amount of feathers with the minimum amount of hissing. That is the balancing act that the Government have to perform every year with duties, including tobacco duty, except in this case the only hissing that we can hear is the sound of the criminal gangs who smuggle illegal tobacco into this country rubbing their hands with glee. If the Government thought that they could raise any more from the tobacco industry, I think that they would already be doing it.

The right hon. Gentleman proposes that the House should require the Secretary of State to report on how he is making the tobacco industry pay for smoking cessation services. One is tempted to ask how much more than £12 billion the right hon. Gentleman wants or expects, but of course what he is calling for is some kind of levy on tobacco, which he and a few others have repeatedly asked this and previous Governments about in the House. Indeed, such a question was asked only last month by the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), so clearly Members are having no difficulty in holding the Government to account on this issue, and I certainly do not think that we need a new Bill to help us.

The hon. Lady received the same answer in September that the Government have given many times before: a levy would be passed on to consumers and so would have the same effect as a duty increase, which is happening anyway, except for the fact that a levy would complicate the tax system, increase the administrative burden on Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and create uncertainty for consumers and businesses. It was a bad idea in 2016 when the right hon. Member for Rother Valley presented a petition to the House about it, it was a bad idea last month, and it is still a bad idea today. The right hon. Gentleman keeps banging this drum, but perhaps it is time to change the tune.

On the advertising and promotion of alternatives to smoking, such as e-cigarettes, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have already committed to examining how they can better support smokers with clear information after we leave the EU and once we are no longer held back by the outdated thinking of the EU's tobacco products directive—yet another benefit of leaving. The best thing that a smoker can do, of course, is to quit smoking altogether, but it is obvious that those who cannot, or do not want to, deserve to be told the truth about e-cigarettes and other products that could offer them a less harmful alternative. At present,

the law prevents manufacturers from giving them that information, but I hope that once we leave the EU, we will be able to change that.

Not all aspects of the tobacco products directive are bad, however; some offer real protections to consumers and deserve to be preserved after we leave the EU. For example, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the directive requires the manufacturers and importers of e-cigarettes and novel tobacco products to share with the Government any market research information that they hold on those products when they place them on the public register of legal products. That seems to be a very proper measure to allow the Government to monitor what is happening in this marketplace. As long as that measure remains in place after we leave the EU, it strikes me that we see another part of the right hon. Gentleman's proposed Bill that is simply not needed.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman asks for the introduction of a tobacco licensing scheme, with tough penalties, but again that simply is not needed. The Government are already at work on implementing a Europe-wide system to track and trace tobacco products. That system will require that manufacturers, importers, wholesalers and retailers are all registered on a public database as "economic operators" in order to handle tobacco. That is a de facto licensing scheme anyway, and it does everything that is needed to support trading standards enforcement against unscrupulous criminals who sell smuggled tobacco or sell tobacco to children—with a bit of luck, we will see a few more of them behind bars as a result. I certainly hope that anyone who is caught committing such crimes would be automatically struck off the list and rendered unable to legally handle tobacco.

As I said, the right hon. Gentleman deserves our respect for his tireless and relentless work to reduce smoking. Although it is not my intention to divide the House, I thought that it was important to put on record the context of his proposed Bill and to point out that its measures are either unwelcome or, more often, not necessary.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23) and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Sir Kevin Barron, Norman Lamb, Mark Pawsey, Liz Kendall, Jess Phillips, Crispin Blunt, Mr Charles Walker, Mr Kevan Jones, Adam Afriyie and Tonia Antoniazzi present the Bill.

Sir Kevin Barron accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed (Bill 280).

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We have just agreed that the Bill is theoretically going to be read a Second time on 23 November. Unfortunately, on that day, 150 private Members' Bills are going to be considered, 148 of which—now 149—I suspect will not be reached. Under our Standing Orders, the Government have to provide us with 13 days in a Session for private Members' Bills. They guaranteed that they would provide additional days in this Session, because it is a two-year Session. They are considering having a two-year Session next time as well. Would it not be a good idea if they announced some additional days for private Members' Bills—today, for instance?

Philip Davies: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Clerk has consulted his scholarly cranium, on the strength of which—and it is a very considerable strength—he was about to proffer me some advice, to which I will listen attentively if I can hear it. In any case, I have a view on what the hon. Gentleman has said, but let us first hear the point of order from the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), if it is on the same matter.

Philip Davies: It is on that very point, Mr Speaker. Am I not right in thinking that the Standing Orders state that there “shall be” 13 sitting days in a Session for private Members’ Bills, not that there will be a minimum of 13 days? Would it therefore not be quite proper for this Session to have just those 13 days, as that is what the Standing Orders clearly set out?

Mr Speaker: Conformity with Standing Orders is a very good starting point, but in reality it is possible for there to be differences of opinion about their interpretation. Recalling the sequence of events earlier in this Parliament, I believe that the Government nodded their recognition of the fact that a two-year Session had an implication for Opposition days and private Members’ Bills, and that therefore there would need to be an explicit commitment to guarantee the requisite number of days. I am not aware that that has yet happened, and that, I think, is at the heart of the hon. Gentleman’s point of order. If he is asking if I think it would be a good idea for there to be an announcement, my answer is: it might very well be, and if there is to be such an announcement, it would probably be a good idea for it to be sooner rather than later, if for no other or better reason than that it would mean he did not have to exercise his knee muscles again by rising to his feet to raise this perfectly legitimate point. I think we will leave it there for now, but I am grateful to both hon. Members for their points of order.

Ways and Means

Budget Resolutions

INCOME TAX (CHARGE)

Debate resumed (Order, 29 October).

Question again proposed,

That income tax is charged for the tax year 2019-20.

And it is declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

1.1 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Four weeks ago, the Prime Minister promised to end austerity. She raised people’s hopes—the hopes of teachers that they would no longer have to rely on begging letters to parents to fund the running of their schools; the hopes of police officers that the safer neighbourhood teams would return to tackle the rise in violent crime; and the hopes of local councillors of all political parties that they would have the resources to support local families in need at a time when a record number of children are being taken into care.

Those hopes were dashed yesterday. At best, those people got what the Chancellor described as “little extras”. No wonder so many teachers, police officers, local councillors and others feel bitterly disappointed at the Prime Minister’s broken promise, because yesterday’s Budget was not the end of austerity. Even with yesterday’s Budget, two thirds of the welfare benefit cuts planned by the Government will still roll out. Outside the NHS, departmental budgets are flat, and the Resolution Foundation this morning revealed that some Departments faced a further 3% cut in their budgets by 2023. Austerity is not ending.

For most people, ending austerity is about not just halting some of the cuts planned by the Government, but lifting the burden that austerity has imposed upon them and their communities over the last hard eight years.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I thank the shadow Chancellor for giving way so early in his speech. May I refer him to page 39 of the Red Book, which shows clearly that, by fiscal year 2023-24, there will be a £30 billion fiscal loosening? He referred to the Resolution Foundation, but it says that under universal credit, more money will be paid out to recipients than under the current system.

John McDonnell: To be absolutely clear, the Chancellor gave the impression yesterday that there would be no departmental cuts, but the Resolution Foundation has said that, although some Departments will be protected, others will have a 3% cut as a result. I call that continuing austerity.

Ending austerity is about more than that; it is about ending and repairing some of the damage that has been inflicted on our society and, yes, has undermined some of the social fabric we rely upon. Yesterday, the Chancellor claimed that this was a “turning point”. It is, but not in the way he suggested. This is not the end of austerity, but it is the beginning of the end of the dominance of

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an economic theory and practice that has wreaked havoc on our communities. People no longer believe the myth that austerity was necessary. They are seeing this Government hand out £110 billion in tax cuts to the rich and corporations while their services are being cut and their children are forced into poverty.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Liverpool's local authority will have had 64% of its budget cut by 2020. Would not a reversal in austerity mean its budget being reinstated?

John McDonnell: We are currently seeing local councils—the first wave has been Conservative—virtually going into administration. That must say something about the impact of a 50% cut in local government funding over the last eight years.

People no longer accept the trickle-down economics that has gripped the Tory party for four decades.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: I will in due course. The Parliamentary Private Secretary has done his job and handed out the briefings and questions to everyone. I respect the hon. Gentleman for his diligence and I will allow some interventions but, to be frank, people out there are fed up with parliamentary banter and want a debate that reflects the real world.

People no longer accept the trickle-down economics that has gripped the Tory party for four decades—the idea that somehow if we cut taxes for the rich and the corporations, this wealth will trickle down to everybody. They no longer accept “public sector bad, private sector good”. They no longer accept privatisation and deregulation; in fact, those are anathema to most people now. What was surprising yesterday was how lacking in self-awareness the Chancellor and his colleagues were and how out of touch they were with the reality of our people's day-to-day lives. His speech reflected how ideologically crushed the Tories are. They are so bereft of ideas that the Chancellor yesterday, in a major parliamentary speech, was reduced to toilet gags. They are so bereft of ideas that they made a pathetic attempt to imitate Labour policies.

Mr Marcus Jones: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generosity. Is the new economic model that Labour is proposing the same one that left 500,000 more people unemployed in 1979 and 450,000 more people unemployed in 2010 than when it came to office?

John McDonnell: A former Local Government Minister gets to his feet in this House and does not express a word of apology for what the Government have done to local government.

For some time, I have had concerns about the nature of the whole debate on austerity. First, many—I accept not all—in the Conservative party seem to have no appreciation of what austerity has meant and continues to mean for our society. I thought at one point that that was because many Labour MPs such as me represented constituencies with a different demographic to many Conservative constituencies. I represent a working class, multicultural London constituency. Yes, it is faced with

different challenges from those of leafy Surrey, for example, but most of all our constituents, wherever they are, rely on the NHS, local schools, the police and local council services, so all of us should have some idea of what the public services that support our constituents have been going through.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: Not at the moment, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

What shocked me yesterday was that the Chancellor delivered a Budget that so clearly failed to address the desperate needs of our society after eight years of austerity. Let us look at just some elements of the human cost of austerity and what the Chancellor brought forward in the Budget.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): As part of the number crunching that the right hon. Gentleman has undoubtedly been doing, has he worked out how much more would have been available for the police, prisons, schools and local government if the UK had not voted to leave the European Union two and a half years ago? Does he not believe that that reinforces the case for a people's vote now to restore the level of growth that we saw two and a half years ago?

John McDonnell: I respect the right hon. Gentleman's views on Brexit because I campaigned for remain as well, but it behoves any Liberal Democrat to come to this House with a bit of humility after serving with a Tory Administration that savaged our public services.

Let me look at some of the elements of human suffering. Health workers are having to cope with the biggest financial squeeze in the NHS's history.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must reinstate nursing bursaries if we are to see the number of nurses we need in our NHS?

John McDonnell: That is an essential element of the reconstruction that Labour will have to do when we come to power.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies said that a rise in health spending of 3.3% was needed just to maintain the current stretched service, and that at least 4% was needed to improve it. Instead, according to the Nuffield Trust, what we got amounts to just a 2.7% increase in overall health spending in real terms next year.

Police officers have seen 21,000 of their colleagues' jobs cut since 2010. As a result, violent crime is on the rise. The independent police watchdog is warning that “the lives of vulnerable people could be at risk.”

What did the police get yesterday? Some £160 million for counter-terrorism—far less than is needed—and not a penny more for neighbourhood policing. And that despite the head of counter-terrorism warning that counter-terrorism work relies on regular policing being properly funded.

Teachers' pay has fallen by 4% since 2011 and the schools budget has been cut by £3 billion in real terms. Some 36,000 teachers have left the profession in a year—the highest since records began.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the cuts to education that have left 22 out of 26 Wallasey schools facing cuts and that have seen £3 million cut from their budgets, while teachers are earning £4,000 a year less and having to do more, are an absolute disgrace, and that that demonstrates that this Government give no priority whatsoever to the future of our children?

John McDonnell: My hon. Friend has got it exactly.

It takes something, does it not, to have headteachers marching on Downing Street? That has never been seen before. Just what did yesterday's Budget do to tempt teachers back? What the Chancellor offered was "little extras". It was an insult, especially when 60% of teachers are not getting a pay rise this year.

There are now 4 million children living in poverty, 500 children's centres have closed, 500 children's playgrounds have closed and 128,000 children are living in temporary accommodation. When children's social care faces a funding gap of £3 billion by 2025, what did the Chancellor offer? Just £84 million for just 20 councils. That will not even scratch the surface of the problem.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con) *rose—*

John McDonnell: No.

We have a record number of children coming into care. I know what coming into care means for a child: they are scarred for life. Why are they coming into care? Because there has been a 40% cut in funding to councils for early intervention to support families. Let the Government justify that.

On young people, the YMCA reports that spending on youth services has fallen by 62% since 2010. The average graduate comes out of university with a £50,000 debt. The IFS describes home ownership among young people as having collapsed completely. Tragically, with the mounting pressure, a decades-long decline in suicide among men has been reversed since 2010.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for mentioning suicide. I wonder whether there is anything in this Budget that he can welcome, even though I appreciate that we may differ. Does he not welcome the announcement on mental health or the announcement of a £21 million centre of excellence for public sector leaders?

John McDonnell: Of course we welcome more money for mental health, but what was required was £4 billion, not £2 billion; and that £2 billion was contained within the £20 billion that had already been announced, so it is not additional money. There are some things that we can work on on a cross-party basis in this House, but we have to be honest about the needs and the requirements, and we have to be straightforward in saying how they can be funded.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is being a little unfair; some people have done very well from austerity. A thousand of the richest people in the United Kingdom have seen their personal wealth increase by £274 billion over the past five years.

John McDonnell: The facts speak for themselves.

To make a real difference to the lives of young people, the Chancellor needed to address the housing crisis, deal with the toppling mountain of student loans, and restore work allowances for single people and couples without children. Instead we got piecemeal, unambitious housing announcements and re-announcements, nothing on student finances, and nothing on universal credit recipients who are single and without children.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The Chancellor's meagre contributions to universal credit will do nothing to reverse the social security cuts for disabled people. Does my right hon. Friend agree that for the millions of disabled people, austerity is far from over?

John McDonnell: I will come on to the plight of disabled people, who seem to have been a particular target for this Government, given how they have withdrawn funding and services.

On older people, there were more than 31,000 excess winter deaths among the over-65s in 2017, and well over 150,000 elderly people are in arrears in their social care payments. The Local Government Association, which works on a cross-party basis, said that £1.5 billion was needed by 2020 just to fill the funding gap in adult social care. The £650 million that was announced yesterday is less than half of that.

What comes out of the analysis is this. The burden of austerity has fallen disproportionately on who? On the shoulders of women. Yesterday, that did not just continue; it got worse. The share of the Government's tax and benefit changes impacting on women increased from 86% to 87%—another year with an increase. The 1950s women, who have been treated so unjustly, have been overlooked once again.

The victims of possibly the harshest cruelty inflicted by this Government are disabled people. A UN inquiry into the rights of persons with disabilities found this Government guilty of "grave and systematic violations" of their human rights. When have any UK Government been charged with that by a UN body? Never. To be frank, we know—

Chris Philp *rose—*

John McDonnell: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once.

Many have taken their own lives as a result of the welfare reforms imposed upon them since 2010, and the Government—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the right hon. Gentleman. The hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) has made his point with force and alacrity, but he should not witter from a sedentary position, engaged in an animated conversation with a Member on the opposite Benches. The same goes for Members on both sides of the House. The shadow Chancellor has addressed the House, as in my experience he invariably does, with considerable courtesy. Whatever people think of what is being said, they should extend courtesy to the Front-Bench speakers, as they should to Back-Bench speakers.

John McDonnell: I understand the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp); he gets excited at times, but as someone who has been excited myself at times, I completely understand.

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The Government have been repeatedly forced by the courts to change how they are treating disabled people. They do not seem to have learned their lesson yet, so yesterday we saw no restoration of disability premiums, no end to the cruel social security freeze, and no end to dehumanising and unreliable work capability assessments.

The Government are also putting the livelihoods of future generations at risk. A few weeks ago the world's leading authority on climate change said that avoiding dangerous climate change would require "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented" action. What did we get yesterday? We got no mention of climate change, no reversal of cuts to renewable energy, and no significant environmental policy.

Neil O'Brien: I am curious: the other day the Government voted through a £650 million scheme to improve energy efficiency and home insulation; why did the Labour party vote against it?

John McDonnell: Because it was not on a scale that would have had sufficient impact. I welcome interventions, but I think we should have a rule that when Members intervene they should describe their background, in this case as advisor to George Osborne, who cut back on the solar energy industry, who undermined wind power in this country, and who set us back so that we will never meet our climate change targets.

The impact—[*Interruption.*] Calm down, calm down—George Osborne used to say that to me, and I said "I'll calm down when you resign," and he did. The impact on the self-employed and small businesses has been equally stark. Some 51,000 high street stores closed last year. Wages for the self-employed have collapsed to around the same level as 20 years ago.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kempdown) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was a disgrace that yesterday we heard that the Government are going to save the high street by turning our shops into residential properties and risking the very fundamentals of how the high street operates?

John McDonnell: My hon. Friend is right. Yesterday we needed serious action to address the bias against high streets, which has led to so many empty shops. Instead we got legislation that will help turn shops into flats.

We then had a huge media presentation about an online tax being introduced: it was said that £400 million will be found from this online tax in a few years' time. At the weekend the Tax Justice Network said the top five tech companies have avoided £5 billion-worth of tax.

My second concern about the austerity debate is that if we understand and appreciate what people have been forced to go through with austerity, only callous complacency could drive us to inflict those policies on people. Yesterday the Chancellor's speech, with references to "Labour's recession," demonstrated that he is trapped in a time warp of a political propaganda exercise by the Tories of a decade ago. [*Interruption.*] I thought they would like that one. Let us be clear: the financial crash

was the result of greed and speculation, and a lack of regulation that goes right back to the 1980s. Austerity was always a bad idea.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Like my right hon. Friend, I heard the Chancellor try to blame the last Labour Government for the recession, but in actual fact the previous Chancellor said a couple of months ago that it was not the Labour Government's fault; it was the whole system's fault, starting with Lehman Brothers in America. We should get the facts right.

John McDonnell: I always said George Osborne would get it right one day.

The consensus among economists, and the evidence of recent history, is absolutely clear. The worst possible response to a recession is for a Government to cut their own spending. In a recession, the Government should be there to support businesses and households. Instead, at the moment when Government support was most needed to help people back on their feet, Conservative Chancellors chose to impose the most severe spending cuts in generations. They did not have to, and they should not have done.

The Tories were warned that austerity would lead to slower growth and lower wages, and it has. The economic experts the Tories chose to ignore were proved right. Growth since the financial crisis, under Conservative Chancellors, has been the slowest after any recession in modern times. Real weekly average earnings are still lower today than they were in 2010. The Resolution Foundation reports this morning that real wages will not have fully recovered until 2024.

Ten years after the crash, we should be clear about the causes of the financial crisis. The Chancellor seemed confused on that point yesterday. It was not the deficit that caused the crisis; it was the crisis that caused the deficit. It was a crisis—[*Interruption.*] They don't like to hear the truth. It was a crisis that resulted from the casino economy that the Tories helped construct right from the 1980s and supported every step of the way.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman asked us to give our personal history: I was a proud public sector employee for 17 years and I take issue with the way that Labour wrecked the economy and spent money we did not have. Would he like to tell us how he proposes to pay for his current funding system?

John McDonnell: Here is an answer: it is called a fair taxation system.

It was the ideology of neoliberalism that said markets were always right, that regulation was simply a barrier to growth, and that, ultimately, greed was good. The financial system this ideology helped design collapsed 10 years ago, and it was Conservative Chancellors who took the political decision to force working people, not the bankers, to pay the price for it.

Several hon. Members rose—

John McDonnell: Mr Speaker, you will admit that I have been generous in the number of times I have given way, and I suggest that, as you have a large number of Members wishing to speak, particularly on the Labour Benches, I should press on.

The result has been a period of stagnation unprecedented in modern British history: a period of falling wages, crumbling public services, and insecurity in an economy visibly failing across great swathes of the country. And because the cuts are still, even now, grinding on, the stagnation will continue, as the official forecasts say: investment forecasts have been revised downwards across the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast period, real wages will barely recover, and growth will remain far below its long-run trend.

The Chancellor cannot use Brexit as an excuse for those dismal figures. The OBR presented its forecasts on the basis of what it called a "relatively smooth exit" from the EU next year, but the Tories are bungling the Brexit negotiations—it is so bad that there is now an impact on the economy. Investment is being delayed and has even been cancelled. Britain already has the lowest rate of business investment in the G7, and even that has fallen this year. It is the uncertainty the Tories have introduced into the whole process that is so terrifying businesspeople. They just want to know where they stand, but the uncertainty was made even worse yesterday. The Chancellor has taken to threatening to revoke his own Budget in the event of a no-deal Brexit, yet on the very morning of the Budget, his Prime Minister was contradicting him. How can any company looking to invest in Britain not wonder where we are heading?

For well over two years, the Government have spent more time negotiating with themselves than with our European partners. With the date for leaving the EU just five months away, time is running out to present a deal that would respect the result of the referendum and win the support of the House. Instead, as the Tories continue to indulge in their squabbling, the economy and the whole country are being confronted with the grim prospect of a no-deal car crash. I have asked the Chancellor before to rule out a no-deal Brexit. A responsible Chancellor simply would not support such a thing, and would not, as he has done before, idly threaten to mutate this country into some form of tax haven off the coast of Europe. Let us put it on record that austerity is not ending. In the weeks and months ahead, people will recognise that the Prime Minister's promise has been broken. There are rumours that this was possibly a pre-election Budget with pre-election tax giveaways. If the Conservatives are contemplating a general election, let me say on behalf of the Labour party: bring it on.

1.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Yesterday's Budget proved the time-honoured truth that careful stewardship of the economy, taking difficult decisions, creating the environment for enterprise and generating growth will lead to better days, not just for those with the dignity of employment, now in record numbers, who did not have it in the past, but for the provision of the public services on which we all depend. This Budget reported record jobs, unemployment lower than in a generation, more full-time jobs, the lowest proportion of low-paid jobs for two decades and rising real pay, with the fastest rises in real pay among the lowest paid in our society, thanks to our national living wage.

We have just seen the big difference between the two Front Benches. While we are delivering more jobs, more opportunity and more prosperity, those on the Opposition

Front Bench promise more borrowing, more taxes and more debt. We have just heard it again from the shadow Chancellor: no ideas for the future; just talking Britain down. There is a big difference in this Parliament between a party that believes in the future and an Opposition Front Bench that would only take us back. Wherever it has been tried in the world, the programme that the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) proposes has led to bankruptcy and misery for millions, and we cannot fund public services on that. Without a strong economy, we cannot fund an NHS that everyone can turn to in their hour of need, whether that involves a life-threatening condition or falling over some fly-tipping. We are able to put record funding into our NHS only because there are millions more people in work who are earning more and paying their taxes.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): On that point, may I thank the Secretary of State for his work on securing the public capital for the Midland Metropolitan Hospital in Sandwell, which had some difficulties following the collapse of Carillion? His work with the chief executive and the board of the trust has secured the future of that hospital, which is now on track to be built. It will be a vital resource for my local area of Rowley Regis.

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has worked so hard to get that hospital back on track. It is now being built because we have put in the capital—it is in the NHS budget. We had to rescue it from the failed private finance initiative that was invented by the Labour party. It is only because we have a strong economy that we can give the NHS the longest and largest cash injection ever in its history—

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)
rose—

Matt Hancock: If the right hon. Gentleman will welcome that injection, I will give way to him.

Sir Edward Davey: The right hon. Gentleman is talking about the rise in health spending. He is Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, so can he tell us by how much social care expenditure is going to rise over the next five years?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I am going to come on to social care. Yesterday, we put a further £650 million into social care, and we are coming forward with reforms to social care to put it on a sustainable footing for the long term.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I want to ask the Secretary of State about acquired brain injury. We save so many lives now, but if we put in significant investment up front to ensure that everyone got the right neuro-rehabilitation, we could save vast amounts of money for the taxpayer. Is that not rather a good model for us to pursue?

Matt Hancock: Yes, and the constructive approach that the hon. Gentleman has taken on this subject with me over many months, and for years before that, shows the progress that we can make. We are putting £20.5 billion extra into the NHS, and making an uplift like that means

[*Matt Hancock*]

that we can turn resources towards preventing ill health in exactly the way that he describes. I pay tribute to the work that he has done on this subject.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Yesterday, the Chancellor boasted of a “jobs miracle”. If there is a jobs miracle, why is the chemotherapy unit at King George Hospital in my constituency closing because of a shortage of chemotherapy nurses?

Matt Hancock: We have a plan to improve the cancer workforce and to try to solve some of these problems. Maybe the hon. Gentleman should come over to this side and work with us to put record funding into the NHS. We can only have record funding for the NHS if we have a strong economy.

Mr Jayawardena: Is it not critical that every single penny put into the NHS is well spent if we are to tackle waste and bureaucracy, unlike what happened when Labour was in charge, when almost half was not spent on patient care?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People want to see more funding for our NHS, and they are going to get it, but they also want to see all the money being well spent.

The Budget confirms that the NHS is the Government's No. 1 spending priority, just as it is the British people's No. 1 spending priority. This Budget places the Government four-square in the centre of British politics. It is progressive and optimistic and focused on the future, not just for the many but for the whole country that we serve.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I absolutely welcome the uplift to NHS funding, but will the Secretary of State answer a small technical question, please? In the Red Book, there are separate entries for the increases in the resource departmental expenditure limits for health and for NHS England? Can he confirm that the difference—£6.3 billion versus £7.2 billion—will not result in a transfer from Public Health England, from Health Education England or from capital budgets to fund the discrepancy? That has happened in the past.

Matt Hancock: Yes, I can confirm that. The £20.5 billion real-terms funding for the NHS in the Budget is for the NHS itself and will be channelled through NHS England. Of course there are budgets in the Department that are outside the NHS envelope, and they will be settled in the spending review. This is exactly as has been planned, and it was made clear in June. I can tell the House that the £20.5 billion is both the longest and the largest settlement for any public service in the history of this country.

Grahame Morris: We need to be precise and accurate about this, and I have just googled the settlement. In fact, the biggest ever increase in NHS funding happened between 1997 and 2008 when the budget went up from £55 billion to £125.4 billion—

Matt Hancock *indicated dissent.*

Grahame Morris: Well, I am talking about being factually correct. The biggest ever funding increase came under a Labour Government. Let us be honest about this.

Matt Hancock: This is a single settlement for a five-year period so that the NHS can plan again.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Matt Hancock: I want to make some progress.

I received some representations about what we should do on NHS funding. One was from a John from Hillingdon, who called for a 2.2% increase in funding. John said that would make the NHS the “envy of the world”. Others may preach a gospel of envy, but we are getting on with building the NHS to be there for us all. The £20 billion increase I have talked about is not a 2.2% per year increase—it is 3.4% a year more over the next five years.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I acknowledge the Secretary of State's contribution to funding the Midland Metro Hospital, which is very important to people in the Black country. However, given that NHS hospital trusts have cumulative debts of around £7.5 billion plus a further £5 billion or so of other debts, can he reassure us that the £20.5 billion will be used not just to pay debts but to provide extra services?

Matt Hancock: The £20.5 billion is just for day-to-day running costs—the resource costs. Of course there is a capital budget, too, which includes £4 billion of taxpayers' money. That goes towards ensuring that we can get the capital built. The critical point is that we have not only that £20.5 billion uplift in running costs but a capital budget. We will make further announcements on the allocation of the capital budget later in the autumn.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for clarifying the £20.5 billion figure, which does not include training or capital. Of course, that contradicts the unhelpful briefing from Downing Street during the summer that it was something like £84 billion. Will he confirm that that £84 billion figure, which has been repeated in the media, is, as the *Health Service Journal* says, a fib, and that we are talking about £20.5 billion purely for resources in the NHS in England and Wales?

Matt Hancock: No. The £84 billion is the cash figure. The £20.5 billion is the real-terms increase by the end of the five years. If we add up all the extra money, we get £84 billion. It is there on page 36 of the Budget, if the hon. Lady wants to look. The biggest single cash increase comes next year, in 2019-20. It is all there in the Red Book.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for more good news for the midlands in the form of £70 million for the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre just outside my constituency to help civilian rehabilitation. Can he share further details of that with us?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute again to my right hon. Friend, who has worked tirelessly in support of that project. The Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre in Loughborough will link world-class military medical facilities with our NHS. That means lessons learned in the medical field from treating our brave troops who come back from the frontline can be brought into the NHS—for instance, surgical techniques that were learned in battle can be adapted to help civilians here. I pay tribute to her and others for the work they have done.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): Here is a representation from a Jonathan from Leicester. Further to the question from the Chair of the Select Committee on Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), can the Secretary of State confirm that, in next year's spending review, the cuts to capital budgets and the £700 million-worth of cuts to public health budgets will be reversed, and that there will be real-terms increases in funding for capital, training and public health? Can he guarantee that?

Matt Hancock: The spending review is next year. What I can guarantee is a £20.5 billion increase in NHS spending. That is the biggest increase in any spending commitment for any public service in the history of this country. *[Interruption.]* It is a pity that the Leader of the Opposition is not interested and does not want to hear about it. If he stayed, he could also hear about the reforms we are going to make. He should hear this more than anyone. We are acutely aware on the Conservative Benches that this is not Government money or NHS money but the hard-earned money of taxpayers, and we need to ensure that it is spent wisely. When he sprays his commitments around, Opposition Front Benchers would do well to remember that this is money from taxpayers.

Mr Jayawardena: I welcome the fact that taxpayers' money will be spread across the whole country, including £10 million to support air ambulances, which provide vital services in rural areas.

Matt Hancock: So many of us know just how important air ambulance services are and the countless lives they save. I am delighted that, on top of the £20.5 billion for the NHS—the biggest ever, longest ever cash settlement for any public service in history—there was £10 million for air ambulances.

Neil O'Brien: If my right hon. Friend will excuse another Leicestershire-based health intervention, I am incredibly grateful for the creation of the new Cottage Hospital in Market Harborough, the gleaming new A&E ward at Leicester Royal Infirmary and the decision to save the brilliant children's heart unit at Glenfield Hospital. Does he agree that that is a more welcome record than the Labour party's record of bankrupting the country, giving us the biggest recession since the second world war and putting 1 million people on the dole?

Matt Hancock: It is true that the Labour party in office has always left unemployment higher than it found it; it is true that, while Labour left the deficit higher, we are bringing it down; and it is true that inequality, too, is coming down. Page 8 of the distributional analysis shows that, contrary to what we heard in that

paean of gloom from the shadow Chancellor, the biggest rises in full-time employee gross weekly real earnings over the last three years have been among the 10% least well paid in our country. That is what this Conservative Government are doing—delivering for everybody in our country.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): On inequalities, does the Secretary of State recognise that life expectancy is stalling under his Government? In some regions it is getting worse. For women, it is getting worse. Perhaps he can answer the question he could not answer last week—why, for the first time in 100 years, do four babies in 1,000 not reach their first birthday?

Matt Hancock: As the hon. Lady knows, life expectancy is increasing, and we are forecast to see an increasing number of people live to a good old age. Indeed, the number of people aged 75 and over is set to double in the next 30 years. That is a brilliant achievement, which is in part down to the hard work of our NHS. Cancer survival rates are at a record high, strokes are down by a third and deaths from heart failure are down by a quarter. Of course, those successes have brought new challenges. The biggest health challenge we face is that people are living longer, often with multiple chronic conditions. The money is only one part of the plan to safeguard the NHS and ensure it is fit for the 21st century. The Budget delivers the funding, and later this year we will deliver the plan for how we will set the NHS fair for the future.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I have very little hope for the older people of our country given that the Government have cut £7 billion from the social care budget and replaced it with only £240 million. How is that safeguarding our old people for the future?

Matt Hancock: Of course, in Scotland social care is devolved, so—*[Interruption.]* And in York, the amount of money for social care is going up thanks to the decisions announced yesterday.

Mr Jayawardena: Is not it true that Labour talk the talk but do not walk the walk? They failed to deliver an effective long-term solution for social care when they were in government. They had 13 years to sort it and they did not. Is not it also true that, even though they said they would use the comprehensive spending review to address that, they left office without delivering? That is what they do time and again.

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The long-term plan needs to ensure that we address the challenges of today and of tomorrow, including dementia, obesity and the rise in mental ill health. It will set out how we are going to address and deliver these changes. The Government believe in an NHS that is free at the point of use for everyone, for the long term.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): The A&E in my local hospital is deeply loved and I am very grateful that it is staying, but it is still under huge pressure. When I have been out at night with the emergency services, I have seen that emergency services personnel have to stay with someone who has an acute mental illness and

[Vicky Ford]

needs a mental health bed, which means that they cannot get on with other roles. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Government's strong announcement of more funding for mental health will help the whole NHS to do more?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and we can only have a sustainable NHS if the social care system is also properly supported.

The social care Green Paper to be published later this year will set out the options to meet the unprecedented demographic challenge—and what a challenge. Some 70% of people in residential care homes now have dementia. The number of people with dementia is set to rise from 850,000 today to over 1 million in less than a decade. The number of people of working age in need of care is rising and is set to increase by almost half by 2035. Yet, despite these pressures, 83% of adult social care settings are now rated good or outstanding by the Care Quality Commission. That is the highest level since assessments began. As a society, we need to address the pressures on social care so that everyone can live in dignity and we can have a situation that is sustainable for the long term.

The Green Paper will bring forward a range of proposals to reform our social care system. I pay tribute to the excellent cross-party work of the Health and Social Care Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, which are helping to build a consensus behind potential solutions. This is exactly the sort of long-term cross-party work that we need to see, when fair-minded people from across the House come together to address the challenges of the future, and I will work with anyone from any party to get this right.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I listened with care to my right hon. Friend's very welcome remarks on yesterday's "Today" programme about having parity of esteem between mental health and physical health, and I welcome the announcement in the Budget of £250,000 for children's crisis centres. Sadly, people in society now have complex mental health problems at a younger and younger age. In order to make these policies work, will the Secretary of State ensure that there is a sufficient number of well trained staff in the NHS to deal with these mental health problems?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; he has put his finger on an incredibly important point. As we spend £20 billion extra on the NHS, we are going to ensure that we train up and attract the people who are going to do the caring.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): On the issue of mental health support and services for children, I was quite disappointed that mental health support for schools was missing from the Budget. A lot of money was promised for child and adolescent mental health services but, as the Secretary of State will know, the Education Committee produced a joint report with the Health and Social Care Committee entitled "The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation", in which we outlined that we were really

keen to see additional funding for mental health support in schools. Is there anything that the Minister can do to look again at that issue?

Matt Hancock: Yes—part of the £2 billion of extra mental health funding that we announced yesterday is to ensure that there is support in schools, particularly for young people. That is one of the elements of the funding that we announced in the Budget yesterday, and I am very happy to talk to the hon. Lady about the details.

The social care Green Paper will address the question of long-term funding reform for social care and how we can help people to plan sensibly so they do not have to fear the risk of losing everything. But the Green Paper will not just look at funding; it will also look at the role of housing, at how we can combine a home with high-quality care, and at the links between the care of children and of the elderly. I have seen how such links can benefit both groups, helping children's development and tackling the scourge of loneliness that elderly people too often face. The Green Paper will of course also look at how we can better integrate the NHS and the social care system. What matters is what works, so we will look at things such as auto-enrolment, and how and if reforms elsewhere can be applied to social care. Like the NHS, the future of our social care system rests not just on funding, but on reform, and we are determined to rise to this challenge.

Every Member of this House will have their own personal story of the NHS. Whether it was the first few breaths of a child or the final few moments of a loved one, from cradle to grave that care is ever present, whatever the shade of Government. This Government want to ensure that that care will always be there for whoever needs it, and that the NHS remains free at the point of delivery. That is why we are putting the extra £20 billion into the NHS. It is only because our economy is strong, employment is rising and we believe in a free market economy that we can fund this increase, for just as there can only be truth when there is freedom of speech, so can there only be prosperity to fund public services when there is freedom of enterprise. It is a great sadness that, in stark contrast with the greats of his party in the past, the shadow Chancellor opposes both. It is now a combination that we can only get under a progressive, optimistic, future-focused Conservative Government. That is what this Budget delivers. I commend it to the House.

1.56 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is an honour to speak for the Scottish National party on the second day of the 2018 Budget debate.

Ten years ago last month, Lehman Brothers collapsed. Excessive risk-taking by financial institutions created an international banking crisis, and a global downturn followed. Since then, people and families across the UK have had to pay for the fall-out. There has been a decade of wage stagnation, a decade of cuts and a decade of the most vulnerable in our society being hit the hardest by Tory austerity. Looking forward, we are staring into the abyss that is Brexit. Mark Carney says that Brexit has already cost householders an average of £900, and the Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that leaving the single market and customs union would

cost 80,000 Scottish jobs. After a decade of austerity, households cannot afford to lose £900 each, and they certainly cannot afford a Tory Brexit.

The reality is that the people of Scotland are badly served by Westminster. We did not vote for a Tory Government and we did not vote for Brexit. I cannot think of a time in the past when a country has committed such a foreseeable act of economic self-harm. The Chancellor does not believe that we will be better off after Brexit. Even the Prime Minister does not believe that we will be better off after Brexit. We were promised £350 million pounds a week for public services. We will not be bought off with a commemorative 50p coin.

Sir Edward Davey: The hon. Lady is making an excellent start to her speech. Does she agree that, after a decade of Lehman austerity, we could be facing a decade of Brexit austerity?

Kirsty Blackman: I absolutely agree. An economic catastrophe is coming down the line as a result of Brexit. It does not matter what kind of Brexit there is; any Brexit is bad for the economy. Staying in the EU is the best possible option for the economy. If we cannot stay in the EU, staying in the single market and the customs union is the second best option.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Further to that point, did my hon. Friend notice in the Red Book that the expected growth that the UK will achieve in the next four to five years equals that of Ireland in only one year? Is that example not a clear signpost to all in Scotland and elsewhere that independence has worked for Ireland and is going to work for Scotland, and that the sooner we get it and the sooner we are clear of this lot, the better?

Kirsty Blackman: Absolutely; it is clear that remaining part of the UK is bad for Scotland's economy. The comparators in the Budget information documents show that the UK economy is growing slower than the EU economy is set to grow in every but one of the next five years.

Matt Hancock: May I just ask whether the hon. Lady has ever seen the result of a referendum that she likes?

Kirsty Blackman: Do you know what? The reality is that we have argued for a very long time—I have argued for my entire adult life—against the current democratic system, because it does not work for the people of Scotland. We do not get the Governments we vote for and we do not get the result that we voted for in the EU referendum. If the democratic system meant that Scotland's votes were reflected in reality, we would be in a very different situation today.

On a serious note, every week in our communities and at our surgeries MPs from both sides of the House are faced with the consequences of Westminster's poor decisions. We see working mothers forced to go to food banks. We see and hear about the Home Office-enforced separation of families. We meet young men struggling with mental health problems who have been sanctioned yet again because they are unable to jump through the unreasonable hoops put in their way by the Department for Work and Pensions. I do not know how anybody,

even in this Westminster Government, can believe that their policies are having a positive benefit. The tears and desperation with which we are all faced on a regular basis give the lie to that notion.

The Chancellor has failed adequately to fund our public services in this Budget. He has failed to undo the devastating social security cuts, he has failed to legislate for a real living wage and he has failed to provide adequate support for businesses facing the impending cliff edge of Brexit.

The Budget should have included decisions to help support all those who have been hit by a decade of austerity, and all those who will be hit by the forthcoming Brexit. The roll-out of universal credit should have been halted. A third of working-age households will be entitled to some universal credit. Of those, around a third will be at least £1,000 a year worse off than under the legacy system.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government missed an opportunity in the Budget yesterday not only to correct the injustices of universal credit but to compensate councils such as Highland Council that are having to foot a £2.5 million bill out of council tax funds simply for administering this failed and shambolic universal credit roll-out?

Kirsty Blackman: Absolutely. The Highland Council area has been particularly badly hit as one of the first areas in which universal credit was rolled out. It is currently rolling out in Aberdeen, and I am hugely concerned about the impact it will have on my constituents. The roll-out needs to be halted, because the issues that happened in the highlands and elsewhere have not been fixed, and they need to be fixed before any further roll-out can occur.

The benefits freeze should have been lifted, the sanctions regime should be scrapped, support for lone parents under the age of 25 must be reintroduced and the WASPI issue must be sorted, with those women being given the money they are owed. I am pleased that the Government have made a commitment to the pensions dashboard, but they now need to legislate to compel companies to comply so that people can access information about the pensions they are owed, and so that they can then get those pensions. That is important, and lots of people have been calling for it.

Workers' rights are another reserved issue, and the Chancellor should have committed to increasing the minimum wage to the living wage—an amount people can actually live on—by the end of this Parliament. The Office for National Statistics said this week:

"Among the countries of the UK, long-term pay growth has been highest in Scotland... Median pay for full-time workers was 87% higher in Scotland than it was in 1997."

The Scottish Government are doing all they can, particularly for staff employed in public sector roles, but we need the powers to do more. In Scotland, our Government have focused on uplifting the pay packets of the lowest paid, which is a progressive choice that makes the most positive difference. The UK Government have not chosen to do that.

We have fought long and hard for a single, real living wage rate. The UK Government need to recognise that it does not cost a 24-year-old less to live than it costs a

[Kirsty Blackman]

25-year-old. If the Chancellor will not make the required commitment to a real living wage for all, he should devolve it so that we can.

Statutory paternity leave should be doubled from two to four weeks, giving fathers even more opportunity to bond with their babies. A complete review of parental leave should be undertaken, including consideration of the start date of maternity leave, especially when a baby is born prematurely.

We propose that the Government set up a labour participation committee to consider groups that are currently under-represented or over-represented in certain sectors, and to examine barriers to work for women, disabled people, parents and other marginalised groups.

The Institute of Directors has called for a pot to be set aside so that small and medium-sized enterprises can bid for advice on how to cope with Brexit. The UK Government's advice thus far has been wholly inadequate, and we have only five months to go until the UK crashes out of the EU.

Businesses need to be able to access finance in order to grow. To do that, they need to have trust in financial institutions and, crucially, financial institutions need to earn that trust. The Chancellor should have committed to setting up a tribunal service so that those affected by business banking fraud—through the Royal Bank of Scotland's global restructuring group, Lloyds Bank, Halifax Bank of Scotland or others—can seek affordable redress, rather than having to go through a court process that is too expensive to access.

The UK Government must also ensure that current EU funding will continue until the end of the current multi-annual financial framework. Scotland must not be any worse off in respect of the funding allocations that replace those provided from the EU, and any arrangements must fully respect devolution and must be put in place with the consultation and agreement of the Scottish Parliament.

The Chancellor had an opportunity to make a commitment to the oil and gas sector deal, and he failed to do so. Our industry needs the deal to be signed off now, particularly with the impending lack of access to labour and investment following Brexit. I am pleased that he has heeded calls to make a clear statement on the future fiscal regime, because we cannot have unforeseen, sudden tax hikes like those made by previous Chancellors.

The other part of the jigsaw that is missing is a commitment to reducing the harmful climate change effects of the use of fossil fuels. In 2015, the UK Government cancelled their £1 billion carbon capture and storage competition, just six months before it was due to be awarded, after spending £100 million on it. That left Peterhead—a key candidate for support—behind. After three years of research and development, we have missed out on this vital industry of the future. The UK Government need to make an unequivocal commitment to supporting the development of CCS.

Drew Hendry: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about carbon capture, and about the betrayal of the £1 billion project at Peterhead. Does she agree that, if the UK Government are serious about meeting the climate change targets under the Paris agreement, spending

£100 million now, when we are behind the pace after abandoning a three-year £1 billion project, is just not good enough?

Kirsty Blackman: Absolutely. The potential benefits of CCS are unquestionable and, as my hon. Friend says, we need to get ahead of the curve again. We need the UK Government to commit to putting the money in now. That is especially important because their pulling the plug means there is now a lack of trust among the companies that are developing CCS. The UK Government need to make a clear and unequivocal commitment.

On evolving technologies, Scotland is a global leader in tidal, and the UK Government must work with the Scottish Government on the contract for difference process to support the technology journey from development to commercialisation, which is particularly important for tidal.

On solar power, we have been contacted by so many individuals who are concerned about what is happening to export tariffs for homes, small businesses and community energy projects from next April. The tariff is a vital support that encourages people to invest in solar power, and it must continue.

Lastly, in order to reduce climate change and to increase the use of healthier methods of transport, this Budget was an opportunity to reduce VAT on bikes. Just as we would like to see VAT removed from digital books, reducing VAT on bikes would make them cheaper for all and would be a real statement of intent from the Government on reducing climate change.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): Is the hon. Lady not aware that reducing VAT is very difficult while we are a member of the European Union, but it is something that we might be able to do after Brexit?

Kirsty Blackman: Actually, reducing VAT is quite possible for a member of the EU. Zero rating things is a problem, but reducing VAT is fine.

The Scottish fire and rescue service and Police Scotland are still owed £175 million of VAT. The UK Government have recognised that the system they had in place was unfair, yet they have refused to pay back the £175 million they owe our two vital life-saving industries. It would be incredibly useful if they could see their way to giving us back that £175 million.

On the subject of the UK Government reallocating funds that should rightly have gone to Scotland, the convergence uplift of £160 million should have been paid to Scottish farmers. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has admitted that the money has been spent elsewhere. We need a commitment that this money will come to Scotland in future years, and we need the previous years' money to come to Scotland now, so that our farmers can have the cash they have been allocated.

I am pleased that the Budget includes measures to ensure that companies pay their fair share of tax in the digital sphere, but the reality is that this is a consultation and the measures are not going to be in place yet. We also do not have a solid idea of what those measures will be. The Scottish National party would therefore like to propose two measures on digital taxation, and we hope that the Government will take them into account.

First, we believe that online retailers should be held liable for tax fraud committed by their suppliers. Sometimes when people order a product from a well-known online retailer it is delivered from China with a customs declaration and a stamp that says “gift”. Large online retailers should be held responsible for ensuring that those who use their platform pay the correct customs duties. We also believe that in order to combat tech firms that avoid corporation tax by registering implausibly low UK profits, the Chancellor should levy corporation tax on an assumed UK share of worldwide profits that is equal to their UK share of worldwide revenue. That could be subject to a dispute tribunal process to ensure fairness. The SNP will submit these suggestions in the consultation process, and we hope that they will be considered seriously.

Scotland’s cities have received city deal funding from both the UK and Scottish Governments. That is welcome, but what is not welcome is the fact that the UK Government have contributed far less to those deals than the Scottish Government. In total, the Tories have failed to match more than £350 million of Scottish Government funding for city deals and growth deals in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness, Stirling and Clackmannanshire, Tay Cities and Edinburgh. We believe that they should match our contribution, and we call on the Chancellor to make that commitment, as well as to fulfill the Chief Secretary to the Treasury’s commitment to provide each part of Scotland with a regional deal.

I come to an ask, for the NHS, that would require only a small financial contribution but would have significant positive benefits. The UK Government could have used this Budget to follow Scotland’s lead on PrEP—pre-exposure prophylaxis. In Scotland, PrEP is available on the NHS, but England has been dragging its heels on making it available. The benefits in terms of the reduction in new cases of HIV are unchallengeable, and it is not fair that those in England cannot currently access the drug on the NHS. That change would not cost a huge amount of money, but it would make a massive difference to people’s lives.

If the UK Government are serious about taking their place on the global stage, they need to reform the immigration system. Countries will be looking for a more flexible immigration policy before signing trade deals with us, and we should start by getting rid of the fees that EU citizens will be expected to pay to acquire settled status. The OBR mentions the ageing population at many points throughout the Blue Book. The UK Government must recognise this challenge, and recognise that we need and want people to come to live and work in our communities. Last year’s Red Book said that a reduction in net migration of 20,000 would reduce GDP by about 0.2% by 2022. The Government need to be honest about the benefits of immigration and be clear that it is good for our country. They need to be clear that, with an ageing population, it is incredibly important that we get people to come to work here, particularly in the care sector and in the NHS. We also need a more flexible working visa policy that gives those who are seeking asylum the right to work, as the current system is dehumanising and unsustainable. Lastly, we should scrap the fees paid that families have to pay to get their children citizenship, which are ridiculously high and are yet another tax on families.

On health spending, the UK Government gave commitment after commitment that they would pass the full Barnett consequential of the increased health spending on to Scotland, but they have chosen not to do so. They have chosen to short-change Scotland by £50 million. This comes on top of the fact that the Scottish Government’s fiscal resource block grant allocation will be almost £2 billion—or 6.9%—lower in real terms than it was in 2010-11. Despite the addition of consequential and other non-Barnett allocations in 2019-20 that the Chancellor announced, Scotland’s fiscal resource block grant is still lower in real terms than it was in 2010-11 and at the start of the current spending review in 2015-16.

The Chancellor had the chance to make a real difference. He had political choices to make and at almost every turn he chose the wrong path. Is it any wonder that people do not trust the Tories? This Government need to follow the lead of the Scottish Government, who have put dignity and respect at the heart of decision making, rather than punishing those who are not born rich. The reality is that people in Scotland are faced with a choice of two futures: they can choose to continue to have a Westminster Government, who make political choices that disadvantage those who can least afford it; or they can fight for a fairer Scotland, where our Parliament has the powers and the responsibility to make choices on behalf of our citizens—choices that will make our country fairer, not create further inequality.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We now have a seven-minute limit on speeches.

2.15 pm

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): This is my ninth Budget in this place, and the majority of them have been framed by the fact that my party has had to clean up the mess left behind by the previous Labour Government in 2010. They have been framed by the comments of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who wrote:

“I’m afraid there is no money. Kind regards—and good luck!”

That was the position that the country found itself in. I feel that yesterday’s Budget was a turning point and we are now starting to see light at the end of the tunnel. We need to give great thanks to the people of this country for their hard work and their determination to see the course through. Yesterday’s Budget means we are now starting to repay the faith of the British people.

I want to focus on three areas, the first of which is public services. The Chancellor was clear yesterday—he was right—that local government had made a significant contribution to tackling the deficit. I firmly believe it needs to be recognised for that, and we need to make sure it is properly funded. I welcome the £650 million package for social care that was announced yesterday, and the £420 million for roads and potholes that will be going to local government.

I also welcome the fact that for probably the first time ever road tax will be paying for our roads rather than being spent on other things. As a consequence, the budget for Highways England will go up by 40%. It is great to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State

[*Mr Marcus Jones*]

for Health and Social Care in the Chamber because I warmly welcome the additional £20 billion that this Government are committing to our NHS each and every year. I look forward to seeing the 10-year plan for the NHS and, within that, the use of the £2 billion for mental health services, which are crucial. Mental health provision is important because the mental health challenges we are experiencing underpin many of the social challenges that we face in this country, so it will be great to see his proposals.

Security is the most important thing for and the first duty of any Government, so I really welcome the extra £1 billion for our armed forces and the £160 million that is going into counter-terrorism policing. I noted that the Chancellor referred to the police and the challenges our forces face in his Budget statement, so I hope that when the police settlement comes forward early next year, we will see positive progress. My local Warwickshire force is taking on additional officers, but it also faces challenges down the track, such as the pensions revaluation. I sincerely hope that that will be reflected in the policing settlement.

Sir Edward Davey: While the hon. Gentleman is talking about police funding, can he explain why he thinks the Chancellor did not announce any extra money, beyond the counter-terrorism policing increase, for community policing yesterday?

Mr Jones: Clearly the police have been given access this year to an additional £450 million, and an extra £160 million was given to counter-terrorism policing. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman, who was part of the coalition Government, will recognise that a process needs to be followed and that the police funding settlement will come forward in a few months' time.

Secondly, on the cost of living, I am delighted that the Chancellor has chosen to freeze fuel duty again. It has not increased in this country since 2011, which is good news for motorists. In that time, the average motorist has saved £1,000 as a result of the decisions made by Conservative Chancellors. I am also really pleased that the rail companies have taken up the railcard for 26 to 30-year-olds, who will get a 30% reduction in fares.

I very much welcome the increase to the personal allowance. The lowest paid will now earn £12,500 before they have to pay income tax. That is a far cry from the £6,500 personal allowance in 2010, and it means that those people will have an additional £1,250 a year in their pockets compared with then. I also welcome the change to the 40p threshold, because although that rate is an important aspect of our tax system, many public servants, such as police sergeants and senior teachers, have been dragged into the 40p rate, as have been many tradespeople such as bricklayers. I do not think that that was ever the intention when that measure was introduced.

It is good to see the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), on the Front Bench, because I welcome the universal credit changes, which will further underpin the principle that it always pays to work. It is excellent that £1.7 billion will be put into

universal credit year on year, and that is in addition to last year's package. It looks as though tweaks are being made to the system constantly to make sure that it responds to some of the challenges. I hope that another look will be taken at the assessment period, because several of my constituents have had challenges with that part of the process.

Finally, on high streets, I am delighted that 30% will be knocked off rates bills for people who own small retail businesses with a rateable value under £51,000. Business rates are an analogue tax in a digital world, and I am pleased that the Chancellor has started to recognise that. I recognise that larger retailers occupying anchor positions in high streets and town centres will not benefit from that change, so perhaps in future we will need to consider those businesses, too. A £675 million fund for the regeneration of our high streets is a massive start to help high streets throughout the country to regenerate. We need to make sure that we preserve our high streets, but not in their current form. We need to make them fit for the 21st century because they are places of massive community value. They are the community centre of towns and cities throughout the country.

2.23 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The House of Commons Library tells me that I have listened to Budgets in the House 44 times, so I hope I am an experienced Budget evaluator. I always come to the Chamber to listen to the Budget, and I base my evaluation of its quality on two criteria. The first is the great global issues that we face, which for me are always the fragile planet, the environment, climate change and global warming, and the fact that the planet's burgeoning population has to be fed, and fed sustainably. We also face the challenge of keeping the peace. Many of us thought that that could be taken for granted, but in the current global circumstances, keeping the peace has become a great concern for us all.

My second criterion for evaluating a Budget is what it will do for my constituents. I believe that I have a sacred duty to come here and represent my constituents, and to make sure that everything that I do—the contribution that my colleagues and I make in the House—adds to the welfare, health and prosperity of my constituents. Those are the twin criteria, and on both I believe that this is an uninspiring little Budget. It is lacking in passion, leadership and values. That is my sincere criticism of the Budget.

Let me go into a little more detail. I have been in the House at times when the country has been in great crisis. At a time of crisis, I have seen people whom one would have thought were pretty ordinary politicians suddenly stepping up to the Dispatch Box and showing the world that they had leadership quality, that they understood what was going on in the wider world, and that they could stand up to do the right thing. I take umbrage at the fact that a Chancellor of the Exchequer could stand in the Chamber yesterday and call the cataclysm of 2009 and the global meltdown of the world economy “Labour's great recession.” I have to say that it must have been a very powerful Labour party and Labour Government who caused the world recession. What rubbish that the man who is supposed to be our Chancellor of the Exchequer could say such a thing—shame on him!

I saw Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling at that Dispatch Box, calm in the face of a hurricane in the world economy. They stood there and made the right decisions. They bailed out the selfish banks. They did what was necessary to save our country. This bunch over on the Government Benches should not tell us how to rise to our responsibilities. We showed leadership. We showed that we had the values. We worked incessantly to get this country back on track.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): We understand that there was a global banking crisis, but is it not right that the Labour Government did not prepare the country for problems that might occur, given their chronic overspending of money that we just did not have, which left us in a great deal of debt when the recession happened?

Mr Sheerman: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but let us be serious. I recommend that she goes away and looks at a rather good book that I have recently read called “Reckless Endangerment: How Outsized Ambition, Greed, and Corruption Led to Economic Armageddon” by Gretchen Morgenson. Read it and learn it, because that was what we came through.

The Chancellor’s remarks yesterday did not really touch on many of the issues that affect my community. The fact is that we have a hospital in danger that suffers due to a private finance initiative scheme. All the Chancellor said was that Labour was responsible for PFI. I have been here long enough to know that the great charm offensive on PFIs was led by John Major. PFIs were the fashion among Members on all Benches. As Chairman of the Education Committee, I saw good PFIs and bad PFIs, but I also saw a lot of smart City types who danced rings around local authorities and local health authorities and gave them a rotten deal. That is the truth of PFIs—there were good ones and bad ones, but a lot of City spivs made a lot of money out of them. Nothing that the Chancellor said yesterday will rescue my local hospital and health trust from that burden.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that 90% of all PFIs were signed under a Labour Government? Yesterday the Chancellor took steps to make sure that there will be no more.

Mr Sheerman: The Chancellor took no steps to help those parts of the country that are in trouble due to PFIs.

Watching the television and reading the papers, my constituents are not fooled: they know that what was left out yesterday was that whatever Brexit deal is struck, it will not be as good as staying in the European Union—that is the truth of it. I come here to represent my constituents, and I know that we are moving towards a disaster for their living standards, their health standards and everything else that will touch their lives over the coming years. This is a year of crisis. Just as we had the crisis of the great depression and the crisis in 2009, this will be the next crisis, and we need people at the Dispatch Box who will take on their role as leaders. I do not mean people such as the former Prime Minister and Chancellor who, when they lost the referendum, ran away from their responsibilities and from leadership. Where are they now? Writing for the *Evening Standard* I suppose, or writing their memoirs in their man caves.

Being in this House and representing our constituents is a grave responsibility. The job does not come and go—we do not want people who try a bit of time as Chancellor of the Exchequer and a bit of time as Prime Minister but then disappear. The great people who have been at that Dispatch Box are the people who have had values, showed leadership, and led this country in good time and in bad times. The fact of the matter is that we are heading for a very bad time indeed if we leave the European Union on bad terms, but that was not mentioned. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, at this time of crisis and impending disaster for our country, did not have the courage to mention Brexit more than once—that is the truth, and my constituents want me to say that today.

At this time of the year, I am, like many in the Chamber, wearing my poppy. I have just been reading a lovely new history about the first world war. The fact is that right in the middle of that war, everybody knew that it was unwinnable and that more and more young men were going to die. Of course, the real responsibility for the first world war lies with us—the politicians. Politicians failed the people of this country. German politicians failed their people, as did French politicians. It was politicians who did it, and they went on killing more and more young people. That was a failure of leadership, a failure of values, a failure of responsibility and a failure to make courageous decisions at the Dispatch Box. We are heading in that direction—not particularly into war, but into the most troubled times when our people will come out impoverished, miserable and unhappy. That will hurt their health, their education and their chance of a good life. For my part, I will do everything that I can to stop the disaster that those on the Government Benches have wished on our people.

2.32 pm

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Last year, after the disappointment of the general election manifesto process, I left the Government in order to make the case that we needed to make this a moment of much bolder national renewal, that we needed to move on from the first phase of reducing the deficit through a programme of austerity and that we needed to set a trajectory of higher growth, more public sector enterprise and innovation, and wage increases and tax cuts focused on the poorest—those on the lowest incomes—in our society. Let me start by saying that I strongly welcome the Chancellor’s Budget for all those reasons. He managed to square an almost impossible circle in a clever Budget that has done something important for some of the most vulnerable in our society.

As a constituency MP, I wish to mention in particular the measures to support the high street. In Mid Norfolk, as in many other rural constituencies, we have seen our high streets hit hard by a big transfer to online retail without the digital giants paying tax in return, and I welcome the measures that the Government have taken to support our high streets. In particular, in health and care day of the Budget debate, I want to highlight the £10 billion put aside for social care; the extraordinary announcement, which I strongly welcome, of the launch of the first mental health emergency service; the £10,000 for every primary school and £50,000 for every secondary school; the £400 million a year for our schools; and the £2 billion to make sure that universal credit is properly

[George Freeman]

funded. These, I suggest, are compassionate steps taken by a Government still paying off the legacy of the appalling inheritance from the Labour party, but doing so in a way that tries to put the needs of the most vulnerable in society first.

All of that is made possible because of the extraordinary economic success over which we have managed to preside. It pains Opposition Members, which is why they are all looking away, that the rate of real income growth has been rising. In the next five years, the OBR forecasts that there will be a bigger real-terms rise in real incomes for the lowest paid than for anybody else, and 3 million new jobs. This is a success story, and nothing tells us how important it is more than the howls of derision from the Opposition, so upset are they that more and more people in this country are not in need of Labour party support. People are coming to us because they know that ours is the party that supports growth.

I want to acknowledge that after eight very painful years, there is a weariness afoot among both those on the frontline of public services, who have tightened their belts, and the lowest-paid people in work. Those two groups have tightened their belts far more than those in plum jobs in government, in Whitehall, or even in local government. We need, as a House, to say to them that they have earned it and to send a very sincere thank you. The British people have tightened their belts far harder than the Government have in the past eight years.

Talking of public sector workers and the need for public sector leadership, I want to thank the Chancellor for announcing the new public sector leadership academy—an academy to support those on the frontline of public services, who have one of the hardest jobs in our society. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) might say that is rubbish, but that is because she has never had to run anything. The people on the frontline of our public services are actually running very complex public services. They, alongside the lowest-paid people in work, are the people to we need to support in the next five years in tightening the belt and delivering the innovation and efficiency that the public want to see.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I note that the hon. Gentleman said that I have never had to run anything. I wonder whether he would like to change his mind given that I ran a crime management centre in a police station and two incredibly busy departments in a busy hospital. Perhaps he would like to correct the record.

George Freeman: I will happily correct that bit of the record, as long as the hon. Lady welcomes the public sector leadership academy, because, given her experience, she will know how important it is.

If we are really to tackle the structural legacy of the 13 years of a Labour Government that led to the biggest economic crisis in this country's peacetime history—[Interruption.] That is a reality that Labour Members now shout down because it is inconvenient. The crisis that a new generation of voters needs to be consistently reminded of was the legacy of 13 years of a Labour Government. If we are to tackle that, we will have to do two important things: yes, we must continue to drive the modernisation of public service, but we must also increase

the rate of growth and revenue generation in the economy by the Government. Even more powerfully, over the next five years we need somehow to make those two ambitions work together. I would like to share some thoughts on how we might do that.

The truth is that our growth rate has dropped since the EU referendum, from 3% to 1.5%. Therefore the first thing that we need to do is to get a good Brexit deal for business confidence. I hope that the Opposition will take the opportunity of the forthcoming Brexit votes to put the needs of business, prosperity and the economy ahead of ideology or party politics. We also need to create an environment in which we can unlock business investment in this country. There is £600 billion tied up on businesses' balance sheets, and we need to trigger the confidence needed to unlock that money in the post-Brexit dividend. We will not get it unless the Brexit deal gives business the certainty that it needs in the years ahead.

We also need to go much faster on infrastructure. I am delighted that, at this point, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has entered the Chamber, because for eight years she and I have been holding meetings to try to accelerate funding for the Ely rail junction. I want the Treasury now to recognise that, across the country, there are infrastructure schemes that could be funded by private finance. I am talking not about PFI, but about giving local authorities and mayors powers to set up infrastructure bonds to create more innovative ways of driving investment into our public services. If we regenerated rail links and rail lines, gave planning permission for stations and developed innovative schemes for capturing the value increase around those lines, we could harness that growth to fund new models of infrastructure.

I particularly welcome the Government's continued emphasis, through the industrial strategy, on fields such as life sciences, robotics and artificial intelligence so that we can create in this country the research platform needed to support the creation of the jobs and businesses of tomorrow. But if we are to be more than just a research economy—if we are to be a genuine innovation nation that pulls innovation through into practice—we need an economy that uses innovation in the private and public sectors. The great trick is to harness the power of innovation in our public services, and nowhere more than in the NHS. If we are really to lead the world in digital health and digital medicine, and the extraordinary revolution that that offers, we will not do it with an NHS running on paper and cardboard. We need to make the NHS a genuine catalyst for UK leadership in digital health. It is the same in genomics. When I set up the UK genomics programme, the idea was not only that we would launch the world's first genomic medicines service in the NHS, which we have, but crucially that, in so doing, we would make this country a leader in genomic research and life science investment.

This, in the end, is the key to getting out of the debt that we inherited from the Labour party—the high-debt, low-growth model that yesterday's Budget acknowledged. We have to somehow unlock innovation in our public services and drive much higher rates of growth in the private sector. With Brexit coming to its resolution here in this House in the next few weeks, we have to make it a catalyst for the renaissance of innovation and enterprise, and the moment at which we set out a vision for public services in the 21st century.

2.41 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I was really shocked when the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) said that there is weariness. It was Halloween yesterday, and that Budget was damn scary, never mind wearying. As for asking public sector workers to tighten their belts, it was not about tightening their belts—it was about going and accessing food banks. That is what that Budget was about, and what the Government continue to be about.

I sat here yesterday listening attentively to the Chancellor delivering his Budget. I was not holding my breath given this Government's track record on breaking their promises, but I am ever an optimist, so I still sat here in hope: hoping, on behalf of my constituents of Bradford West, for this Government to deliver on their all-singing and—dare I say it?—all-dancing “end of austerity” Budget. Alas, even the Chancellor's self-deprecating humour could not mask the reality of yet more broken promises.

No doubt we will hear from many colleagues, as we have heard before, about what this Budget really means and how it has failed to redress the balance and the crisis in the health and social care sector, with no end in sight under the Conservatives. But for now I want to talk about young people, and particularly their mental health. That is not only because I come from the great city of Bradford, which will have the youngest population in the whole of Europe by 2020, but because, as a former chair of a large mental health charity and a former NHS commissioner, I have an acute understanding of the realities that this Government continue to fail to grasp. They fail to listen to charities such as Barnardo's, which has warned the Government that they are sleepwalking into a crisis.

Throughout this country we have seen a huge increase in the number of young people, in particular, suffering from mental health issues. Just a few weeks ago in my constituency, I met George Zito. George and his colleagues work to provide positive mental health training across schools in Bradford. George explained to me that 8,500 young people across Bradford have been diagnosed with mental health disorders, but the number with lower-level concerns is estimated to be at least double that. Implementing mental health specialist departments in every large NHS A&E is one way of tackling the crisis in mental health at the last stage, but we cannot afford to provide just last-minute crisis rescue for people's mental health disorders, as the Government are currently doing with their Brexit negotiations.

When 50% of mental health problems are established by the age of 14, and 75% by the age of 24, making young people's mental health a priority allows us to prevent future life problems for a whole generation. The Children's Society has expressed concern that the Government's plans for improving children's mental health more generally are moving too slowly. With only one in four children being reached by school-based mental health teams in the next five years, there was nothing in the Budget to address that. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) mentioned earlier that is extremely disappointing that the Government did not put extra resource into schools to provide counsellors who can effectively tackle low levels of wellbeing and support children with poor mental health.

The reality on the ground is that people like George Zito from my constituency will not get the resources they need, and little will be done to help reach young people with mental health issues in their schools. With this Budget, the two-year waiting times for young people trying to see a specialist counsellor for issues to do with mental health will remain to a large extent in Bradford West. The Chancellor decided it was okay to trick the young in my constituency facing issues with mental health while his Budget could treat the wealthiest, who are 14 times more likely to benefit from it than the poor.

Between 2012 and 2016, this Government's cuts led to a loss of 600 youth centres, 3,500 youth workers, and 140,000 youth centre places for young people. This Budget does nothing at all to resolve the loss of those services. It not only neglects young people's need for direct access to mental health counsellors in their schools but, given the minimal youth services available, leaves them with little or no face-to-face support. Although I sincerely welcome the Chancellor's cash injection of £2 billion, which has been referred to on more than a few occasions, I am afraid that it just does not cut it for my constituents, or for young people up and down the country. The Institute for Public Policy Research suggests that almost £4.1 billion is the actual figure needed to meet the necessary provision of mental health services.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): In situations where there are no beds in acute mental health wards, public funds are being used to pay for private beds in private hospitals. Does my hon. Friend think that that is a good use of public funds?

Naz Shah: I absolutely share those concerns about that expenditure when we are not investing in the infrastructure we need. What we heard yesterday, and more of today, was sticking plaster options—those are the only solutions that this Government have come up with. That is one thing that the Conservatives are absolutely the masters of—saying, “We are investing £2 billion, but actually we stripped you of £5 billion the week before.” It just cannot work like that.

My concerns remain as valid as they were before the Chancellor stood up yesterday and delivered his Halloween frighteners, because the truth remains that once again this Government are using their mastery of applying sticking plasters to try to hold together a wound that they have inflicted and that, quite frankly, is not healing. The tricks in his bag were exactly those, delivered by the Chancellor on behalf of a Tory Government who are now a master of disguise. Yesterday, the Chancellor liked to refer to himself as Fiscal Phil. Although it may be humorous for the Chancellor to half-pronounce his name, it is catastrophic for this whole country when his Budget does not even half halt austerity, half provide the provision needed for mental health services, or go halfway towards providing the parity of esteem that his own Government have been promising.

With the Chancellor suggesting that he will put an emergency Budget before Parliament in the event of a no-deal Brexit, a few things come to mind. Is the Minister willing to provide assurances that the extra funding for mental health will not be swallowed up, that there will not be cuts, and that the Prime Minister's failure to negotiate a Brexit deal will not mean collateral damage for those suffering the most?

[Naz Shah]

Finally, I want to talk about the investment in the public sector leadership academy, which the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk mentioned. I concur: I absolutely value that investment. However, the problem is that it is those very public sector leaders who are having to deal with austerity. For example, there is the former chair of Solace in Doncaster, who has written an article about it. In Northamptonshire, the Tory council is having to go through bankruptcy. There is nothing wrong with the people involved as leaders. What is wrong is the cards that they are dealt in having to cut services and make decisions every single day of the week about whether a woman is not going to get a bed for the night following domestic violence, a child is not going to get a CAMHS referral, or a child is going to take home a begging letter from their school because there is not enough funding and it cannot afford food. That is the reality of austerity, and it needs to stop now.

2.49 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am grateful to have caught your eye in this important Budget debate, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I would like to begin by welcoming the Chancellor's statement and recognising that UK public finances are in a much better shape than they were. Despite the narrative of negativity from the Opposition, the economic facts demonstrate a much more positive reality. I thought the Opposition might welcome the fact that average real wage growth in the public sector is now 3.1%—a 10-year high—or that the Chancellor is predicting an additional 400,000 people in work by 2023. That is on top of the 3 million extra jobs we have created in the last 10 years or so. But nothing came from the Opposition, except that they have 39 uncostered expenditure pledges. That is irresponsible public policy making.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) said, we need to build on the high-tech areas of our economy, such as AI, where we are world leaders. We need to ask ourselves why, when we can do the innovation in this country—for example, inventing the world wide web—large IT companies such as Google did not emerge in this country. We need to concentrate on the high-tech sectors of the economy. As my hon. Friend said, that is the way to build ourselves out of the debt created by previous Governments. We need to encourage more students from around the world—the brightest and the best—to come to our universities to study subjects such as computer sciences, so that our universities are at the world forefront of this much needed research.

We need to relentlessly pursue a growth strategy post Brexit. I was delighted that the Chancellor was able to release some of his cushion in this Budget. I hope that we get a deal; I am optimistic that we will get a deal and that this Parliament will pass it. We can then move forward, businesses that are currently shelving investment decisions will make those decisions and the economy will start to thrive.

One thing we can do in the post-Brexit era is to look carefully at the business rates system. I held an Adjournment debate on that earlier this month, in which I pointed out that business rates are not necessarily related to the ability to pay. There are some unfair quirks in the business

rates system. For example, a business with a rateable value of under £12,000 gets small business rate relief, but if someone has two businesses with a rateable value of, say, £3,000 each, they get no small business rate relief for either of them.

I welcome the fact that the Government have put £900 million into the rating system, but again, that is a sticking plaster over a system that needs to be thoroughly reformed. I also welcome the fact that there is a third off business rates for retailers with a rateable value of up to £51,000 and a fund for the sustainable transformation of high streets.

Perhaps the most important thing that we need to look at in public services over the next few years is education. As I have alluded to, education is the way that we will be at the forefront of innovation in this country. I have campaigned over a number of years as part of the f40 group to ensure that my schools in Gloucestershire get fair funding. I welcome the additional £475 million for capital spending, but that does not address the current spending problems. In Gloucestershire, we have overspent by £3.2 million on the high-needs block of the education budget. As I mentioned in my intervention on the Health Secretary, that is unfortunately because our children are getting more and more complex health and other problems at an earlier age and need more special assistance in schools.

While I welcome the additional £1.3 billion put into education as a result of our manifesto commitment, it was predicated on the basis that secondary school children throughout the country were to get £3,800 under the fair funding formula. In fact, we will only be able to afford per pupil secondary school funding of £3,600 in Gloucestershire. That additional £200 per pupil would make a huge difference to my schools. I have to report to the House the sad fact that while we had a period of years when our schools in Gloucestershire were going from good to outstanding ratings, that has begun to drop back, which is of great concern.

One way in which the Chancellor has responded to public concern over IT companies such as Google and Facebook is to introduce a digital services tax. I agree with a little bit of what Opposition Members said—I think the tax is unambitious. If we look at the Red Book, we see that the tax is only 2% on profits, with a £25 million annual allowance, and it only covers relevant global revenues in excess of £500 million. The result is that hundreds, and maybe thousands, of relevant small and medium-sized IT companies around the world will be exempt from it. The tax is only predicted to raise £440 million by 2023-24. If we raised more from that tax, we would be able to put more money into schools. The Chancellor needs to look at that carefully. He introduced the diverted profits tax to start to deal with the issue of international companies not paying proper tax in the UK, but that has only raised £388 million this year.

Infrastructure is very important in this country, and I welcome the £25.5 billion for the roads programme. I desperately hope that that extra money will finally secure the construction of the missing link on the A417 in my constituency, for which I have campaigned for 15 years. The Chief Secretary is listening, and I hope I will get good news shortly. We have consulted on it, and we have a preferred route. All we are waiting for is the Government to announce which route they want.

Affordable housing is very important, and I welcome the extra £500 million for the housing infrastructure fund. I welcome the fact that a lot more money is going into housing. Providing housing is one of the most important things that we can do for our young people, and intergenerational fairness needs to be looked at. Low-paid public sector workers in my constituency, whether they be nurses or teachers, often cannot afford to live in the Cotswolds, and we need to look at more innovative ways of providing social housing for them.

2.56 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): It is a pleasure to participate in the Budget debate. There were some announcements to be welcomed yesterday, such as the tax on big tech companies. I have been calling for those changes since my time on the Public Accounts Committee, and they are long overdue. In the round, though, this Budget fell well short of what is required. After the Prime Minister's big talk of ending austerity, what we got was too little, too late. To get the changes we need to create jobs and prosperity in all parts of the UK, there is only one solution: a Labour Government.

Today, I want to focus on a key issue that has affected families in south Wales and on which the Government have failed to act, and that is helping people to protect their pensions. Last year I called attention to a brewing steel pensions crisis. Facing a hard deadline on their future options, British Steel pension scheme members found themselves targeted by unscrupulous pensions advisers. There were nearly 8,000 transfers out of the scheme, and we know that 872 of those were advised by firms that were eventually required to stop advising. Worryingly, one financial planner has said that the high number of compensation claims submitted against just one of those firms might be the tip of an iceberg.

Too many people saw their hard-earned pension pots put at risk, including constituents of mine who were worried sick about their future. They needed an immediate, robust and decisive response from the regulators. Unfortunately, poor co-ordination, unclear consumer information and weak oversight meant that the response for those consumers has been hesitant and insufficient. It was often unclear who they needed to approach for help. Unbelievably, they were expected to take up their concerns with the advisers they suspected of fleecing them. Pensioners researching specific advisers had to go through a lengthy process to find out basic information. They needed to search the Financial Conduct Authority's register to decipher legal notes that were sometimes closer to double Dutch than plain English. The FCA is now making changes to its register, but it still is not giving people critical information in a straightforward enough way.

The most pressing problem remains the sorry state of financial regulation and pensions oversight. As a Work and Pensions Committee report found, while interest in steel pension transfers was increasing from late April 2017, it was not until November that the FCA began to take action. At that point, a full-scale crisis was under way. Even then, it was not until December that it was taking regular action against suspect firms. While there has been some progress, it has not been clear enough for us to give concrete answers to the people affected, or to give us confidence that this will not happen again.

Nowhere is this more evident than with one of the firms most closely identified with this scandal, Active Wealth (UK), and its director Mr Darren Reynolds. The Financial Services Compensation Scheme is paying out over £500,000 for claims related to this firm alone, yet 162 claims, many from steelworkers, are still open. Mr Reynolds failed to turn up to Parliament to answer questions. The ability of his company to advise on pension transfers was restricted and the company is now in liquidation. Despite this, Darren Reynolds is still listed as an active person on the FCA register. From my inquiries, he does not appear to have been referred for more serious investigation. What needs to be done for this sector to tackle this bad behaviour and for this character to be properly held to account?

The pensions debacle that hit steelworkers last winter should never have happened. It is a stark warning that regulating these businesses is not working well enough. It happened because we have a system of pensions and financial regulation that fails to protect hard-working people. After much criticism, the FCA and the Pensions Regulator say they are working better together, and that is a positive step. However, this is not a problem of co-ordination alone; we also need stricter penalties, better information and far tighter oversight. The Government urgently need to look at what has happened to drive improvements in the future. They need to review current regulation on pensions advice regularly, make sure that any wrongdoing is aggressively dealt with and ensure that consumer information is easy to find and to understand.

I want to include this personal plea for action. Many of my family were steelworkers or miners, and our steelworkers put in decades of toil to earn these pension pots. Some have found these pension pots put at risk because of the wrongdoing of some and the inaction of others. The Chancellor needs to put this right and to get on the side of working people.

I will end by focusing on the extreme pressure that the Government's recent proposals on pension valuations could cause our police forces. Gwent police estimate these could cost them the same amount of money as 100 officers. The Government need to give our police more funding. Instead, however, they are forcing expensive accounting tricks on them with no notice. That is not right.

Finally, I point out that there is a better path. For a genuine end to austerity, real help for our public services, and rules and systems that work for working people and those in retirement, we need a Labour Government.

3.2 pm

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I have been in the House long enough to remember lots of Labour Budgets, and I remember the claim that boom and bust had been abolished—only to be followed by the biggest bust that we have had in our history. It must have been a big bust, because only that would have made the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats work together. We normally fight like ferrets in a sack, but in the context of 2010, a real crisis had to be dealt with.

If we look at what has occurred over the long term, we can see that we have made a great success of it. First, we have reduced the deficit from 10% to about 1%. That is a good thing, because if we borrow lots of money, we

[*Sir Robert Syms*]

pay interest, which means that taxpayers' money goes to pay bondholders and shareholders, not on the things that people want. I think that a compassionate Government is one who balance the books, because that means they can devote resources to the priorities that people have.

We have managed to do that without crashing the economy. Despite the calls that were often made about the economy going into recession, we have had eight years of a growing economy, which is actually pretty good. On top of that, we have created 3 million jobs. We all know that the best way to deal with poverty, to give people life chances and an opportunity to train, and the best thing for families is employment. If there is a challenge now it is to get wage levels and take-home pay up. When we compare our performance on employment with the EU and most of our neighbours, we can see that we have done a pretty good job. I am pleased there are signs that pay is picking up and that British workers will be paid more.

There is a lot of good to be said about the Budget yesterday. I do not think that Budgets in themselves make much of a difference. What makes a difference is long-term economic success and planning. If we look at Germany and other countries, we can see that they have pretty sane policies year after year—over seven, 10 or 15 years—which grow the economy gradually. Certainly since 2010, we have made pretty good progress, and there is more progress to be made as we exit from the European Union.

I welcome what the Chancellor has done on public spending. We all know that there are pressures with an ageing population and with mental health, and the Government have started to address some of those pressures. They have been able to do so because of careful management of the public finances. I also welcome the additional spending on defence. I am one of those who have always felt we have cut defence too much, perhaps because of the economic crisis. I think that Britain, as a world power and as a member of the United Nations Security Council, does need to spend sufficient resources on defence, so the £2 billion announced in the Budget is to be welcomed.

I think we have made good progress, and all that the Government need to do now is to keep that progress up year on year. We have a decent balance in this Budget because not only have we been able to spend more on public services—with the proviso that we need reform, and the proviso that we need productivity to rise because spending money will not necessarily in itself produce better outcomes—but we have managed to reduce taxation. Since 2010, we have doubled the allowance to £12,500 for those who pay tax, which is pretty good, and it massively increases the incentive for people to get into work. It is no accident that we have record employment, because we have made raising the tax allowances to help people get a job a very critical part of our employment strategy. It is also quite right for the upper rate of tax to go up as well, because that lifts all the tax bands for many middle earners. The fact of the matter is that, as a country, we tax people too much too early, and we need to increase incentives. There has to be a balance between incentives and extra spending, and on this occasion we have got that right.

We have a key task over the next few months in getting a good deal on Brexit. I note that the shadow Chancellor criticised the Government for contemplating leaving without a deal, yet as far as I know the Labour party are going to vote against the deal, so there seems to be a slight double standard.

John McDonnell: What deal?

Sir Robert Syms: Well, we shall see what comes back in the next few months.

The reality is that the Government have actually managed the economy well, and because of that, despite the level of uncertainty, we are still creating jobs and we are still growing. The interesting point is that, despite the soft patch earlier this year, the third quarter growth figures show that we are now growing more than the EU, so we are starting to pick up again.

I am confident that we have a good team at the Treasury and that they are listening to what colleagues are saying about their constituency concerns. I think we have had a really decent Budget, which has balanced sensible spending with reform and a sensible reduction of taxation. We are also maintaining a sensible management of the economy, certainly in the plans to have a 1% deficit, which is a massive reduction. I hope that we over-perform, and that if we do, we can reduce that further. The reality is that this Government have done well, and the country is doing well. We need not run down the country; the country's best years are still ahead of us.

3.8 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I thought I would start by picking out a few key points from the Office for Budget Responsibility report, which might have a slightly different emphasis from the points that the Chancellor would pick out. Let us start, on page 64, with household disposable income:

"Real household disposable income fell by 0.2 per cent in 2017".

On page 65, the report says:

"We expect relatively weak growth in per capita real earnings and real disposable incomes... In 2019, real per capita disposable income growth is flat".

On household saving and debt, on page 67, it says:

"We expect unsecured debt to rise steadily as a share of household disposable income".

On household net lending and balance sheets, on page 70, it says:

"the ratio of household debt to income has risen steadily since the start of 2016...we expect the ratio of household debt to income to continue to rise steadily...with the ratio reaching just under 150 per cent by the start of 2024."

On business investment and stockbuilding, on page 72, the report says:

"The latest data suggests business investment fell in both the first two quarters of this year...we expect a modest rise in business investment as a share of real GDP over the forecast period—less than would be typical at this stage of an economic cycle."

On UK exports as a share of GDP, on page 77, it says:

"In August, the Government announced an ambition to increase the UK's exports to 35% of GDP, but has not specified the date by which it believes that this can be achieved. The Government's previous aspiration was to increase exports to £1 trillion by

2020—our forecast suggests that this will be missed by £320 billion. The Government is not on course to meet its current ambition in our forecast”.

On risks and uncertainties, on page 81, the report says:

“The outlook for productivity growth remains hugely uncertain.”

On page 83, it says:

“the probability of a cyclical downturn occurring sometime over our forecast horizon is...high”.

On assumptions regarding the UK’s exit from the EU, it says:

“we still have no meaningful basis for predicting a precise outcome upon which we could then condition our forecast.”

On page 91, it says:

“Real GDP Growth has been revised down in 2018”.

Now, the Chancellor, of course, would and did choose to cherry-pick a different set of headlines yesterday, but I think this is a more balanced picture than that presented by him.

I can assure the Chancellor of two things in relation to this Budget. First, the people of Enfield are sick and tired of austerity. Secondly, we have no confidence that the Government’s programme of austerity is coming to an end. The Government’s £1 billion cut to the Metropolitan police budget since 2010 has resulted in 230 police officers and police community support officers being removed from the streets of Enfield. Over the same period, violent crime has surged locally by 85%. Where was the Chancellor’s announcement to reverse those cuts, put more bobbies on the beat and help create safer neighbourhoods?

How can the Government have the cheek to say austerity is over, when they are still planning cuts of £1.3 billion to councils next year? By 2020, the Government will have slashed funding to Enfield Council by 60% in just a decade.

There is a better example in this Budget of the Government’s misguided priorities. The Chancellor announced more funding for potholes than for our schools. Pothole funding is welcome, but surely education should be a higher priority. Does the future of our children not matter? This is a slap in the face for many schools in my constituency, which are having serious problems paying for basic items such as pens and paper, let alone retaining and recruiting teachers.

Austerity is not coming to an end, and nor, as the Chancellor asserted, is the “economy working for everyone”. This year, we have seen household debt rise to its highest level on record. Over-indebtedness in Enfield is higher than the London and national averages, and we have more than 14,000 residents in real financial difficulty. One in three workers living locally does not earn a living wage, and the average worker is £800 a year worse off than they were a decade ago.

The Government’s abject failure to address the housing crisis means local families are struggling to cope with soaring rents and a lack of affordable homes, with our borough having the highest eviction rate and the second highest level of homelessness acceptances in the capital.

The last Labour Government lifted 1 million children out of poverty, but child poverty rates under the Conservatives are getting worse, not better. Some 34,000 children in Enfield are now living below the poverty line. This is a

shameful record for the Government, and a record that could deteriorate still further as a result of their disastrous universal credit roll-out.

Karin Smyth: My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that the failure to say anything considerable in the Budget about early years support and education and Sure Start centres yesterday represented a glaring omission, and addressing those issues would have helped families in constituencies such as Bristol South and Enfield North?

Joan Ryan: My friend is absolutely right. In fact, in Enfield, we now see a real problem, as we do in many other parts of the country, with children not being ready for school at the age of five. This has a significant impact on their achievement throughout their school careers and on their future.

North Enfield Foodbank has said that food bank usage continues to increase, with Enfield having the fourth highest rate of food bank usage in London last year. The main reason for that increase is delays in the payment of benefits and changes to them.

The Chancellor said that the Government were “delivering on the British people’s priorities, supporting our public services”—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 668.]

There is no public service or institution more important in our country than the national health service. Huge pressure has been placed on doctors’ surgeries. Well over half the residents who replied to my GP services survey said they had difficulty getting an appointment to see a doctor, and we know that, going forward, Enfield is short of 84 GPs to serve our growing population.

The Government’s chronic underfunding of our national health service since 2010 means that North Middlesex Hospital, like so many other hospitals across the country, is operating with a substantial financial deficit. NHS England is trying to deal with a deepening staff crisis, while hospitals are trying to recruit doctors and nurses. This is an impossible situation. We cannot square this circle. On public health, which warranted no mention whatever, we in Enfield are facing another £1 million cut by 2020, and everybody knows the link between poverty and health.

The Government have failed to address eight years of devastating cuts to our communities, and they are failing to deliver on the priorities of the British people. Austerity is not coming to an end. Yesterday’s Budget proves it. There is no hope here that I can take to the people of Enfield from this Conservative Government. I will not be supporting this Budget.

3.16 pm

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan). Since the Chancellor sat down yesterday, much has been made by commentators of the question of whether austerity has indeed ended. However, surely that is the wrong question, because what the Chancellor’s speech set out yesterday was the most important point of all: fiscal prudence and careful financial management are what a good Chancellor should always focus his attentions on before all other things, so that when there is a need for more cash for urgent or

[*Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan*]

unexpected events, it is possible to provide resources without jeopardising the long-term economic stability of our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to apologise if I became agitated yesterday during the Leader of the Opposition's reply to the Chancellor, but that was because it is so very frustrating to listen to someone who offers himself as a potential leader of our country but has absolutely no interest in its financial stability. His willingness to borrow "to invest", as he calls it, means simply a new vast mountain of debt, binding all our children and their future offspring to huge debt interest payments—real cash from real, hard-working taxpayers being used to service debt and therefore not being used for public services, for supporting those who cannot look after themselves, or for ensuring that we invest in the most advanced and flexible defences to protect and look after our constituents. He would rather enjoy the short-term self-gratification of handing out cash that we have not yet earned, but those who would suffer most are those who can least afford it. High interest rates would cripple people with mortgages. There would be a flight of capital investment from our business community, and the small and medium-sized enterprises and larger businesses that are the backbone of our jobs, and whose hard work and risk taking generate so much of the tax we need to pay for our public services, would stop investing, move abroad, and leave a Corbyn Labour Government to bankrupt our nation, as Labour has done before.

That is a scenario that Conservative Members—and, I believe, many on the Opposition Benches—cannot bear to consider for our constituents, who deserve so much better. The last eight years of fiscal rectitude have been hard, but we can now see the benefits of that graft, and the increasing tax take that the Chancellor can use to help to grow our economy and look after those in need. A stable economy means business investment, and that means real jobs, low interest rates and real investment in our public services.

The confirmation of £20 billion for our NHS is very welcome. I hope that the NHS five-year review will invest in local services and community hospitals, and address the rural sparsity factor, which has for too long been ignored by the centre.

There is the investment in the borderlands deal, a devolution programme that allows Northumberland and her neighbouring counties—regardless of the Scottish border, which is simply a line on a map as far as we in north Northumberland are concerned—to focus our investment on the areas of infrastructure and business sectors that we, as the locals, know will help to boost our economic growth most effectively. We will be able to work with our neighbours to achieve what those pesky border reivers never did: a coherent economic and cultural community based on geography and our natural assets; and, rather than fighting each other for personal gain, working together for us all in the most wild and beautiful part of our country.

The Chancellor's commitment of £50 million for trees—funding to purchase carbon credits from landowners who plant qualifying woodland—is most welcome. This is real support to help those who commit to the slowest-growing crops: the trees that maintain good soil health; improve the water basin; reduce the risk of flooding in

the valleys; and hold carbon dioxide while they are growing and then continue to be a carbon sink when they are harvested, with the wood used in housing and the wood trade.

It is excellent news that the Chancellor will be directing all road tax receipts into road investment and maintenance. That makes perfect sense and is welcomed by those who pay their taxes to use the roads every day. I had thought I might not be able to find a way to thank the Chancellor for his support, when he was Secretary of State for Transport, of my campaigning efforts to invest in the A1 through Northumberland in order to dual it and to make it into the safe and functional 21st century road it needs to be for local users, visiting tourists and businesses moving goods. He understands the investment concept of "build it and they will come". The first £300 million, which he committed, is now being spent to dual the first 13 miles. With the commitment to allocate £28 billion to the national roads fund, he can be assured that I shall be returning to discuss the dualling of the last stretch of the English undualled road between London and Edinburgh shortly. Before that, however, the commitment to general road maintenance and the battle against potholes is most welcome. Northumberland County Council looks after over 3,500 km of roads. The "beast from the east" managed to shred many of our roads earlier this year, so this commitment to spending the monies collected from road users makes real sense to us.

I am also most grateful that the Chancellor has heard the call from my most rural communities for investment to ensure that we can get decent broadband to every property and business, wherever it is. This will ensure that we have long-term solutions that use technology to reach everyone.

Most welcome, of course, are the cuts to income tax, which will mean that my constituents will each have a personal allowance of £12,500 from next April, as well as an increased national living wage of £8.21. Could nobody tell my son, because that will really excite him, given that he will have earned even more when he gets down to the pub at the weekend? There is much for our small businesses to benefit from. The Chancellor has made a commitment to Brexit and to giving all Departments the cash that they need to get ready for the changes that will need to be put in place.

I thank the Chancellor for listening to the voices of so many MPs about one of those areas of Government spending that most people take for granted and assume is all working fine. I believe that we need to talk about this area of critical national policy much more than we do. It is a public service like no other, because this public sector workforce puts its life on the line for us every day. The question of defence investment and why a comprehensive insurance cover is necessary is not a subject of conversation every day among mums at the school gate. However, every parent's focus is on keeping their children safe, well fed, healthy, and able to have a happy and safe childhood, so how is it that the most important role for any Government to fulfil—protecting their population—is too often forgotten or ignored in polling and questions of day-to-day spending? It is our insurance policy, but we assume that everything is all okay. I therefore listened with pleasure to the Chancellor committing nearly £2 billion over the next 18 months to help the Ministry of Defence to ensure it can maintain all our capabilities to keep us safe.

As we leave the EU, the one thing which remains fixed is our geography. We will remain, as we have always been, an island maritime trading nation—outward facing and trading across the globe. We need to keep safe the seas across which all our trade moves. We need to ensure that international waters are free of danger so that oil and other goods can move around the globe, whether they are British products being exported, or our imports into our thriving ports of the food in our supermarkets and the oil we need every day. Without the Royal Navy's day-to-day invisible work, our economy would be profoundly affected. I am very pleased to support this Budget.

3.24 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), who, despite being on the wrong side of the line at the border, is always entertaining.

Despite the Chancellor's rather dead-pan delivery of yesterday's lengthy Budget, the simple truth is that not one of us can trust or believe a single word we heard. Whether on jobs, investment, tax cuts, austerity, extra funding for the NHS or universal credit, the truth is that the Budget is little more than a wish list cobbled together by someone seriously lacking in ambition. It is, none the less, a wish list of what the Chancellor would like if everything turns out the way he hopes it will in the Brexit negotiations. If those negotiations go pear-shaped—I reckon one would get pretty short odds on that being the case—he has admitted that we will all be back here in the spring for what he described, rather euphemistically, as a fiscal event.

In short, what we heard yesterday was, "This is what I'd like to do in an ideal world, but just don't mortgage the farm on it happening because we have absolutely no idea how Brexit will turn out, and if it doesn't go well, everything will be up in the air and we will have to do it all again before the clocks go forward." The Chancellor basically admitted that his Budget will not be able to withstand Brexit. What a way to run a country. What a way to run an economy. Perhaps saddest of all, given that this was his best shot, what a paucity of ambition on the part of the Chancellor.

Anyone watching yesterday who had hoped for or expected the fulfilment of the Prime Minister's promise of an end to austerity would have been left sorely disappointed. This Budget most certainly did not sound the death knell for austerity. Public sector workers, the low-paid, the disabled, the sick and those seeking employment will all still continue to bear an unfair share of the burden of austerity. Frances O'Grady, the general secretary of the TUC, was absolutely right when she said:

"This Budget does not undo the austerity that has devastated public services. And it lacks the investment needed to speed up wage growth after the longest pay squeeze in 200 years".

Let no one be in any doubt that, 10 years on from the financial crash, austerity is far from over. The UK Government will continue to balance the books on the backs of the poorest, weakest and most vulnerable in our society.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): The growth commission that was commissioned by the Scottish Government said that there would be 25 years of austerity if Scotland separated. How would Scotland balance the books then?

Brendan O'Hara: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the commission's report and advise him to read it, rather than simply taking the crib sheet handed out by his party.

Much has been made of the Chancellor's announcement that £20 billion of new funding would be made available to the NHS over the next five years. We are told that that funding will be transformational for the national health service, but let us put it into perspective. The new money, which we welcome, averages out at a 3.4% increase per annum for the next five years. That is actually still less than the average funding increases received by the NHS in the first 60 years of its existence. All the Chancellor announced is that NHS funding, having been squeezed mercilessly by the Tories in the past decade, is returning to a position that is a little below its historical average. The reality is that in releasing this money, the Chancellor has simply removed the Treasury's heavy boot from the neck of the national health service. If the Chancellor had had the good manners to remain in the Chamber until my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) had spoken yesterday, he would have heard him ask why the Scottish national health service is being short-changed in the Budget to the tune of £50 million a year, which makes a cumulative shortfall of £250 million over the five-year period. That £50 million is enough money to pay for 1,200 nurses in Scotland.

In his Budget, the Chancellor had the perfect opportunity to do the right thing: stop the roll-out of universal credit dead in its tracks until the well-publicised faults in the system, which are hurting the poorest and most vulnerable in our society, have been fixed properly, once and for all.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Further to that point, is it not a scandal that the Highland Council has to fork out £2.5 million of its carefully hained resources to pay for the roll-out of universal credit? What might that £2.5 million have done for some of the poorest people in areas such as Argyllshire and my constituency?

Brendan O'Hara: I could not agree more. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the cost to councils and individuals of the appalling roll-out of universal credit. The Government know that it is wrong, but they are pigheadedly determined to see it roll out. The Budget was the Chancellor's perfect opportunity to stop it, but he refused. For reasons best known to himself, he decided instead to tinker around at the edges, with the promised money coming nowhere close to meeting the shortfall that was created by his predecessor. The Chancellor has decided to do almost nothing for those who are currently on universal credit and are struggling under the work allowance, the two-child cap and the benefit freeze.

As Gillian McInnes, the manager of the citizens advice bureau in my Argyll and Bute constituency, said:

"The Government has still not done enough to address the real problems of universal credit, which are causing serious hardship for many families. Without further support for families, many parents and children will be left in a desperate situation, with many"—

indeed, many more—

"forced into using food banks."

[Brendan O'Hara]

This was the Chancellor's opportunity to end austerity—he chose not to. This was his opportunity to stop and fix universal credit—he chose not to. Instead, he and the UK Government chose to hand out tax cuts to the wealthy while continuing to try to balance the country's books on the backs of the poorest in our society. Heaven help us all if this was the Chancellor's "good guy Budget"—the one that was based on the Government securing a half-decent Brexit deal. One shudders to think what he has up his sleeve when we are all forced to reconvene in this place early next year for his fiscal event, if and when the Brexit negotiations go totally pear-shaped.

3.31 pm

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): There is much to celebrate in the Chancellor's autumn Budget, which carefully balances the need to spend more on key services with the need not to snuff out progress in repairing our economy. Having listened carefully to the criticisms from Opposition Members this afternoon, I am left only with the sneaking suspicion that if we had announced £100 billion of extra spending, Labour Members would probably have advocated £200 billion, using our constituents' money to hose their party in crowing virtue.

The first duty of any Government is to keep their citizens secure. In a world of rapidly changing threats from both state and non-state actors, the substantial additional money for the armed forces and the £160 million extra for counter-terrorism policing operations are timely and welcome. If we fail to retain skilled personnel or to keep up with technological changes in warfare, and if we look only at the immediate challenges while our enemies plan for the next half-century, we risk reneging on our principal commitment to the electorate.

Our vital reforms to welfare have been broadly welcomed by the public, who understand the inherent justice of making work pay. However, if those reforms are to maintain public confidence, it is vital that they are funded correctly. Universal credit is only just beginning to roll out in my constituency, and I know that my local jobcentre has been eager to use the new tools available to them with universal credit. The £1,000 increase in UC work allowances, the boost to the minimum wage, the increase in the personal tax allowance, and money to ease the transition to universal credit will make crucial differences to the credibility, and therefore the sustainability, of our welfare policy.

My main high streets in Upminster, Elm Park, Harold Hill and Hornchurch are sustained by lively independent retailers who work exceptionally hard and take risks to provide jobs and services to the local community. The cut in business rates by a third for retailers with a rateable value under £51,000 is vital to their sustainability. Coupled with cash for high street regeneration, money to repair roads and the removal of rates for public toilets, I hope that we shall begin to see a revival of small town centres.

We all know that the NHS faces massive additional cost pressures from an ageing population and expensive new medical advances. The Government have set out an unprecedented multi-year funding plan that equates to over £20 billion more a year in real terms by 2023-24.

I hope that will put the finances of our major hospitals on a sustainable footing. The demographic pressures on outer London of growing numbers of children alongside a rapidly ageing population, the PFI debt burden and difficulties recruiting staff place constant pressure on the budget of my local hospital, Queen's. Beyond that, any additional funds must be relentlessly focused on investments that ultimately bring down the cost of the NHS. In that regard, I put in a plea for a nurse training facility in outer east London to reduce reliance on agency staff, measures to boost primary care to keep people out of hospital and, as a special request from a young constituent, the full implementation of the Think Autism strategy. I also want to raise the concerns of my local hospice, Saint Francis, which is worried that the NHS pay award will make it harder for hospices to get the right staff. I ask that their needs be considered, given the exceptional support they provide to the terminally ill and their families.

None the less, I must sound a note of concern. The NHS is now consuming an ever larger slice of the national pie—it is projected to account for 38% of public service spending by 2023—and this will have consequences. Even if we removed the extra money for NHS England, however, the Budget suggests that spending pressures on our local police and councils would likely continue. We have been giving councils more power to raise revenue, and yesterday we announced £650 million to ease short-term social care pressures. That is right. The core schools budget is to rise, too, and primary and secondary schools will get some additional capital spending, but I fear that these measures will prove insufficient to keep at bay the rising costs and demand pressures in my outer-London constituency, particularly on special educational needs provision, additional employer pension contributions and increased use of statutory services that squeeze money needed for other critical elements of council work.

The NHS boost must be openly debated before the spending review and set against other public spending priorities. Health is vital to my constituents, but if they were asked whether the NHS should be the almost exclusive beneficiary of additional public funds, or whether a portion should be given to our overstretched police forces, schools and councils, I am not convinced the health service would secure all the bounty. People in my constituency are worried about crime and frustrated at the Mayor of London's leadership of the Metropolitan police, which is seeing outer-London boroughs deprioritised against inner-London ones. Beyond the precept, we need to be confident that the Home Office is providing the funding that police officers need to meet their increasingly complex workload.

Finally, I would like to issue a word of caution about Brexit. It has been suggested in the approach to the Budget that any failure by MPs to back the Government's eventual Brexit deal will jeopardise our ability to turn on the spending taps in the spring. Parliamentarians on both sides of the divide have expressed concerns about the Chequers strategy, as has the EU itself, and I am anxious that we avoid a deal cemented with unacceptable concessions or a proposal that slithers us into an indefinite period of limbo. Either scenario would heighten the risk of no deal and the prospect of a radical Labour Government, which would have profound implications for the public finances. The cost of Labour's renationalisation programme alone is £176 billion.

I have heard it said that most of the electorate care little about customs unions, trade deals or regulations, and that they just want an agreement of any shape and then to move on. I caution MPs against making that assumption. One resident wrote to me last week:

“Speaking to people locally, I feel I am not alone in worrying that what we will end up with is just what we have now without any influence.”

The best way to protect our public finances from a Labour Government, unleash our economy from uncertainty and bring about the growth that can pay for better services is to negotiate a deal with the EU that is not only deliverable but gives our nation the flexibility and autonomy it needs to make the most of Brexit.

I should have liked to say much more about investment, growth and trade policy, all of which ultimately underpin the provision of strong public services, but I will conclude by suggesting that what matters above all to our constituents is not the amount spent on each service but the outcomes from and quality of those services. We must not forget value for money, the risk of false economies and the inadvertent pressure placed on other Departments amid the laudable desire to put the health service on a firmer footing.

3.37 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I note the Prime Minister's recent announcement that austerity is over, although the message does not seem to have reached the Chancellor. There was nothing in yesterday's Budget to end austerity and there is no doubt that austerity is alive and kicking viciously in my constituency. As with so many things, the Prime Minister seems to think that just by saying something she can make it happen. Her first announcement as Prime Minister was that she was going to help those just about managing. Well, the just about managing are still waiting, and the just about managing in Burnley are managing just a bit less well than they were two years ago.

When we confront the Conservative party with the dire consequences that its budget cuts have wrought on our constituents—from the rise in NHS waiting lists to the lack of care available to the elderly and disabled and headteachers struggling to manage underfunded schools—we are told that record amounts are being spent. It does not take an economist to see that the Chancellor cannot, on the one hand, take credit for reducing the deficit and, on the other, brag about increased spending, without having a better record on growth than this Government's miserable effort.

Yesterday's Budget failed to address the crisis in the NHS and social care—one mention of carers, but not a single penny of support; not even a mention of the WASPI women or women's refugees; no attempt to right the wrongs of universal credit; no extra funding for the police and fire services; no attempt to provide additional funding for nursery schools, in spite of the Education Secretary's recent warm words. The extra spending on repairing potholes is welcome, but I find it shocking that the Chancellor provided more for potholes than he did for schools, even though every school in Burnley and Padiham is facing damaging cuts.

The Government like to mislead with figures. There is a pattern of swingeing cuts, followed by the reinstatement of modest amounts amid a fanfare of celebration. However, the recent revelation from the Office for National Statistics about the Department for Education's dubious

figures really was something else. Most ridiculously, spending on private schools was counted as Government spending on education. Next, I would not be surprised to see the use of luxury spas included in public health spending.

For me, the most damning statistic to emerge over the summer was the one on life expectancy, which has fallen in parts of my constituency for the first time in over 30 years. That is a true reflection of the Government's record in office and the price my constituents are paying for austerity. Members will not be surprised to learn that the last time there was a fall in life expectancy was the 1980s, during the tenure of another Tory Government committed to policies that resulted in the decimation of our public services. Members may recall that we were told at the time, “There is no alternative.” Well, there is an alternative: it is a Labour Government.

The Government consistently remind us of the need to be fair to taxpayers. Let us consider that with regard to taxpayers in my constituency. Consider the low-paid essential worker who earns £12,500 per annum. Every extra pound they earn is taxed at a marginal rate of 32%. Compare that with the tax paid by the multimillionaire who, barely lifting a finger, reaps the benefits of stock market wheeling and dealing, and pays capital gains tax at a mere 20%. There is nothing fair about that.

Let us consider fairness for council tax payers. The owner of a band A property in my constituency, worth as little as £50,000, has to pay a council tax bill of £1,220, while the owner of a band G property in Westminster worth £2 million gets a council tax bill £36 lower. There is nothing fair about that.

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that eight years of austerity have failed completely and that only a Labour Government will provide the investment our country desperately needs?

Julie Cooper: My hon. Friend makes a good point; I agree with him absolutely.

Some 36% of the children in my constituency are growing up in poverty, and the changes to universal credit will make that much worse. Can it be fair to punish children whose only crime is to have two siblings? Five and a half thousand children growing up in Burnley and Padiham will be affected by those draconian measures. There is nothing fair about that either.

The people in my constituency know who is responsible for the growing queue at the food bank; they know who to blame when they cannot get a GP appointment; they know who to hold to account when the old and disabled are left to struggle on without adequate social care; and, perhaps most importantly, they will not forget that it was this Conservative Government who, most shamefully of all, forced record numbers of our children to grow up in poverty, short of food, warmth and hope. They will not forget.

3.43 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper), but I disagree with her. This is a great Budget.

I am glad that the Chancellor has set aside substantial amounts to prepare for all eventualities as we approach Brexit. The Banbury constituency's vote in the referendum was the closest in the country; by 500 people, we voted

[*Victoria Prentis*]

to leave. Now, I hear a great deal of unity locally over the need to get on with getting a deal. The uncertainty of Brexit is challenging for my constituents. With a good deal done, I really look forward to a pro-growth spending review early next year.

Locally, we can see that the economy is going well. There are great employment figures, but we need to focus on wage growth, which leads to more disposable income. I, for one, was pleased to hear the figures the Chancellor gave yesterday.

In my area, we are obsessed by healthcare. Everybody in this Chamber will have heard me talk, probably several times, about the Horton General Hospital, which we have been fighting to save for the past 40 years. The problem over the years has in fact been not financial, but structural. Small is beautiful and local, and we must not give in to the overweening ambition of Oxford to suck in more cases or more births. The German model of maternity offers choice but retains smaller obstetric units and, most importantly, excellent outcomes for mothers and babies. We have had a historical failure to recruit both midwives and obstetricians. Locally, we have had real progress with the clinical commissioning group since the fabulous new interim chief executive took over. The Horton has a very bright future.

I welcome the extra funding in the Budget—an average in real growth terms of 3.4% a year—but we need to ensure that it translates into extra people doing the right thing in the right place. Nobody is pretending that every sort of complicated surgery can be done everywhere, but A&E, paediatrics and simply having a baby with the benefit of an epidural should be provided locally. I know that the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care agrees with this broad premise and I look forward to talking about my local situation with him.

In north Oxfordshire, we are proud of building three new houses a day. We are keen to welcome people to Banbury to fill our jobs and we are building them houses to live in. I am often asked how we are managing to make this progress: we have done so by having a consistent and strong local message and strong leadership. Cherwell District Council's policy of putting housing generally on brownfield sites near towns, rather than piecemeal in villages, has seen new communities flourish. I also welcome the housing measures we heard about yesterday.

It would be wrong of me not to mention the public service I have worked in throughout my adult life. The Justice Committee, on which I am very proud to sit, recently heard that spending on justice will have fallen by 40% between 2010-11 and 2019-20. The Department does not have a protected budget. I was very pleased to hear what the Chancellor had to say yesterday and, more importantly, what I read in the Red Book afterwards, about the justice spend, and I welcome the £30 million to improve security and decency across the prison estate.

Faisal Rashid: Today I received a letter from the Cheshire police and crime commissioner co-signed by the acting chief constable informing me of £60 million in cuts since 2010 and a further £12 million in cuts over the next two years. There are severe pressures on policing in Cheshire. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government have failed to provide adequate funding for policing?

Victoria Prentis: No, I do not agree, but I was able to take my local PCC's issues up with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury directly in the last fortnight, and I encourage the hon. Gentleman to go to the Treasury with specifics; I think he will find that Treasury Ministers are listening.

We have £30 million extra to improve security and decency across the prison estate, which I feel very passionately about. We also have a whole new prison, Glen Parva, which was due to be a private finance initiative project, but the Treasury has now agreed to fund it. No specifics on the finances have been given in the Budget because it has to go out to tender and there will be all sorts of legal issues, but that is a very big commitment from the Treasury, and I for one am very proud of it. We need to put decent conditions in place for criminals so we can rehabilitate them before they are put back into society.

I also welcome the £21.5 million to be invested in the wider justice system. I feel very strongly that justice is not free; it does not just happen. The rule of law is not automatic, as we can see from the world we live in: it is a world in which people are poisoned in Salisbury, and in which the Chinese have a definition of the rule of law that does not coincide with the norms of modern international law since the second world war. I feel very strongly that we need to stand up for British justice values, and this does not happen automatically or cheaply.

We have had real difficulties in the prison service.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Victoria Prentis: No, I will not; I am sorry, but I need to make progress, and I feel very strongly about this subject. We have had real difficulties in the prison service under successive Governments which we know can only be resolved if we can recruit more staff. The prisons Minister and the Lord Chancellor, whom I am happy to see in his place, are both working extremely hard on staff recruitment, and real progress has been made. We can see that this is making a day-to-day difference on the coalface, if you like, in prisons. People are being treated more appropriately.

However, there are other areas of justice spend that are harder to justify and even to talk about in this place. We have a crisis of judicial recruitment, for example, and it is tied up with the provision of suitable judicial pensions. The quality of court buildings also matters for morale, and it is therefore important for the recruitment of the people that we need to provide justice in a way that we all too often take for granted. The justice system stands or falls as one. What we do for the most lowly magistrates court is just as important as what we do for the Supreme Court. The system must be joined up, and if we are proud of the rule of law and the separation of powers that we talk about so often, we must be careful to fund the system as an entirety.

I am glad that the Lord Chancellor has been here to listen to this. I commend him for what he is doing. I also commend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what he is doing for the justice system. The subject does not often get talked about in the House, and it was not talked about a great deal yesterday, but the detail in the Red Book has pleased me. Thank you for your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker.

3.51 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I welcome the rise in mental health funding, but people with mental health problems also need support from other Departments, not just Health, particularly when they have problem debts. A person is four to six times more likely to have a debt crisis if they have mental health issues, and half of all those seeking debt help have a mental health issue. The two are interrelated. Debt can trigger clinical depression, anxiety attacks and more, while mental illness can build debts. Universal credit is not helping. I am thinking not only about the complex and stress-inducing work capability assessment but about the wait for the first payment. Also, if people are able to get an advance payment, they struggle to pay it back. None of that will do anything to relieve their mental health issues.

If the Government really are intent on prioritising the nation's mental health, they need to guarantee that no one will be left without sufficient income as a result of moving to universal credit. Under the rules, any advance payment could be deducted at a rate of up to 40% of the standard payment. It was also possible to have other debts, such as council tax arrears or money owed to utility companies, taken at the same rate. The Chancellor has announced a reduction of this rate to 30%, but that could still mean a combined deduction of up to 70%, which is much higher than for pre-existing legacy benefits, so actually the change will be of little help. For some people, having deductions taken from their benefits to pay their creditors can be a positive method of repaying debt and managing their bill payments, but a rate of 70% is ridiculous. What steps is the Department for Work and Pensions taking to determine whether a deduction is appropriate or even affordable for the individual? I recognise that this method can be positive, but for many people it is inappropriate and unaffordable.

Universal credit can push people further into debt. The Government's data confirm that people on universal credit are falling into rent arrears, with more than two in five saying that that is due to problems with universal credit. More than half the recipients of universal credit that Citizens Advice helps have had to borrow money while waiting for their first payment. We know that 97% of tenants in Wigan who live in social housing go into arrears because of universal credit, and that 60% of those tenants have arrears of more than £600. It is therefore perhaps ironic that the Chancellor has finally announced a breathing space in the form of a statutory mechanism to give those in problem debt a period of respite while they get their financial lives in order.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I met representatives of Macmillan Cancer Support this morning, and they were talking about the challenges facing cancer patients in the self-same circumstances that my hon. Friend has just described. Does she think that action needs to be taken for them, as well as for people with mental health issues?

Yvonne Fovargue: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I also think that the rules on terminal illness should be changed.

Going back to the question of the breathing space, the devil will be in the detail. For a breathing space scheme to work well, it has to have minimum standards.

It has to provide enough time for the person in debt to get advice on the best way to resolve their problem debts, to recover from temporary financial difficulties and enter a statutory debt solution, and to pay their debts at a manageable rate. There must also be funding so people can access free, independent and impartial services speedily, because when people decide they are at the end of their tether, they want to see someone quickly.

The Government suggest a breathing space of 60 days, but debt advisers need the flexibility to recommend an extension. I worry that if the arrangement is too rigid, creditors may well delay until someone gets out of the breathing space period so they can start chasing them again. Call me cynical, but that is what 23 years at Citizens Advice does.

There is clear consensus that a breathing space solution must cover all debts, including debts to the Government—household bills such as council tax and moneys owed to central Government. It must also offer protection against further interest and charges, and against enforcement action. Creditors must stop collection activities such as calls, letters and visits—that means no more bailiffs. Returning briefly to universal credit, there must be no deductions from benefits or other income to recover outstanding debts during the breathing space period, future deductions must be affordable, and—please—there must be no public register of people who enter a breathing space. Evidence from Scotland shows that that deters people from doing so. If there is going to be such a register, let us make it private between creditors and people in debt.

I welcome the announcement that the Government will look at no-interest loans, although the long timescale will allow many people to fall into debt. It is unfortunate that, despite the work of the Law Commission, Government time was not given to debate ending the exploitation of a Victorian law that was used as a vehicle for logbook loans.

I turn to education—in particular sixth-form funding, which is at crisis level.

Sir Edward Davey: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Yvonne Fovargue: I have to move on, I am afraid. There is a range of new requirements, the needs of schools and colleges have increased, and under-investment in sixth-form education is having a negative impact on the education of the young people in my constituency. That simply means the Government will be unable to meet their stated objective of having a strong post-Brexit economy and a socially mobile, highly educated workforce. That is bizarre, frankly.

At least £760 per student is required to continue providing 16 to 18-year-olds with a high-quality education, but the Raise the Rate campaign asked the Chancellor to increase national funding by a more modest £200 per student. That would at least have been a start. It is disappointing that there has been no action.

Will the £400 million to provide the “little extras” be shared with sixth-form colleges? That might have helped Winstanley College in my constituency with the little extra of providing a teacher so German A-level could be reinstated, or allowed St John Rigby College to reinstate one-to-one time to support students who are struggling emotionally or academically—it might have, had that money not been ring-fenced for building maintenance and purchasing equipment.

[Yvonne Fovargue]

Let me comment briefly on the raising of personal allowances. Families on the average wage in Macclesfield will gain just over £12 a month, while people on more than £50,000 per year will gain just under £40 a month. It is pretty obvious who will gain the most. It certainly is not women over 50, who are still waiting for any measure to help them.

The Chancellor said he chose not to unveil the Budget tomorrow as he wanted to avoid Halloween jokes. It is a good job he did not wait until next Monday, as my constituents, having heard that austerity is over, may have expected a firecracker of a Budget that lit up their lives. Instead, all they got was a damp squib.

3.58 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Our country faces some immense challenges and this Budget—from a fine Chancellor, who I hope stays for many more Budgets—does good work in tackling a number of them, but there are several others that I want to address and that some colleagues have touched on.

The first challenge to which the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have risen is the need to fund healthcare properly. A number of Members across the House have regularly made the case for an increase of about £20 billion a year to bring our spending in line with German or French levels, and this is happening. But I agree with the point made yesterday by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann)—that is, that we need to pay for this. It should not just come from additional borrowing, and we should continue to look at using hypothecated or other forms of revenue, particularly when it comes to social care.

A second challenge that the Chancellor has met—as, indeed, have employers up and down the country—is the need to increase and maintain employment, and to reduce unemployment to the lowest level in decades. The unemployment rate has fallen from 8% to 4%. In many constituencies, including mine, it has fallen much further than that, but every person out of work is still one too many. It is also welcome that on the whole jobs are gradually becoming better paid.

The third area in which the challenge is being met is defence and our global role, particularly in international development. The UK is one of the only major countries in the world—if not the only one—to maintain both the 2% defence commitment under NATO and the 0.7% official development assistance, and I welcome that. In difficult times, we can be proud that the UK will meet our international commitments as well as the commitments to our own people on safety and security.

Now, what about the challenges? The big and immediate one is clearly exiting the EU. It is absolutely essential that we reach a deal. I am a member of the Exiting the European Union Committee, and the more I hear of the consequences of no deal, the more apparent it is just how damaging it would be to the EU and to the UK. The Chancellor recognises this, and I sincerely hope that he does not have to come to the House with his alternative Budget. But this is not just about exiting the EU; it is about the future of the economy.

My hon. Friends the Members for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) and for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) have mentioned the challenges we face

and the future opportunities. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) and I recently produced a book on the future of work, looking at countries around the world that are meeting these challenges, including South Korea, Singapore and Argentina. Lots of people across the country are trying to meet these challenges, but they also exist globally.

It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Yvonne Fovargue), who was right about funding for 16 to 18-year-olds. The years from 16 to 18 are a critical time, and funding dropping off at that stage poses some severe challenges to colleges and schools.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Like me, the hon. Gentleman is a west midlands MP, and knows that the west midlands economy is very important to the country. I am not sure whether the Government have clarified whether there will be more money for further education. Further education is the backbone of things such as apprenticeships, and we need more apprenticeships. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should be focusing on this important area?

Jeremy Lefroy: Indeed, and I think I just mentioned that. In my constituency, Newcastle-under-Lyme College and Stafford College do excellent work, as does South Staffordshire College, but they are underfunded, particularly at that level.

A further challenge is balancing the Budget. The OBR report refers to the Chancellor in terms of St Augustine, as it describes the Budget as Augustinian—“make me chaste, but not yet.” I believe that it is nearly 20 years since the UK has run a Budget surplus, and we are now pushing that back by a further two years. This is not the way to go. We have to look carefully at how we can return to a balanced Budget or a surplus, which can only come from growth, more efficiency or allowing tax rates to rise—we have some of the lowest revenues as a percentage of GDP in the G7—but that has not happened this time. If we are to maintain a sound fiscal policy, it will have to happen soon. The country needs to build up assets in better times to meet the challenges of hard times, and one of those assets is a surplus Budget and a reducing deficit.

Local government finance has been mentioned today. This is a great challenge because I believe, as do pretty much all colleagues in this House, in the importance of devolution and making decisions locally. However, the Government are placing more and more pressures on local government, without giving it the means to deal with them. Local authorities, including Staffordshire, have done excellent work to reduce spending while maintaining services over the last eight years. That cannot go on. Local government has reached the bottom. I welcome the additional money, but we need to see more, particularly in terms of loosening up the requirements for referendums.

The right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) rightly said that the Office for Budget Responsibility report talked about the low savings rate and rising personal debt. That incredibly important area has not been focused on, and I am extremely concerned about it. We need to help households rebuild their balance sheets. People cannot always look to Government to support them in times of difficulty. Personal assets are vital, and I urge the Chancellor to look at ways of

encouraging saving, difficult though that is—including efficient lifetime savings accounts that people can draw on in times of difficulty, financial education in schools and further support for credit unions.

We have the biggest current account deficit in the G7—from memory, it is about 3.8%. That is down from 5.1%, but it is still too much. We are too dependent on resources from other countries, and we need to build up our network of foreign assets, from which we receive income. At the same time, we need to reduce our balance of trade deficit.

Finally, we have the challenge of supporting people on the lowest incomes who are long-term sick or disabled. At a time when many people in this country are seeing their incomes continue to rise and are living in prosperity, which I welcome, we need to meet the needs of those who suffer from disability, sickness or low income. I welcome the changes to universal credit, but it still does not work for everyone. I welcome the additional money, but we have to make sure that nobody loses out in the transfer to universal credit, most particularly disabled people. Others, including my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) yesterday, have spoken about how that could be done.

This Budget is a chance to tackle long-term challenges in difficult circumstances, with the coming exit from the EU. The Chancellor has seized the chance to address some of those areas, on which I congratulate him. I believe that, but for this challenge of exiting the EU, he would have tackled other areas, too, but the challenges that remain cannot be put off for ever.

4.7 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, especially with respect to renewable energy.

This might not be a Halloween Budget, but it is yet another attempt to scare Members about Brexit and to frame the Brexit question as deal or no deal. Although the Chancellor hardly mentioned Brexit, the underlying message is that there is something for us if we back this Budget—tax cuts and something for the NHS—and more in store if we get a soft Brexit. The other message is that if we do not vote for a deal, there will be a disastrous hard Brexit.

Certainly a hard Brexit would be a disaster, but so would this soft Brexit. It is just wrong of the Government, day after day, to propose a choice between the Brexit deal that the Government come back with and a hard Brexit with no deal. The truth is that there are alternatives. When we get there, this House must debate those alternatives, not just the two that the Government keep scaring us about. It is almost like the Noel Edmonds TV game show, "Deal or No Deal". I switched over to another channel when it came on my TV, and this Parliament could switch over and have a third choice—that choice should be a people's vote and an exit from Brexit.

The Budget forecasts show why a third option is so important. People should look at the growth forecasts, which are seriously scary. We are going to be trapped in a Brexit low-growth economy. We have had 10 years of financial crisis austerity and, with these growth figures, we are going to have 10 years of Brexit austerity. The figures should be really scary. Our economy had near to

the highest growth rate of any G7 country in the four years before the referendum, and since then we have had the lowest growth in the G7. That should worry us, and that is even before we add in the risks and uncertainties. The OBR's economic forecast could not factor in all the risks and uncertainties; it had to assume that there would be a soft Brexit.

So even these low growth figures may well not be as bad as things turn out to be. That feeds in to the spending figures. Ministers have made much of the health figures, but when one strips out the health increase, one sees that all the rest of the Departments will, on average, see 0% growth for the next few years. That is austerity continuing—it is really scary and completely not needed. According to the OBR, Brexit has already cost £15 billion in lost tax revenue, and we hear in the Budget that even Brexit preparation is going to cost more. That is why we have to escape this Brexit trap; whether it is a no-growth Brexit or a deal Brexit, we have to have a people's vote.

This Brexit Budget was shaped to try to buy off the Back Benchers and the Democratic Unionist party, not to try to get a proper forward strategy for this country. There were deals in there for Belfast. It may deserve that money, but the timing for it is funny, and we know what the talks have been to try to get there. We know that the Government could not put forward the tax rise needed to get the Budget into surplus and to invest in public services because they could not get that tax rise through their Back Benchers. The Brexiteer Tories on the Back Benches would not have voted for a tax rise. The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) was right: we need to get a surplus, we need to invest in our schools, hospitals and police, and we need to undo some of the damage from universal credit. We need that, but we can only do it if we have some honesty on the public finances. The reality is that this Chancellor and this Government are so weak that they cannot put through the tax measures needed to get the right economic balance in this country and the right investment in our public services.

When we look at individual public services, we see that they are crying out for investment. For example, since 2015 we have lost 4,789 full-time police officers, 2,231 community support officers and 4,334 special officers. That is more than 9,400 officers lost, at a time when crime has been going up. Knife crime has increased by 62% since 2015, firearm crime has increased by 30% and homicides have increased by 33%. The Conservatives should be ashamed of themselves for not having been prepared to invest in the security of our people and safety on the streets when violent crime is going up by so much.

I have a question for those on the Treasury Bench. We have been looking in the Red Book. The Government have announced £164 million for counter-terrorism police, which is welcome, but it does not score anywhere in the Red Book. We have been making inquiries and asking the Treasury about this, and it says that it is from the reserves. I have never heard an explanation like that. The Chancellor announces £160 million for counter-terrorism policing yet it is not in the Red Book or said to be in the Red Book. That is an insult to this House, and I hope that Ministers will have an answer by the end of the day.

My constituency is seeing school funding cut, and headteachers have been marching. They do not normally do that in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames,

[Sir Edward Davey]

but they were doing so recently because they are fed up with having to lose staff, cut the curriculum and cut opportunities for young people in their charge. They do not stand for it, and this House should not stand for it. It was an insult to offer less money to schools than the Government are spending on potholes. What sort of priorities do this Government have when they put potholes before our children and their futures?

Not only did the Government get the short-term spending decisions wrong but they got the long-term spending decisions and strategy wrong. Where was the investment to tackle climate change? What about the opportunity in green growth—in our renewable energy? There are huge opportunities there, but there was nothing on that in the Budget. As for social justice, it was good to see some recognition that universal credit is causing pain out there, but the Budget did not go anywhere near enough. We are going to have to revisit this as a House if we are going to make sure that the poorest people in our country share in any future prosperity.

4.14 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): There is much to digest in the Budget, so I shall focus on only a few of the announcements that were made. In line with the theme of today's debate, I shall start with those on health.

As a children's doctor, I work on the frontline of the NHS. Throughout my career, I have become increasingly concerned about the number of young people with mental health problems. More than half of those problems start before the child is 14, and 75% have started by the time the child is 18, so early intervention is critical to try to avoid crises further down the line. I therefore welcome the Government's announcement of £2 billion more for mental health, which will ensure that every school has a dedicated mental health team to tackle what is becoming an epidemic of eating disorders, depression and self-harm among young people. It is a welcome step as part of the Government's commitment to develop parity of esteem for mental and physical health problems. More work needs to be done to identify the cause of these problems so that they can be tackled earlier.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care thinks about how to spend the Government's £20 billion increase for the NHS, will he consider how much money is given to children with life-threatening and life-limiting disorders? Many of their families struggle from day to day, so extra money to help to fund children's hospices, as well as the availability of respite care, would be most welcome.

I have spoken in the Chamber previously about the challenges facing ambulance services in rural areas. My beautiful constituency of Sleaford and North Hykeham covers some 433 square miles. Ambulances have to rattle along lots of little tiny winding roads, at speed, to get to patients. Increasing the number of ambulances available to East Midlands ambulance service would help.

Ambulances do not just travel by land. Air ambulances provide an incredible service to our most unwell patients. They are funded entirely by philanthropy, and such services are under constant pressure to fundraise so that they can buy and maintain aircraft and pay for staff.

I welcome the Government's announcement of £10 million of capital funding for air ambulance trusts, which will contribute towards these life-saving services.

For ambulances on the ground, the challenge is not just distance but the road network along which they travel. The additional £28 billion investment in roads will represent the biggest single upgrade of the network since the expansion of the first motorways in the '60s and '70s. I will continue to campaign for extra money to complete the Lincoln bypass, and to improve the A46/A17/A1 junction and areas of the A1 and A15, so that roads in Lincolnshire are safer and we can travel more smoothly.

The money for potholes has been mentioned by other right hon. and hon. Members. Potholes are a big problem in Lincolnshire, so I am pleased that extra money will be spent on them, particularly as winter is coming.

I am glad that the Government are investing in our physical infrastructure, but in the 21st century, digital infrastructure is also extremely important. We rely on the internet more and more in our daily lives, so the lack of high-speed broadband in some rural areas can create a real sense of isolation. Whether for the person who cannot download their papers, the small-business owner who cannot submit their taxes online or the studious schoolgirl who cannot complete her homework on the online maths platform, a poor internet connection affects all aspects of work, family life and opportunity for rural constituents. I am therefore delighted that the Government are providing an extra £250 million for high-speed broadband in rural areas. It will be a welcome boost, if it is ensured that the money is directed towards connecting the remaining 5% to 8% who are not yet connected rather than towards getting faster speeds for those who already have a reasonable connection.

A Government's first responsibility is always the protection of their citizens. As we mark the centenary of the end of the first world war, we remember the sacrifices that were made by many, and also remember the sacrifices made every day by our brave servicemen and women. I participated in the Royal Air Force branch of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, through which I met many service people at all levels. I heard about their concerns and worries, and about the pressures they were facing. They do an incredible job in the most challenging and, often, the most terrifying of circumstances. It is vital that we provide them with the support that they need, and the Chancellor's announcement of an extra £1 billion for our armed forces will help to ensure that our armed forces can continue to operate at the very highest level.

Finally, I welcome the Government's commitment to making work pay. Increasing the work allowance and decreasing the taper rate further for universal credit will help even more people into work. Some 1,000 more jobs are created in the UK every day, and we also have one of the lowest unemployment levels in Europe, which affects young people in particular. Young people in this country have a much better chance of getting a job than those in other parts of Europe, which is something of which we should be proud.

Furthermore, increasing the personal allowance to £12,500, which fulfils our manifesto promise a full year early, allows people who have gone out to work to keep more of what they earn to spend as they wish. The best

stability that someone can have is a monthly pay packet, and this Government's effort will ensure that a record number of people have that stability.

4.19 pm

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this most important debate on public services and the Budget. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson). I agreed with her comments about children's mental health. As co-chair of the all-party group for the prevention of adverse childhood experiences, I agree that tackling the causes of children's mental health problems is vital.

Today, however, I wish to talk about community safety and the public service that our police provide. My constituency of Stockton South desperately wanted a better response from the Chancellor than a Budget that ignored community policing. I cannot really imagine how it must feel to be frightened in my own home. I have heard many people's stories of the fear that they feel, but how many Members really know what it is like? How many of us know what it is like to be woken in the night by people loudly bashing on the door looking for someone to sell them drugs; what it is like to know that, if we were to go out to walk the dog, someone might break in and steal our possessions; and what it is like to have to listen to sex workers being threatened by clients through a flimsy adjoining wall when we are lying in our beds in the early hours of the morning?

Hon. Members have probably heard these sorts of stories from looking in their email inboxes, engaging on social media and meeting people at their surgeries, but yesterday those affected were ignored by the Chancellor. Cleveland police, which covers my constituency, has dedicated professionals working hard under the exceptional leadership of Police and Crime Commissioner Barry Copping, a new chief constable, and a team of hardworking officers, police community support officers and support staff. I pay tribute to everyone working in our police forces to keep our communities safe. They are the people who pick up the pieces during a crisis. I thank them for everything that they do. No police officer goes to work each day not wanting to help, not wanting to prevent crime, not wanting to respond to need and not wanting to engage with communities, but our community can see that the policing in Cleveland is not adequately meeting their needs. In the past eight years, the actual cash—not real terms—budget for Cleveland police has fallen by more than 10% from £148.5 million in 2010 to £134.6 million in 2018. The money that remains buys much less today than it did in 2010. Inflation, pay awards, national insurance increases and the apprenticeship levy all increase the cost of policing.

In real terms, Cleveland police force is £39 million worse off than in 2010, and we have 500 fewer police officers as a result, but is that not the same picture as in the rest of the country? No. This Government are widening social divides by making the greatest cuts to policing in the areas of highest need. The least impact of the Government's police cuts has been experienced in Surrey, where residents have seen an overall funding increase of 1% since 2010. Recorded crime is nearly 60% higher in Cleveland than in Surrey. If Cleveland had received the same increase, my local police force would have gained an extra £15 million a year instead. I am genuinely pleased that the people of Surrey have

had a 1% increase in their police funding, but if it is good enough for Surrey, why is it not good enough for Stockton South?

Why is my community different and why is Cleveland so special? Cleveland is a great place to live. Our communities are strong, and we are a good place in which to do business, but policing our area is a challenge. We have particularly high needs: the highest levels of antisocial behaviour in the country; the second highest levels of domestic violence; an increasing level of recorded crime; the highest levels of drug abuse in the country; high deprivation; and serious and organised criminals involved in the supply of drugs. The Government promised us a Budget to end austerity, but the fact remains that Cleveland police is now £39 million a year worse off than it would have been, with more cuts to come.

Austerity has always been a political choice. Over the past eight years, time and again, the Conservatives have been able to find giveaways and sweeteners for a few people at the top while leaving communities in places like Stockton South to pick up the pieces. Think about the woman in Parkfield in my constituency who contacted me in tears because she says she has no choice but to sell her home just to get away from a small number of criminals in the area who act with impunity. Or think about the police officer who got in touch and offered me a picture of a force working its hardest, but unable to do its job, with low staff morale and significant concerns about a loss of public trust. "We desperately need the support of Government," the officer told me. There is crime that officers want to tackle—crime that they want to fight—but it carries on with impunity because they do not have the numbers to be there when they are most needed.

Since 2010, Cleveland police has lost about 500 officers, yet next year the Government plan to make Cleveland's thin blue line even thinner, with a further cut of an even greater £9 million. Nine million pounds of cuts means even fewer police officers at a time when our communities have never felt less safe. If the Chancellor really wanted to end austerity, he would give Cleveland police their £9 million back. Police in our county need the resources to be able to do their job. My constituents have a right to feel safe in their community and to know that the police will be there for them when they are needed.

The Conservatives used to call themselves the party of law and order. How can Conservative Members carry on saying that with a straight face to some of the people who visit me at my surgeries, and probably theirs too? This Government will carry on fighting among themselves long after the grand gestures of Budget week have been forgotten; I and my Labour colleagues will carry on fighting for the proper funding that our local police forces need to keep our constituents safe.

4.26 pm

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), and I will pick up on one or two of the themes that he mentioned. I want to touch on the NHS and policing before turning to employment and, finally, the family.

I know that my constituents will welcome the additional funding for the NHS, with £20.5 billion more by 2023-24—£394 million per week—and average real growth rates

[Michael Tomlinson]

of 3.4% per annum. That is significantly more than Labour promised at the last general election. Importantly, with this money there will also be reforms and improvements. That will be welcomed and will make a big difference to our NHS in Dorset and Poole. I look forward to further announcements from the Secretary of State clarifying exactly how this will affect our area.

On policing, I was pleased yesterday when the Chancellor specifically mentioned the submission by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). The Chancellor said that he recognised that policing is under pressure from the changing nature of crime. Furthermore—the hon. Member for Stockton South did not mention this—the Chancellor told the House that the Home Secretary will review police spending powers and further options for reform when he presents the provisional police funding settlement in December. I strongly support my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire in his campaign for a fairer funding formula for our policing, because that will make a difference in my part of the country, Dorset. I look forward to working with him on policing.

I want to focus a little on employment, and then on the family. I welcome the Chancellor's comments and revised estimates on future employment growth. I have the privilege of chairing the all-party parliamentary group on youth employment. Each month, we look at the statistics on employment and unemployment relating to young people—not just because statistics are important but because they affect individuals' lives, including young people moving on to the first rung of their career ladder. At our meeting this month, we celebrated the fact that youth unemployment is now at its lowest level since comparable records began, at 10.8%. Of course there is more to do and further that we can go, but for interest and comparison purposes, the EU average is 14.8%.

Our current all-party inquiry is on social mobility—another theme that has been mentioned in this debate—and in particular we are looking at young care leavers moving into work. In that regard, I very much welcome the Department for Education's announcement last week about the care leaver covenant. I look forward to hearing more about that from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), when he comes to our all-party group in December. At this month's APPG meeting, we heard from two care leavers about the importance of stability and having a consistent mentor figure in their lives. Stability and family support are so often crucial when young people move into the world of work.

I turn to the family. I am grateful for the work that the Centre for Social Justice does in this area. I have learned from the CSJ that despite the increased risk of poverty, it is estimated that the Treasury spends about £1 on preventive spending for every £6,000 it spends on responding to the consequences of family breakdown. Furthermore, it appears that marriage is disappearing in policy making, just as much as it is disappearing in our poorest communities. Some 87% of high earners marry, and 24% of low earners marry. The rich get married and stay together, and the poor do not.

Why does that matter? Because where there is poverty, family breakdown is often not far behind, and while poverty is often a driver of family breakdown, crucially

so too is family breakdown a driver of poverty. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, children who experience family breakdown are twice as likely to fall into poverty—[*Interruption.*] Despite the chuntering from those on the Opposition Benches, the public really get this. A recent CSJ poll confirmed that young people aged 14 to 17 aspire to a lasting relationship just as much as they aspire to a long-term career; they find that just as important. It is clear that support for the family is important for social mobility and for alleviating poverty. Marriage and the family should not be disappearing from Government policy making. When it comes to the Budget and our public services, it seems to me that more could be spent on preventing family breakdown, which would mean that less was spent on the consequences.

Finally, I welcome the increase in support for universal credit—a policy that I have wholeheartedly and repeatedly supported. When it was last debated in the Chamber, almost the moment that I sat down, I received an email from a resident in Dorset, of which it is worth reading a significant part. The email reads:

“I have just seen Michael taking part in a debate today on universal credit”—

people do actually watch these proceedings, strange though that may seem. It goes on:

“I have been in receipt of universal credit since March this year and have generally had a very positive experience. I greatly appreciate the guidance and support from my work coach, the simplicity of use of the online system”.

It is not starry-eyed, because it mentions a concern about moving into part-time work and the relationship with council tax support, but it concludes:

“I love the fact that all aspects of my life are dealt with centrally. It is crucial that Michael emphasises the positive aspects of the universal credit system and that the Government continues to roll it out.”

Given yesterday's Budget statement, universal credit will make it even more worthwhile to be in work. The work allowance increase is progressive, and Opposition Members should welcome it. I look forward to more positive comments about that policy, possibly even from those on the Opposition Benches.

4.33 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): This was a Budget for

“the strivers, the grafters and the carers who are the backbone of our communities and our economy.”—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 653.]

Or so we were told—I would like to extend an invitation to the Chancellor to come to my weekly advice surgery and say that to the dozens of families I meet every single week who are trapped in insecure gig economy work, who are being failed by universal credit and who cannot afford to put a private rented sector roof over their head. I will talk about each of those issues in turn.

Let us start with workers' rights. The Chancellor stated that delivering higher wages for those in work is core to his mission, yet our national living wage is littered with loopholes and used by some of the biggest organisations to cut terms, conditions and take-home pay. Those organisations should be named and shamed—I am referring to the likes of Marks & Spencer, Zizzi, Ginsters, Le Pain Quotidien, Caffè Nero and countless others that have sought legislative loopholes, against the spirit of the law.

Only this morning, I heard from one of the thousands of B&Q staff members being forced to move from nights to days. Just two years ago, one lady lost her annual bonus and her Sunday premium. She works the twilight shift to enable her to care for her two children. If she keeps her job, by the end of the month she will earn £1.50 an hour less than she currently does, but she cannot work the new shift because she cannot care for her children as well. She is not being offered redundancy. I ask those on the Treasury Bench to use their influence to encourage B&Q to offer redundancy to the 441 twilight shift workers who cannot at the moment take the hours that are being offered to them.

The Chancellor talked about protecting employment for lower-paid workers. Does that mean that the Government will follow the lead of British Telecom and the Communication Workers Union by calling for the abolition of exploitative “pay between assignments” contracts that keep agency staff on low pay for years at a time, even though they lack a gap between assignments?

On housing, which is a supposed Government priority, I was expecting a little more than the few lines that we heard yesterday. I welcome the proposed measures and money, but they are simply not of a scale that will make the difference that is so desperately needed. Solving the housing crisis is the politics of “and”: we should lift the housing revenue account cap, for sure, but is it not time to argue that all public sector sites that have been disposed of should be used first for the purposes of social housing, to introduce more punitive action for empty properties and to increase the surcharge for the one in six over-55s who own a second property? What about councils such as Merton that do not have a housing revenue account? In the past year, Merton has had one four-bedroom property to offer, and there are 441 families chasing that one four-bedroom property.

What about the green belt? The Budget states that revised planning reform ensures

“more land in the right places...for housing.”

Do Treasury Ministers agree that we should de-designate the 19,334 hectares of unbuilt green-belt land within a 10-minute walk of London train stations? This supposed green belt includes a car wash, a waste plant, a disused airfield and even a lap dancing club. At no environmental cost, that is enough space for almost 1 million new homes.

Finally, I turn to universal credit. I appreciate that I do not have much time left to speak, but I must ask those on the Treasury Bench for their help with Mr C, who applied for universal credit at the beginning of September. As the result of a routine operation, he had an artery severed, and the likelihood is that his foot will now have to be removed. He lives in one room above a shop, which he shares with his sister, who is in her 50s. Since the beginning of September, we have attempted to get a home visit for him so that he can claim the money he is entitled to. More than eight weeks later, in spite of getting the help of the local jobcentre manager, and in spite of numerous calls and letters to everybody we can think of, that man is still awaiting his appointment. Surely that is absolutely wrong.

This is a Budget with an absence of hope. The era of austerity is said to be coming to an end, but for now it continues to proceed, dragging almost a decade of damage in its wake, affecting people without homes for their children, people trying to claim benefits and people who just want a fair week's pay for a fair week's work.

4.38 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh).

I thank the Chancellor and his team for their efforts in making this Budget possible. In particular, I am immensely grateful to him for his consideration in cutting business rates for small businesses. This issue is important both to my constituents and to businesses in Southport, and I am grateful to him for mentioning this in his speech yesterday. It seems to me that we should be trying to play to our strengths as a country. That is the way we are going to attract investment, keep employment at a record low, provide jobs and prosperity for people in the future, and create increased funding for our public services.

One of Britain's, and indeed Southport's, strengths is its small businesses that provide the majority of jobs in the private sector. One of the benefits of being the Member of Parliament for Southport is that I get to meet some extraordinary entrepreneurs and small business owners. They are the people who form the backbone of our economy, and over the past year I have had the pleasure of meeting many of these hard-working individuals. I therefore deeply welcome the new tax reforms set out by the Chancellor in his Budget speech yesterday, which will provide unparalleled relief to many small business owners in my constituency.

However, things have been all the more difficult for small businesses in Southport because they are having to work without the support of Labour-led Sefton Council, which is more interested in punitive charges than in building a strong economy. Lord Street, in particular, is suffering under the Labour Council, but it is now set to be handed a fighting chance under this Conservative Government and this autumn Budget.

There are a number of things I want to talk about in the time I have available. The first is the Chancellor's plan for our high streets, which will provide up-front support through business rates, while implementing a package of transformational initiatives, including a £675 million future high streets fund. Then, specifically, there are those things that can make a real difference to small businesses in our communities: how we can get out of their way in terms of tax and regulation; how we can stand up for them by regulating the online marketplace and digital businesses to create a level playing field with the marketplace on our high streets; and then, finally, how we can create growth so that we can continue to put record investment in our public services.

Cutting the deficit is still important, because only if we continue to deal with the debt left behind by a reckless Labour Government will we be able to safeguard our economic future and invest in all those things that are so essential. We are making good progress—the UK economy has grown every year since 2010, and unemployment is at its lowest level since 1975. But we have to be honest: there is still more work to do to ensure we live within our means. We have to stick to our plan, making difficult decisions about spending that will get the debt and the deficit under control but that do not penalise the wealth creators and businesses in our country. We need to invest tax receipts, not waste them like the Labour party does.

[Damien Moore]

We also have to provide a much needed boost to small businesses that were left behind by the last Labour Government, to ensure unemployment remains at a record low and that the longevity of our high streets is maintained. Again, that takes difficult decisions, so I welcome the announcement in yesterday's Budget to provide up-front support through the business rates system, cutting bills for retail properties with a rateable value of below £51,000, which will benefit 90% of retail properties. I also welcome the addition of the £675 million future high streets fund. That means that someone running a small business will see their tax come down by a third and their high street restored.

It is not just about getting out of the way of small business but about standing up for those specific issues. It is about making sure that those same small businesses are not disadvantaged by an overbearing digital marketplace that is not paying its fair share—a real David and Goliath battle. I was therefore delighted to hear in the Chancellor's statement yesterday that the Government will introduce a new 2% tax on the revenues of certain digital businesses to ensure that the amount of tax paid in the UK reflects the value they derive from their UK users, ensuring an even ground between businesses on our high streets and online. It is not Amazon or Facebook that are the lifeblood of this country; it is the small businesses in constituencies like mine.

That is why small business is important. It means more business and more tax collected and more economic growth, and, yes, a strong economy means more money for our public services. I therefore welcome the Chancellor's announcement yesterday of additional funding, and an indication that the hard work is starting to pay off. This means £2 billion more for mental health, and the long-term plan for the NHS will commit further funding to help achieve parity of esteem between mental and physical health services. That means anyone experiencing a crisis can call the NHS line 24/7, and it means more mental health ambulances, increased community support and comprehensive support at every major accident and emergency by 2024.

I have discussed school funding with headteachers in my constituency. This Budget means £400 million more for schools this year, with £10,000 allocated to the average primary and £50,000 to the average secondary to help schools buy the equipment they need. It means £1 billion more for defence across this year and next, ensuring our world-class armed forces can face the new threats and build on the UK's record of spending more on defence than any NATO member except the US.

With unemployment at its lowest since 1975 and employment at a near record high, the years of financial hardship endured by the people of this country due to Labour's inability to fix the roof while the sun was shining is now a thing of the past. With this Budget and a strong economy, constituents and businesses in my constituency of Southport can be assured that this Government are delivering for them and that their hard work is paying off.

4.45 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The financial health of industry in my area is absolutely critical. The attempts yesterday by the Chancellor to bury the bad news for industry, in particular energy-intensive industries,

did not help at all. He did not mention it, but he did not bury the news very deep either: it is there for all to see on page 47 of the Red Book. If the changes in carbon taxes materialise in response to Brexit, it will cost individual firms millions of pounds. The carbon emissions tax is significantly higher than the average emissions trading scheme price over the past 12 months, which was just £12.30. This would increase the cost of carbon for UK installations across the country, currently covered by ETS, by 30%.

The Chancellor acknowledges the increasing high total carbon price, but proposes to freeze it at £18 a tonne of carbon dioxide for 2021. He might think that that is an ambitious move, but these plans come with little notice and a particularly high cost for industry. Firms like CF Fertilisers in Stockton are significantly exposed to the additional extra costs. The EU energy trading scheme is a market-based instrument for which companies had developed a strategy over time to ensure they were able to comply. Now, on top of the perfect storm of high electricity and gas prices, this carbon tax, coupled with the doubling of the gas climate change levy, is a very real issue for energy-intensive industries.

The Government did publish a document on this last night. It betrays a fundamental change in policy since the Brexit vote, with no consultation with industry along the way. In the worst Brexit scenario of all, EIIs are being given an expensive fait accompli with no notice, no discussion and no impact assessment. This makes industry very nervous. Rolled together, all this serves to make the UK an unattractive place for EIIs to do business in the future.

The Chancellor could have helped an industry facing such a dilemma by giving some indication of Government support for carbon capture, use and storage, but he did not. As I have said on numerous occasions, Teesside is ripe for investment in carbon capture, use and storage. The industry needs some indication that the Government are capable of making the right call on this matter. Perhaps once the task group on CCS reports we will hear something more positive from the Chancellor in the new year.

This is my ninth speech in a Budget debate, and in every single one I have talked about health inequalities in my area and the need for a 21st century hospital in Stockton to help tackle them. Stockton was promised a new hospital, but in 2010 the coalition Government scrapped it while making sure that similar plans went ahead where there just happened to be Government MPs of both the blue and yellow. Let me outline why we need to solve the social care crisis and build a new hospital in Stockton.

Nationally, on average, a boy born in one of the most affluent areas of England will outlive one born in the poorest parts by 8.4 years. In Stockton, where life expectancy for a man in the town centre ward is 64, that gap is around double at 15 years. Incidentally, that life expectancy age is the same as in Ethiopia. Our children in these inner-city areas are living in poverty. They are more likely to be undernourished, more susceptible to all manner of illnesses and more likely to end up in care. Older adults are more likely to be ill, given a lifetime of hard work in the heavy industries. One in five babies in Stockton is exposed to cigarette toxins in the womb because their mother smokes while pregnant. That was in 2015-16. That year, there was a significantly higher

rate of hospital admissions attributed to smoking than the national average. According to the British Lung Foundation, people in the north-east have the highest chronic obstructive pulmonary disease mortality ratio in the country. The English average for children achieving a good level of development at five years old is at 60%. In Stockton, this is just 50%.

Dr Paul Williams: Does my hon. Friend agree that the cuts to public health funding have had a significant impact on Stockton Council's ability to deal with some of those health inequalities, and is he as disappointed as I am not to have heard about increases in public health funding in the Budget?

Alex Cunningham: Most certainly. My hon. Friend and I represent between us some of the most difficult areas in Stockton, with high levels of smoking and drinking that make the national average pale into total insignificance. We desperately need that additional funding, so I most certainly agree with him.

Our local North Tees hospital does an exemplary job in the most difficult circumstances, yet it could do so much better in a modern building with services that are required cheek by jowl and where people can be treated in wards rather than converted corridors. That is why we need a new hospital in Stockton and why I will mention that in every Budget speech I ever make until I get it.

Still on health, the police and crime commissioner for Cleveland has been doing excellent work on the introduction of heroin-assisted treatment in neighbouring Middlesbrough—a project that the experts believe will help to save lives and money and reduce crime across Teesside—but he needs Government support to make it the best that it can be. I hope that there will be a full Government commitment to that initiative.

On policing, I am really worried, like my colleague next door in Stockton South, about policing in our area. Like most others, the Cleveland police force area has been short-changed by this Government over many years and the police know that they can no longer deliver the full service that is needed. As my hon. Friend said, over the last eight years, the Government grant for policing and crime in Cleveland has been cut by around 24%. He also outlined in detail why we need that extra money, yet Cleveland is harder hit by cuts than most other forces because of how it is categorised. The county is largely rural, but the vast majority of the population is in inner-city areas, with the same challenges of the cities, yet we do not get the same level of funding. Let me be clear: there will be severe repercussions for public safety and criminal justice in Cleveland if the people do not get more funding.

On education, the Chancellor announced some one-off funding for schools to pay for little extras, but it is teachers and action on pay that they need. Stockton's branch of the National Education Union visited my surgery on Friday. It wants to see the Government fund the full pay award rather than leave schools to do it. It also wants all teachers treated fairly, which the pay award fails to do. I hope that they will hear something better from the Government in future.

I simply plead again with the Chancellor to do the right thing by Stockton: help us to tackle the health inequalities that we have; help us to deliver the public

health programmes that help to educate people about the choices that they have in life; and please find a way to build us a new hospital.

4.52 pm

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in favour of this Budget, which continues the important work that was begun in 2010. A lot has been achieved. We have record employment, with 3.3 million more jobs and 1,000 more people in work every single day. I am particularly proud that we have halved youth unemployment, meaning that more young people can get a good start in life. I meet them all the time in Harborough, and it is a huge pleasure.

Incomes are now rising the fastest that they have in a decade—most rapidly at the bottom end of the labour market—and the national living wage has already increased the wages of people on it by £2,750 a year. That will go up to about £5,000 a year, and combined with increases in the personal allowance, that has raised the income of someone working full time on the national living wage by 44% since 2010 alone. That is one reason why inequality is now lower than at any time under Labour.

The deficit is also down by nine tenths and debt is falling as a share of the economy—in fact, debt as a proportion of GDP is now forecast to go down by a whopping 11 percentage points. The corner has definitely been turned. In the Budget, the Chancellor has helped small businesses in my constituency. He has helped with the cost of living. He not only has debt falling but has a lot of headroom to respond to the needs of our public services. I will come back to that point in a moment, but first, let me note some of the progress we have seen in our public services in recent years, starting with schools.

The proportion of pupils in good or outstanding schools has gone up from 66% to 86% since 2010, which is a huge improvement. Thanks to the national fair funding formula, we are addressing the historical unfairness that has seen places such as Leicestershire do badly. As a result, funding in my constituency over the next two years will go up twice as fast as the national average—and, through things such as the sugar tax and the condition improvement fund, we have seen big improvements such as the new school hall in South Kilworth.

We have also seen many improvements in our schools that are not to do with just spending more money. We have ended the right of appeal against exclusions so that we protect teachers and other pupils against disruption and violence; we have introduced year one phonics screening to nip problems in the bud; we have ended grade inflation and restored rigour; we have stopped Ofsted being so overbearing, which many teachers will welcome; and we have enabled innovations such as the brilliant free schools, which are now the highest-performing type of school in our system.

The improvements go beyond schools and into further education. FE colleges in my constituency can now teach the new T-levels, a new, more rigorous qualification with 25% more funding per student and 50% more hours taught and worked.

Emma Hardy: Would these be the same T-levels that the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills said she would not allow her own children to sit?

Neil O'Brien: The new T-levels will fix a problem that has been known about for 100 years and give us a more technical system that will be more like the German one and will be the envy of the world.

I welcome the £20 billion for the NHS—a staggering £400 million extra a week—and the fact that we have a vigorous new Health Secretary who is bringing new technology into the NHS in order that it will no longer be the place with the most fax machines and pagers in the world. If you really love something, you want it to be the best it can be and you make it the best it can be.

I welcome the fact that crime is down since 2010 and that we protected police spending in real terms in the 2015 spending review, and I welcome the £200 million a year extra in the Budget to counter serious youth violence and the money for counter-terrorism, but I hope that those are a down payment on a strong settlement for law and order in the spending review. I have been unhappy with the lenient sentences people have received in recent cases, such as the motorcyclist who repeatedly kicked a police officer in the head but was spared jail—that was a mistake; an unprovoked assault and wounding in Market Harborough that did not lead to imprisonment. Assaults on prison officers in HMP Gartree were not even prosecuted. We should be jailing more people for longer, and if we need to find additional resource to do it, it will be money well spent.

In the battle to get our terrible deficit under control, a corner has been turned. In the 2010 spending review, annual average real growth in departmental spending was minus 3%; in 2015, it was minus 1.3%; and from next year, it will be plus 1.2%—a clear difference in direction. Some people now argue that, if we exclude everything that is going up, such as health, defence and aid, other things are going down. I have two things to say about that. First, yes, absolutely the NHS has been prioritised—because it is the people's priority. Secondly, the Chancellor has sensibly left himself some headroom. With national debt as a percentage of GDP now forecast to fall by 11 percentage points over the forecast period, compared to 7.5 percentage points before, we now have some headroom.

Only through a thorough spending review can we find out how much money we need on top of more efficiency. Once that review is complete, if the Chancellor feels he needs to use some of that headroom to invest in strong public services, he will have my full support, but while such a balanced approach has my support, the country is in no position to go on a massive spending spree. To use a diet metaphor, we have been through a difficult diet to stop the country having a heart attack and we have got the weight off, and some people say that we should get back on the burgers and the cream buns. No, we need to stay fit for the long haul and have a strong economy. That is what we will do.

Now that the partisan part of this debate is over and the real cognoscenti are here, let me finish with a couple of points we do not talk about enough in these debates. Labour sometimes says that this is an ideological choice and that we did not need to reduce spending. Why then did Labour's last Budget propose to reduce total managed expenditure from 48% of GDP to 42% of GDP? We in practice reduced it to 41% of GDP, but the idea that the difference between 42% and 41% is the difference between a massive ideological crusade and sensible socialist cuts

is ridiculous. We should be clear in the House that the differences are not so great as they are sometimes made out.

Secondly, we must be careful about promising people a huge spending splurge. We are an ageing society, and the OBR's fiscal sustainability report forecasts that, in the absence of no policy changes, debt-to-GDP will start to rise because we are all living longer and using the NHS more, and that this will take debt to more than 250% of GDP in the second half of the century. Let us not promise people things we cannot deliver.

Thirdly, let us not be complacent about managing our debt. Sometimes people say, "Oh well, after the second world war we had huge debts that were 250% of GDP and that was fine." I say to them that we used to have 25% inflation in this country, which cut through our debts pretty quickly, we did not have index-linked debt and we did not have an independent central bank. We must recognise in this House that if we run up big debts, it will be much more difficult than it ever was before to get them down. We must have a prudent approach.

To conclude, if Members on either side of the House say that we should use some of the headroom that we have earned to invest in strong public services, I agree with them. However, if Members want to pretend that there was an easy alternative to what has been done over the past eight years, that is just not the case. If they want to pretend that we can use magic money tree-ism to fund everything we want and not worry about the deficit ever again, that is just not true. The most sensible Opposition Members know that, and if the Opposition ever find themselves in government they will experience it. I plead for an honest debate in this House. We have to have a balanced approach and we must not promise people things that simply cannot be delivered.

5 pm

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Austerity has been inflicted on the UK for the past eight years. Austerity was, and still is, an ideological and political choice. The absolute truth that we cannot get away from is that true austerity would not have allowed for further tax cuts for the wealthy, while the rest of us bear the burden. We do not hear a lot about those tax cuts from Government Members.

The Government were lying to us when they said that austerity was a necessity, and they are lying to us now when they say that it is over. Tax cuts costing £2.8 billion will benefit high-income households at the same time as we see a cash freeze on working-age benefits. The idea that this Government are strong and stable on the economy is ridiculous. The economy they have presided over for eight years is one of low investment, low growth and low pay. After eight years, economic productivity is on its knees, local government is at breaking point and the cuts are not forecast to end any time soon. Calling this Budget the end of austerity is a mockery of those who have taken the brunt of the cuts over the past eight years.

I am very concerned that no extra funding has been provided for regular policing, because the cuts to policing budgets have hit Lincolnshire hard. I am also worried that three quarters of the £12 billion of welfare cuts announced after the 2015 election remain in place. It is not tinkering around the edges of income thresholds

that will address the callous and chaotic roll-out of universal credit in my constituency of Lincoln. Proper funding and a route out of poverty are needed. I hope that the links between poverty and ill health need no explanation. It is a national disgrace that, thanks to this Budget, food banks will remain a feature of our society.

Under this Government, the NHS has experienced the slowest spending growth in its history. After eight years in which NHS budget increases have averaged just 1.4%, the Government's 3.4% increase is, to quote the Health Foundation, "simply not enough". This Budget will barely keep our NHS afloat, let alone reverse eight years of neglect. As a nurse, I saw at first hand the appalling damage the Government have done to our health services. I get fed up with hearing people say how good our health workers are and, "Let's give them a pat on the back." Actually, let's pay them properly, because they cannot spend a patronising pat on the back; they cannot pay their rent with it or buy food with it.

An estimated 4.3 million people are on NHS waiting lists and last year 2.5 million people waited four hours or longer in A&E. With 41,000 nursing vacancies in the NHS in England and more nurses leaving the profession than joining it—some of them are my friends—the Government must reinstate nursing bursaries to reverse the 32% drop in applications since they were scrapped in 2016. I support nursing apprenticeships, but they are not delivering the numbers. We have to reinstate bursaries if we want the numbers. It is all right saying that we will fund however many places, but we have to train those nurses and we have to give them the money to be able to afford to train. I know; I have been there. I remind the House how expensive the current reliance on agency nurses is. That expense is coming out of the public purse. It just makes no sense not to have bursaries and trained nurses.

The insufficient funding increase for the NHS is further undermined by the Government's disregard for public health services. Public health budgets have decreased by 5.2% since 2014. Those cuts have consequences for our local communities; 85% of councils are planning to reduce their public health budgets this financial year.

The Government have been similarly short-sighted in slashing funding for social care, which has been cut by an estimated £7 billion since the Tories came to power. While the Chancellor allocated an increase to social care grants, that will not close the social care funding gap, which could be over £2 billion by 2020. Age UK estimates that 1.4 million older people do not have access to the care and support they need.

In conclusion, I welcome the Government's commitment to increase mental health funding by £2 billion, but the Institute for Public Policy Research estimates that double this amount is needed to achieve true parity of esteem between mental and physical health. That sum is meaningless; it is simply not enough. With one in four of us experiencing a mental health problem each year, there is no excuse for the Government's half-hearted approach. The Government's cuts to mental health, social care and public health also drive demand for NHS use, creating a bleak cycle in which underfunding places further strain on staff and service delivery. I know that; I have been there first hand.

This Budget shows that austerity is part of the Conservatives' political ideology and make-up; it is central to their small state, low public investment approach

to managing the economy. We should not expect anything other than austerity while we have this Government. To truly end austerity, we need a general election and a Labour Government, and we on this side of the House say, "Bring it on."

5.6 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is, of course, a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), but unlike her, I choose to welcome the Budget, which will deliver genuine benefits to my constituents in Redditch.

First, I welcome the overall framework of this Budget—the fact that the money being spent for my constituents comes from growth in the economy. It comes from jobs and lower taxes, which means that my constituents will have more money in their pockets.

I am glad to see the shadow Chancellor back in his place. He referred to leafy Surrey, and we are very proud of our leaves in Redditch, but I doubt that that was what he had in mind. This is a Budget for middle England. My constituents come from all walks of life, and we cannot get much more middle England than somewhere like Redditch. We welcome the £20.5 billion to be spent on health up to 2023-24, a massive increase of 3.4% every year.

Members will know that I have spoken often about the acute trust that services my constituents—or rather, that lets them down on a regular basis, unfortunately. This matter is dear to my heart because the trust is one of the worst performing in the country. As the local MP, I inherited a flawed process that involved the removal of services from our local hospital, the Alex, before the trust as a whole was ready to take them on. We are coming to the end of that painful process and seeing more money being put into our local trust, with £16 million already delivered to it, but I want that trust to hurry up and get itself out of special measures. I consistently advocate that and lobby for it. I am meeting the trust and urging it to submit its business case so that it can give my constituents the good services they need and deserve.

To sound a note of positivity, there is capital investment in that hospital and a new urgent centre for the Alex. These steps are to be welcomed, but there is more to do, so I welcome the fact that money is coming into our NHS more generally.

I want to pick up in particular on the fact that we are focusing on technological investments in the NHS more widely. I would like the Health Secretary to come to Worcester and Redditch to see what we are doing there with the innovative bed capacity app. That is helping the flow-through of patients, which will of course help more patients to be seen more quickly at the front door.

The Government have made up to £10 billion more available for social care in the three years up to 2019-20. There are lots of pressures in Worcestershire in adult and children's social care. There is rising demand in children's social care. I note that local authorities are able to make bids for a fund, and I would like Worcestershire to be able to do so, as it has rising need and demand.

As the daughter of a dementia sufferer, adult social care is close to my heart, and I have seen how much pressure there is on that service. The number of people over the age of 85 needing 24-hour care in England is

[Rachel Maclean]

projected to almost double to 446,000 by 2035, so I welcome the fact that there will be a long-term solution in place following the Green Paper on health and social care.

Many colleagues have touched on mental health, and I am going to touch on one specific aspect, about which I have already spoken in the Chamber: the menopause. We had a fantastic debate on that subject not long ago in this very place, and it was a real pleasure to be supported by colleagues from all across the House. I pay particular tribute my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), who responded to the debate for the Government. In fact, two male MPs spoke, and they put a real focus on the issue of mental health at the time of the menopause. That focus is really welcomed by women up and down the country.

I would like to make a plea for some of the additional mental health funding to be used for issues relating to the menopause, because that is a time when women battle with mental health issues. Surely if two men in this Chamber can talk about the menopause, businesses and other organisations up and down the country can do so as well. I want to put on record my thanks to my male colleagues from all parties who have pledged to support me further on this so that we can stop the stigma of the menopause and stop it being a taboo subject. We need to raise awareness, because this affects people's mums, wives and partners, and the women they work with. It is good that we are raising awareness around this critical issue.

There were a number of welcome announcements in the Budget, and I want to focus on the air ambulance service. I have been privileged to meet a wonderful woman called Jenny Ashman, who is a volunteer from Inkberrow in my constituency. She is known locally as "Jenny from the chopper", because she has raised nearly £2 million for the midlands air ambulance services, and I am sure that she will be jumping for joy at the announcement of £10 million for the air ambulance services up and down the country.

There is a lot to welcome in this Budget, but as time is short, I shall finish by saying that the Budget speaks to the aspirations of middle England. It is a practical Budget that puts more money back into the pockets of my constituents in Redditch. We are seeing tax cuts for 30 million people, which will mean that they have more money to spend. That will put money back into the economy.

I have been dismayed to hear the negativity coming from the other side of the House. The Opposition have no answers to the problems facing our country. We remember the legacy that was left by their Government when they crashed the economy, and the note from their Treasury Minister that there was no money left. That was the legacy that we inherited, yet all they have come up with in the intervening time is a plan that would cost every man, woman and child in this country £3,500. They would load £1 trillion of debt on to our hard-working citizens, and they are still blind to the misery that they inflicted on my constituents. Their comments are outdated and patronising. People should come to Redditch. They would see that, although my constituents are not rich, they are rich in spirit. They come from all walks of life, and they will welcome this Budget.

5.13 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I should like to highlight some of the facts and figures that the Chancellor missed yesterday before I move on to discuss some of the taxation and public spending measures. First, a record 8 million working people are now living in poverty. There are also 4 million children living in poverty, two thirds of whom are in working families. That number is going in the wrong direction. There are also 4 million sick and disabled people living in poverty—twice the number of non-disabled people. Our life expectancy is flatlining, and for women it is actually going backwards, but what do this Government do? They increase the state pension age. We also know that infant mortality has increased for the first time in 100 years, and that four in 1,000 babies will not reach their first birthday, compared with 2.8 per 1,000 in Europe.

Many epidemiologists have linked this reversal of the generations of health improvement with the austerity that this Government have wrought on the country as a whole and on people on the lowest incomes in particular. Resolution Foundation analysis published today and yesterday's Budget book show that people on the lowest incomes will be hit disproportionately hard. The Government have not reduced inequalities. Have Ministers assessed the Budget's impact on life expectancy? Will it continue to flatline, will it get worse or will it increase? I doubt they are able to say it is on the road to recovery.

On tax, I am pleased that small businesses, particularly those on the high street, will have their business rates reduced—that has been a particular issue for a number of my constituents—but what will that mean for councils' revenue, and how will they be recompensed? My council has lost nearly half its budget from central Government. The digital services tax sounds great, but the OBR says it will affect around 30 tech giants, which will pay about £15 million each. How will that address the fundamental issue that, for example, in 2016, Google paid £36.4 million in corporation tax on declared UK sales of £1 billion, whereas according to its US accounts those sales were £6 billion?

On public spending, the Chancellor confirmed that the NHS would be given much-needed cash. That is welcome, but a range of think-tanks, from the King's Fund to the Nuffield Trust, say it actually needs £30 billion by 2020. Again, the additional £2 billion for mental health crisis is welcome, but what about emphasising prevention? What about assessing the Government's own policies on sanctions, work capability assessments and the personal independence payment process, which make the mental health of many claimants worse?

The £1 billion for social care is important, but it does not address the £2.5 billion funding gap since 2010 and does not help the 1.2 million people who need care but cannot get it. I worry that after the publication of the social care Green Paper, which is being consulted on, a new funding regime involving a social care insurance scheme will be announced. That would have disastrous implications for the NHS, as we see closer integration between the NHS and social care.

I could go on about the derisory figures for education and the fact that my local police force and our emergency services will receive nothing substantial, but I want to talk about homelessness, which is rising but was not mentioned in the Budget. We see rough sleepers on our

streets in towns and cities up and down the country, but we hear nothing about the families who live in temporary accommodation or people who sofa-surf, as they are not deemed as having priority need for housing. That is the Government's biggest shame. It epitomises their neglect of too many citizens and reflects not just their failure to ensure that enough houses are built for us all, with social and affordable homes as part of the mix, but their ill-thought-out social security policies, such as universal credit.

Universal credit has been a disaster from start to finish, and it has now been revealed to be driving homelessness. One shelter says UC is the reason why a third of its residents are in it. UC tenants of the housing association First Choice Homes in Oldham are in more than £2.5 million of rent arrears. Research suggests that nearly one in five people in Oldham struggles to pay a social rent. UC is part of that problem. Policy in Practice estimates that the changes to UC announced in the Budget will not have a significant effect. It says 345,000 more households will still be worse off and 29,000 will be no better off. Disabled people will still be worse off. People in employment will see some improvements, but self-employed people will see none at all.

Karin Smyth: My hon. Friend is a well-known expert in this area, which she has spoken up about many times. Does she agree that the Government's inability to look at people in the round—particularly at their mental ill health, their disability, their poverty and their lack of access to work—drives some of the problems she highlights, including those with universal credit?

Debbie Abrahams: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. The human misery caused by such an inhumane policy cannot be underestimated.

L contacted my office recently after her UC was suddenly stopped because her son, B, has severe learning difficulties and L, who is the main carer, did not realise that he would have to make a separate claim once he had reached his 19th birthday. When the money stopped, L had nothing—she did not know why it had stopped and nobody contacted her. It was an absolute disaster for her, and she said:

“At times I just want to end it all...it's just so hard and I get no support or respite.”

L is a candidate for the new mental health crisis fund that the Government have set out—a product of their universal credit policy. On top of this, the investment in UC does not offset other cuts to social security, with welfare spending set to fall in the next couple of years.

Most worrying are the cuts affecting disabled people, which have not been addressed in the Budget. In fact, according to the OBR, disabled people will be worse off. As the United Nations said last year, this Government are presiding over a “human catastrophe”. The Equality and Human Rights Commission estimates that families with a disabled adult and a disabled child will have lost 13% of their income—£5,500 a year—by 2022. This is on top of colossal cuts across other Departments. What about their help from the Chancellor? What about their bright future?

We have done a lot—the former Labour Government did a huge amount to improve life expectancy, and to lift disabled people and children out of poverty—but we need to do more. The inequalities in our society are

getting worse, not better. These inequalities are socially reproduced, so they can be changed, and that should give us all hope. But political will is needed to tackle them, and I am afraid that this Government just do not have it in them.

5.21 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): May I start by apologising for being absent for much of this debate because I was chairing the Health and Social Care Committee? I also declare a personal interest, as three members of my immediate family are employed as NHS doctors.

We need to take a whole-system approach to health—to think of it not just as the NHS, but as a system including social care, public health, the prevention arm and training budgets. I return to a point that I made in an intervention: I wholly welcome the uplift in the NHS budget, but the increase in the NHS England budget that will take place between 2018-19 and 2019-20 is £7.2 billion, whereas the uplift in the wider health budget in the Red Book is only £6.3 billion. It concerns me that this might indicate that some of the uplift in the NHS England budget will come by way of being taken out of other aspects of the health budget, particularly the Public Health England budget, as we have seen in previous years. I hope that the Minister will touch on that in his response.

Jonathan Ashworth: I think that the hon. Lady may have left the debate to attend her Committee when I re-emphasised her point directly to the Secretary of State, who told us that we would have to wait for the spending review. Would she share my disappointment if the Government tried to pull the same trick that they pulled three years ago, and actually misled us or gave us bogus figures for NHS spending that did not include public health expenditure, capital and training?

Dr Wollaston: We need absolute transparency around health spending, and to take not only a whole-system approach but a long-term view.

Public health is the prevention arm of the system, and taking money out of public health has a serious impact on future spending and our ability to tackle health inequalities. It would be very troubling indeed if much of this uplift came directly from a public health cut. We need to be specific about that, and it is not sufficient to wait for the spending review to clarify that point; I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us further about what it means. People need to plan for the future, so if £900 million is going to be taken out of public health grants, we need to know that now.

When we ask the public which parts of the system they prioritise, public health tends to be at the bottom of the list. It is up to the Government to look at the evidence, and they must be clear that the evidence shows that we must focus unrelentingly on the prevention arm of healthcare. That is the right thing to do, and it is where we have the greatest chance of tackling the burning injustices of health inequality, so it is an important point to address.

The other aspect I want to touch on is social care. The Health and Social Care Committee has just had a sitting with the Care Quality Commission on its excellent “State of Care” report. The report comments on “fragility,”

[Dr Wollaston]

and the report of a couple of years ago talked about “a tipping point.” The CQC told us that that tipping point has been passed for many people in social care. The interaction between social care and the health service is so close that, if we do not focus on social care, we are simply tipping more costs on to the health service.

Of course it is welcome that there will be an in-year increase for adult social care of £240 million this year and £650 million next year, but it is widely recognised that, because of the extraordinary increase in demand and pressure—driven not just by the welcome fact that we are living longer but by the great increase in the number of people with multiple long-term conditions living to an older age and by younger, working-age adults living with multiple complex needs—social care needs more than £1 billion a year just to stand still, so we need to go further.

I recognise that much of this will come alongside next year’s social care Green Paper, which we are all looking forward to, but the system is under considerable challenge. I hope the Minister will recognise in his closing remarks that we are not there yet on social care. He needs to say what we are going to do in the long term to address our social care needs. As I have said before, we will require an approach that involves the Labour Front Benchers, too. We need to see political consensus, otherwise the politically difficult decisions on funding will not get through the House.

If there are to be cuts to public health, the Government will have an even greater responsibility to provide other levers in their public health policy to reduce demand in the system. The Chancellor specifically referred to wanting to reduce the tragedy of lives lost to suicide. Unfortunately, at the same time, the delay in the reduction of the maximum stake for fixed odds betting terminals means that we have passed up on an important opportunity to address the misery of gambling addiction. That is a hugely wasted opportunity. Likewise, there is a missed opportunity to look at what has happened in Scotland on minimum unit pricing to make sure we are addressing some of the key drivers of public health problems. The Government cannot duck that if we are to see cuts to the public health grant.

Finally, there is the impact of Brexit. The Chancellor has said that there will be £4.2 billion for preparations for a no-deal Brexit. I am afraid that the costs will be far higher. The Health and Social Care Committee recently heard from the pharmaceutical industry that it is having to plough hundreds of millions of pounds into preparing for no deal. That is phenomenal and inexcusable waste; it is money down the drain. I hope the Government will rethink their policy, because no version of Brexit will provide more money for the NHS. There is a Brexit penalty, not a Brexit dividend, and I hope both Front-Bench teams will come together and agree that, ultimately, we need the informed consent of the British people for whatever version of Brexit we come up with, with the option to remain and properly use the money instead for tackling austerity and improving the lives and the health of our nation.

5.29 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who made a characteristically thought-provoking speech.

This year’s Budget, like last year’s, comes after my annual community consultation, where I use the three weeks of the conference recess to talk to people across the constituency. Last year, the view I shared with the House was:

“Like towns and cities across the country, Sheffield is at a tipping point.”—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2017; Vol. 632, c. 123.]

It was at a tipping point because of the collapse in the social fabric and in the ability of services to deal with the problems people were facing. So where are we 12 months on? In more than 60 hours of discussion at more than 40 events in this year’s consultation, all I found was greater concern and the feeling that we are closer to that tipping point. There was greater fear of the rise in violent crime and antisocial behaviour. We have some really impressive and committed police officers leading the fight against knife crime in Sheffield, supported by some great community groups, but we need to recognise the perfect storm that has been created by a combination of Government policies. Eight years of deep cuts to local services have decimated youth provision, led to rising school exclusions and seen falling police numbers—we have lost about a third of our police staff across South Yorkshire.

From the National Audit Office to the Police Federation, and to the Home Secretary himself, everyone agrees that police forces are underfunded. So when the Prime Minister promised the end of austerity, we might have anticipated that things would change in the Budget, but they did not change—not a bit. There was not a penny more for core police funding, nor were there any funds to rebuild youth services.

Nor was there an adequate response to the crisis in mental health, which was another significant issue raised right across my constituency. People told me of their difficulties in accessing services and of treatment waiting times that are simply too long. Young people in particular told me that they were waiting more than six months from referral to their first appointment with child and adolescent mental health services. So although I welcome the extra funding for mental health, we must recognise that it is simply mental health crisis provision, as the Chancellor described it. Of course, such provision needs to be properly funded, because we have a crisis in mental health, particularly for our young people. They want to know why they need to get to crisis point in their mental health before the system responds. A mental health crisis hotline is no substitute for proper face-to-face support. And what has happened to parity of esteem between mental and physical health? The £2 billion going to mental health is just 10% of the funding allocated to the NHS overall, so there is no parity of esteem there—in fact, we are moving further in the wrong direction, and that is a missed opportunity.

The Chancellor missed another opportunity to do the right thing by pushing back the start of the £2 maximum stake for fixed odds betting terminals to October 2019. That delay means that people will die—people like my constituent, Jack Ritchie, who took his own life aged just 24, having been, in the words of his mum Liz, “groomed by gambling companies”. Jack began gambling while at secondary school, playing on fixed odds betting machines at the nearby bookies. We all know, and the Government have admitted, that these machines are the “crack cocaine of gambling”, with players winning or losing up to £100 every 20 seconds. So what is the Chancellor’s answer for Jack’s grieving family, whose

charity Gambling with Lives is to be launched here in Westminster in a couple of weeks? What is the explanation for the decision to push back the introduction of the lower stake? The Budget has no answer for Jack's family, who are to be hugely commended for their work to try to prevent other young people from getting to crisis point. It has no answer for the young people who tell me that they have to get to crisis point before their mental health problems will even begin to be addressed, and it has no answer for my constituents who increasingly fear the violent crime and antisocial behaviour that corrodes our communities.

This is a cruel Budget, not only because of the lie that it marks an end to austerity, but because it fails the strivers and grafters of whom the Chancellor spoke, giving priority to higher earners. His tax adjustments reduce tax for basic rate payers by £130, but we MPs, like other high earners, will gain £860 a year. It is part of a pattern, as the Resolution Foundation has pointed out. In total, the tax and benefit changes since 2015 have given the richest fifth of households an extra £390 a year, while the poorest fifth have not simply gained less, but have lost £400 a year. Failing to end austerity and failing on social justice, this Budget fails our country.

5.36 pm

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) in this important debate.

It is important that we pay attention to the fact that the Prime Minister announced the end of austerity, yet yesterday it was announced that austerity is "coming to an end". Which is it and when will this be? Austerity was a political choice, not an economic necessity. How will the Government alleviate and redress the devastating impact of austerity? Austerity has not tackled the deficit; rather, the onus of who pays has been shifted to teachers, police and nurses. After eight years of this Government's hard austerity, too many people are suffering and too many vital public services are in crisis.

Yesterday, we heard not a penny announced for the day-to-day costs of schools, even though school funding has been cut by 8%; not a penny for regular policing, even though 21,000 officers have been cut and violent crime is on the rise; and not a penny for local councils to close the funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025—and they are facing cuts of £1.3 billion next year, too. The Government are not fixing the fundamentals. Must it always take a tragedy to effect meaningful change?

Take a look at our fire service: rather than fighting fires, it is having to fight for funding. It is beneath contempt not to pay those who work in our fire service properly. Indeed, real wages are lower today than they were in 2010, while CEOs are paid 143 times the wage of the average worker.

The late Audrey Hepburn once said: "As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands: one for helping yourself, the other for helping others." When will the Government stop and realise that? Rather than help, the Government have shown again through the Budget that they know the price of everything, yet the value of nothing. Once again, they are saying, "Your price is way too high; you need to cut it, cut it, cut it, cut it." It is like the emperor's new clothes: the emperor seeks to describe an elegant, flamboyant gown that he is wearing, but he is actually completely naked.

This Budget does not mark the end of austerity. The NHS has experienced the slowest spending growth in its history. When the Government created the Budget, clearly ignoring the issues caused by their austerity, it seems they had 99 problems but did not consider the state of the NHS to be one if they believed that £20.5 billion was sufficient to repair the damage caused by eight years of under-investment.

According to the Health Foundation, the £20.5 billion promised is simply not enough. The £2 billion that has been announced for mental health is welcome, but it is half what is needed, and let me be clear: this is not new money and these are not new resources. These financial gimmicks fool no one. The Health Secretary has said that it would take a generation to establish parity of esteem under this Government. However, people with severe mental health conditions cannot afford to wait five years for meaningful action from this Government. Too many people, including children, are already waiting months to access the treatment that they need, leading to a devastating mental health crisis.

In my constituency, there has been a real-terms cut of 10.6% in adult social care, almost double the national average, and the Government consider their announcement of £650 million for long-term adult social care services an accomplishment when it is less than half what the King's Fund estimates is required to meet demand. Nearly 1.5 million elderly people are not getting the care that they need—an increase of 20% in just two years. The sum of £84 million over the next five years to expand children's social care programmes is pitiful compared with the £3 billion needed by 2025. Services are overstretched, and the recent trends in the level of funding are unsustainable and unacceptable. The needs of Peterborough—my constituency—have been attended to on the cheap for far too long. As a consequence, cracks are beginning to appear in our services. Our needs have not been properly or adequately assessed, or indeed addressed, and the current settlement is blatantly below par.

Dr Caroline Johnson: Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the biggest challenges facing Peterborough hospital, which serves her constituency and in which I work, is the financial burden of the PFI that was used to build the hospital? It is a beautiful hospital, but so much money was spent on it that we are burdened with this PFI. It was a Labour Government who did that and we are now having to pay for it.

Fiona Onasanya: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. Yes, I know that very well about the PFI, which is why Labour is seeking to end PFIs. *[Interruption.]* Before she says that we signed it, I would like to talk about now and the fact that PFIs actually came in under John Major. Talking about now, Government are pursuing efficiency to the point of ineffectiveness. I end on this poignant note: investment now is lower in relation to GDP and we are ranked 22nd in the world. The time for warm words is over. Austerity has dire consequences and a little extra just will not cut it.

5.42 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Writing earlier this week in the Welsh edition of *The Sunday Times*, I labelled yesterday's fiscal event a "fantasy Budget". That is because, of course, it did not mention the big elephant in the room, which is Brexit.

[Jonathan Edwards]

If the withdrawal agreement does not make it through the House of Commons—that is working on the assumption that there will be a withdrawal agreement between the British state and the European Union—the Chancellor will be back here in a matter of months with an emergency Budget. I hope that, in such a scenario, more sensible minds might prevail with a policy put forward based on extending article 50 coupled with a people's vote at the end of it with remain as an option.

As always, the most interesting part of the Budget came with the accompanying OBR report. Its projections are based on the most optimistic Brexit scenario envisaged by the British Government, and, basically, it envisages no change in its growth forecasts. Indeed, page 9 of the OBR report shows the UK's projected economic growth at the bottom of the advanced economies of the world. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, in its green budget, emphasised the decoupling that we have seen between the British economy and the other advanced economies of the world since the 2016 referendum. Growth is now at around half of pre-recession levels, and that is as a result of eight years of austerity, which has permanently sucked out demand from the economy, and now the Chancellor faces Brexit, all of which lead to anaemic levels of business investment.

The British Government are trying desperately to pivot away from their austerity narrative. They know now, in the new climate, that that is a political vote loser. However, yesterday's spending commitments fell far short. The IFS puts the price of ending austerity at £19 billion per annum by 2022-23, and the Resolution Foundation puts it at about £30 billion. Yesterday's spending commitments did not match those sorts of sums. Once extra spending on the national health service in England is stripped out, most other Departments faced a flatlining budget, if lucky, or real-terms cuts. We will have to wait for next year's comprehensive spending review to have a full picture. I look forward to that fiscal event next year. Public expenditure as a percentage of GDP is now basically at the levels seen at the end of the Thatcher years—about 38%. Austerity has enabled the British Government to achieve their objective of remodelling the state but at a huge cost to public services and support for the most vulnerable in society. Far from ending austerity, austerity is now entrenched in the UK taxation and spending model.

Turning to Wales, the vast majority of spending decisions were England-only, highlighting the fact that the major fiscal event for my country is the Welsh Government's budget. A huge amount of work needs to be done by politicians in Wales and by the Welsh media to promote that event to its rightful status. The BBC proclaimed a half a billion pound bonanza for my country, neglecting the fact that these were Barnett consequentials resulting from spending in England. A magic-money cash giveaway, as portrayed, it most certainly was not. The key point of interest is the remaining inherent unfairness in the Barnett formula as it applies to Wales. The Welsh Government responded by saying that the vast majority of the £500 million was old money previously published following the enhanced funding announcement for the NHS in England over the summer. Funding per head in London, the richest part of the European Union by a country mile, is higher than it is in Wales. The geographical wealth inequalities

within the British state should shame Westminster, and there was little in the Budget that is going to lead to a meaningful rebalancing.

I was very disappointed that there was no announcement on the shared prosperity fund. The communities I represent form part of the West Wales and the Valleys European region. We receive £2 billion in convergence funding within the current EU multi-annual financial framework, which runs between 2014 and 2020. During the referendum, we were promised not a penny less. However, it looks increasingly likely that the communities I represent will be significant financial losers and that the British Government will take away powers from Wales over the use of shared prosperity fund money. I put the Treasury on notice that unless it honours the promises of the Brexiteers, it is walking into a political firestorm, and that political control of the powers over that money must reside in Wales.

The Budget highlighted the north Wales growth deal, with £120 million of funding, but neglected to mention that that accounts for only about 10% of the total funding. We saw a similar scenario with the Swansea Bay city deal, with only 10% of the funding coming from the Treasury. Therefore, 90% of the money associated with these growth deals comes from the Welsh public sector and the Welsh private sector.

It was interesting to see that there was no mention in the Budget of the Secretary of State for Wales's pet project, the western powerhouse. I can only presume that it has gone down in the Treasury as it has in Wales—not particularly well—and I was glad to see its omission yesterday.

We saw the announcement of the £900 million business rates cut. The Secretary of State for Wales immediately called on the Welsh Government to match that promise. I have to be honest—I was completely unaware that tax cuts by the British Government for England led to Barnett consequentials for Wales, but perhaps that shows my lack of understanding of how the Barnett formula works. I would be very grateful if the British Government outlined whether there is indeed some compensation money for English local authorities for the loss of revenues they face as a result of those business rate cuts, because that would then lead to Barnett consequentials that could be applied to Wales.

A major brewing political storm today is the enhanced borrowing powers that were included in the Budget—some £300 million. The British Government are trying to tie that to the M4 relief road. It would completely undermine devolution if those borrowing powers were constrained by being limited to what the British Government want the Welsh Government to spend the money on.

5.49 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards).

A little earlier, the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) accused Labour Members of being rather negative and sending out negative waves. Well, I have some positive waves, but they are radiotherapy waves, and some ideas. I am delighted that the Minister for Health, the hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Stephen Barclay), is on the Treasury Bench; I am sorry he could not join us for the debate earlier, because there were some really good suggestions as to how we can improve the service.

I was disappointed that, despite numerous debates and questions on the cancer strategy, the Chancellor did not mention any further funding for advanced radiotherapy. He said in the statement:

“we agreed that the NHS would produce a 10-year plan, setting out how the service will reform, how waste will be reduced, and exactly what the British people can expect to get”—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 656.]

I declare an interest, as a cancer survivor who was successfully treated with both chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I am also now a vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on radiotherapy.

I am not alone in having benefited from radiotherapy. About one in four people receive some form of radiotherapy during their lives, and almost half of us will be diagnosed with cancer in the UK at some point in our lifetime. Those stark facts will, I hope, remind the Government how important it is that we invest in modern and accessible cancer treatments. Delivering the recommendations set out in the cancer strategy is crucial to improving care and support for thousands of people affected by cancer. I like to participate in the knockabout and the political point scoring as much as anyone, as Members probably know, but I am not trying to make a party political point about the nature of this policy. I am simply trying to emphasise that it requires resources, a plan, a strategy and commitment.

I have regularly raised advanced radiotherapy and its benefits and have advocated further investment in research into it. Given the cost, investment and research should be evidence-based, but there are some very exciting areas. I went to see the new proton beam therapy machine at the Rutherford Cancer Centre in Northumberland, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). I saw the installation of a proton beam therapy bunker and the advanced equipment there, as well as stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy, or SABR; adaptive radiotherapy based on advanced imaging, which is a form of magnetic resonance imaging combined with a linear accelerator; combinations of radiotherapy and new drugs; biomarkers, so that radiotherapy can precisely target cancer cells; and molecular radiotherapy.

I also recently visited the Elekta facility in the constituency of the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), in the company of my fellow vice-chair of the APPG on radiotherapy, the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), and Professor Patricia Price from the Royal Marsden Hospital. We saw these machines being built and developed. This is very impressive technology and it is being developed here in the United Kingdom.

Not only does SABR treat cancers that conventional therapy cannot but the advanced nature of the treatment is such that patients need only be irradiated four or five times, rather than 20, as was the case with conventional radiotherapy. It is not only more effective, but it would save our cancer centres money. More importantly, it can dramatically reduce the number of times that patients are exposed to radiation while still destroying the cancerous tumours.

Although it is needed in over 50% of cases, access to radiotherapy in England is patchy, varying from 25% to 49% depending on the region, with the average being around 38%. Ideally, according to research by Cancer Research UK, patients should have to travel no more than 45 minutes to access this form of treatment, and

considerable investment is going to be needed to achieve that. Only 5% of the NHS cancer budget is currently spent on radiotherapy—5% of the cancer budget, not of the total NHS budget—which is £383 million. More investment is needed to increase access to modern radiotherapy because that will increase cancer survival.

I encourage all Members of the House and Ministers to read the “Manifesto for Radiotherapy”, which highlights the importance, and the important benefits, of increasing the percentage of spend on radiotherapy. Increasing it quite modestly—from 5% currently to 6.5% of the cancer budget—would secure a world-class radiotherapy service. Let us not forget that one of the justifications for the huge health and social care reforms put forward by the Government was the poor cancer survival rates. Currently, our cancer survival rates are the second worst in Europe, so there is a deal of work to do.

I suggest that investment in radiotherapy would not only enable treatment of large numbers of cancer patients, save lives and achieve better outcomes but bring positive economic benefits. I commend it to the Minister for Health and urge him to look at it as part of the cancer strategy.

5.56 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): An end to austerity cannot come soon enough. It is disappointing that the Chancellor chose yesterday just to kick the can down the road, and that he has committed only to starting to end austerity—maybe—in a spending review next year. Families and children in my constituency cannot wait until then; they have waited long enough.

The Chancellor says that this is a Budget for hard-working families. I take issue with that term because we should not judge people on such a basis. Many families cannot work because of their circumstances and feel stigmatised by the “strivers and skivers” narrative that the Government continue to use. However, universal credit means the disgraceful reality that many families are actually in work but still facing poverty. Cuts to universal credit mean that they will not be able to work themselves out of that poverty trap.

That situation is compounded by the Chancellor's pretently living wage, which leaves 16 and 17-year-olds facing an increasing age pay gap. In 2017, the gap between the pretently minimum wage and the rate for 16 and 17-year-olds was £3.45 and this year it was £3.63. Next year their rate will £3.86 less, but 16 and 17-year-olds still have the same bills to pay. They can be in the same job and doing the same task as somebody on the higher rate, but this Government do not value their labour, which is an absolute disgrace.

The reality is that the UK Government's cuts will see welfare spending in Scotland cut by 3.7 billion. The Scottish Government are trying really hard and making changes to make the system fairer in the limited way we can, but we are working with one hand tied behind our back.

My constituency voted for independence in 2014 and to stay in the EU in 2016. We did not vote for austerity, and we did not vote for the choices this Tory Government are inflicting on us. This Government are doing nothing to convince these voters that their vote in 2016 was wrong. Acknowledging that austerity should be over, but taking no action to end it is a disappointing move

[*Alison Thewliss*]

for even the most hardened of cynics, and the possibility of crashing out of the EU without a deal fair focuses the mind.

Economic policy is not just about adding pennies here and there on fuel and alcohol but about the building blocks of what we want our society to look like. Austerity embeds inequality—there is no safety net for people who find themselves on hard times, and people feel punished for being disabled—and this is no way to build a fairer society. The UK Government also fail to acknowledge that austerity is gendered and discriminatory at its very core. The Government should be looking at inclusive growth policies to increase wages and to engage women in the labour market, but they are not doing so.

Women are more likely to claim benefits. This is not because they are lazy or workshy, as the “strivers and skivers” narrative would have us believe, but because a societal expectation still exists that women will look after the children, the elderly and the sick. Even now, the majority of unpaid labour is almost always performed by women. When benefits are cut, it is frequently women who will go hungry to make sure their children are fed. Women also go into low-paid and part-time work to meet their caring obligations.

What did the Government do? They cut and they cut and they cut. We have seen huge cuts to breastfeeding support across England. I mention that because it leaves women with very little choice. If they want to breastfeed and do not get support for that, they are forced to buy infant formula, but infant formula has risen in price by 9.6% since the Brexit vote. With real-terms cuts to benefits, where are these women supposed to find the extra money? Healthy Start vouchers have also not kept pace with the increase. On top of that, if the baby happens to be the third child born into a family, that family will now be nearly £3,000 a year worse off because of the two-child cap on universal credit. Something so arbitrary as the order children are born in should not affect their chances in life.

A freeze on fuel duty does not help many working families or those with caring obligations who are still struggling to make ends meet. People on very low incomes often do not own cars—in Glasgow, 51% of households do not have access to a car. Nor are people on very low incomes likely to benefit from an increase in the personal allowance, because they do not earn enough. Two thirds of them are women. What is the Chancellor going to do to help those women?

Some 3,400 women in my constituency are affected by the increases to the state pension age. These women have a contract with the state, and the UK Government are not holding up their end of it. Some parts of my constituency still have a life expectancy that is below average. That is a legacy of previous Tory policies, which forced people into poor life choices. Most people affected by this pension policy will not even live long enough to get the full benefit of their state pension.

The impact of this policy is starting to show in the statistics. The recent annual survey of hours and earnings showed that the gender pay gap for over-60s had increased by nearly 3% in a year. WASPI women are having to postpone their well-deserved retirement and take up low-paid jobs just to keep their heads above water.

Austerity means difficult choices for the lowest earners in our society. People are at risk of getting into debt to feed their families, pay rent or buy Christmas presents for their kids during the five-week wait on universal credit. As I have said in this place before, somebody making a claim in Shettleston jobcentre when universal credit rolls out on 5 December will be without money until 9 January—a cold, lonely Christmas, with no money coming in. The response of the Chancellor and DWP Ministers is to say, “It’s okay. They can get a loan.” People in my constituency do not want more debt; they want fair wages and a high standard of living, and they do not want to be dragged down by this Government’s policies.

Funding for managed migration does not help the people who will be part of the roll-out on 5 December in Calton. These people will miss out if there are any managed migration funds. That is why universal credit must be paused now. I am begging Ministers to look at this, because I do not want children in my constituency going with nothing at Christmas.

Austerity will not be over until the benefit freeze is lifted, the two-child cap is abolished and there is a focus on policies that actually increase wages. Last week I called on the Chancellor to end the benefit freeze. The Tories have rightly received harsh scrutiny over universal credit, but the benefit freeze could be just as damaging to low-income families. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that, by 2020, it will cost families as much as £800 a year.

There is a huge disparity here. The Government have a choice between big businesses, tax cuts and low earners, and their priorities have been made perfectly clear in this Budget, which does nothing for so many people in this country and will put them further in poverty.

6.3 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (*Alison Thewliss*).

I had an amusing conversation with a Conservative MP the other day. He argued that I think he and his Conservative colleagues wake up each morning planning how to make people’s lives more difficult. Madam Deputy Speaker, you will be pleased to know that I reassured him that I do not actually think that. I actually believe that, at their core, people are fundamentally good. But I also believe that our actions and experiences are shaped by our experiences of the world: what we see, hear and feel informs our understanding and, therefore, what we believe to be right. That is the only generous explanation I can find for why the Chancellor has failed to give our public services, education and local government the sustained and substantially increased funding they desperately need. He has failed to listen and understand why it is needed. Surely if the Chancellor had seen the levels of poverty that I have seen in Hull, he would not be so quick to disregard our requests. My first ask for the Chancellor and the Minister is this: walk a mile in my constituents’ shoes, and see, feel and hear what they have to experience every single day. If I am right and people are, at their core, fundamentally good, surely the Minister and the Chancellor cannot ignore our call for greater investment and a change for our constituents.

Hull has a higher need than other places, yet has been disproportionately affected by austerity. One child in three lives in poverty in my constituency. My area has

more children than average with special educational needs and disabilities, yet the budget for Hull has been cut by a third compared with the national average of just over a quarter. Only one unitary authority has been hit harder than Hull. But those are just numbers, and numbers do not explain the very human cost and the very human stories. Here are just two of my more recent ones.

My constituent Steve is disabled with an advanced case of multiple sclerosis. His care bills rose from £50 to £86 a week because of the cuts. He could not afford to pay them and ended up being chased by East Riding of Yorkshire Council for the money he was unable to pay, which caused him extreme distress and upset.

Diane is 60. She has been affected by the changes to state pension rules for women. She was recently refused a benefits award because apparently she is not poor enough. She has been working for 42 years—since she was 16. She wrote me an email saying that she was a proud woman who did not want to be asking other people for help, but that she could not afford to buy new glasses because she did not have enough money.

Put simply, because of the cuts, people in our country are not getting the support that they need and the support they have worked their whole lives for and deserve. The consequences of austerity are being felt up and down the country. Public services are being stretched to breaking point. The tough choices we hear people speak about are easy to say here in this environment, while we are in our cosy lives going back to our warm beds. It seems that tough choices are only tough for the very poorest in society.

Public services are a good thing. Funding them is the right thing to do, because that gives everybody, or tries to give everybody, the same chances in life. My life has been shaped for the better because of the public services I have used: from the NHS who helped to deliver my children to the health visitor, Ann, who came to help me in those first weeks, which are terrifying as a new parent; and from my teachers in my local comprehensive who made me believe in myself and that I could do things to make the world a little better to the Sure Start centres that offered me so much support with my youngest. I could go on. My life experiences—what I see, hear and feel—have been made better by the public services around me. This is my truth, and it is why I stand here today demanding that those services are saved.

Public services are not like private care. They are not just about benefiting me; good public services benefit everybody. The Budget so deeply patronised and angered our parents, teachers and governors in mainstream schools with the promise of a “little extra”. Many schools are sending out begging letters to parents asking for funding for basic supplies. Done right, investment in public services can save money in the long run, for example by enabling children to stay at school and preventing off-roll exclusions through investment in pastoral care and family support.

I have significant and deep concerns about how our vulnerable children can be exploited. I fear for their future. Today, Barnardo's issued a statement saying that our excluded children are at risk of being groomed and exploited by criminal gangs. Those children might not have had to be excluded if the schools had the money for the pastoral care and support they needed, and if our social workers had the money for early intervention

and family support. There is no mystery to why the number of exclusions has increased along with austerity. As I tell my children, actions have consequences. In this case, the Government's inaction has a consequence.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission published a report that asked, “Is Britain Fairer?”, and I will quote from the executive summary. It said:

“Disabled people are...more likely to be in poverty... They...face poorer health and lack of access to suitable housing.”

It said that “Child poverty has increased” and that infant mortality has risen

“for the first time in decades.”

It said that tax and welfare reforms continue to have a “disproportionate impact on the poorest in society”

as well as on some ethnic minorities, women and disabled people, and that the reforms are “weakening the safety net” for

“those unable to work, or stuck in low-paid or precarious work.”

It said:

“Homelessness is also on the rise”.

In society, in government and in Parliament, we reap what we sow. There are huge consequences of pushing a policy that leaves people behind for not only the people themselves, but society more widely. Where austerity is being pushed the hardest—in cities such as Hull—the consequences will be even worse. It is time for the Chancellor to think again. The cost of austerity is simply too high.

6.10 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), who made an excellent speech.

We have had the usual smoke and mirrors about the real money that is going into the NHS through this Budget, but I think that everybody outside the Chamber agrees that it is not enough to meet the increase in demand that we all know about. Equally as concerning, however, is the fact that the percentage of the NHS budget that will be part of public spending over the forthcoming years will rise to roughly one third of overall spending. That says an awful lot about what we are not spending money on, as well as what we are spending.

Sometime soon, we will have the 10-year plan. The taxpayers, whom the Secretary of State was so concerned about earlier, will have absolutely no say in that plan, the priorities or how the resources are allocated. It is a completely missed opportunity to treat the public as grown-ups in the debate about health funding so that they are clear about the cost of health services, the extent of spending and the quality that money can buy, and understand what they are prepared to pay for.

Let me speak briefly about VAT. Page 50 of the Red Book refers to some tinkering around the edges of VAT, but the Government make no mention of closing the loophole that has been exploited by some NHS trusts. I visited a Treasury Minister recently to talk about wholly owned companies saving VAT. The Treasury seems unconcerned about the loss of income from VAT on wholly owned companies, and the Department of Health and Social Care seems totally unconcerned about the competing fragmentation of our services. It would be really good if both Departments had a chat with each other, decided what the policy should be and sorted it out.

[Karin Smyth]

I want to concentrate now on the Budget. Bristol is a city of high employment, and also a city with high rates of ill health and disability. The greatest inequalities are in my constituency, with people living on average for 19 years in ill health. The Marmot review on health inequalities estimated that between £36 billion and £40 billion are lost in taxes, welfare payments and costs to the NHS through health inequalities. This is a huge opportunity for us to do better.

I want to touch on universal credit and social care. Some 5,900 of my constituents currently claim employment and support allowance and the Government intend, at some point, to migrate them on to universal credit. In successfully claiming ESA, my constituents have been subject to the work capability assessment. Many have been initially refused, but then have successfully appealed that decision on one or more occasion. They will have proved to the Department for Work and Pensions that their long-term disability or ill health means that they cannot work and need financial support. There is still no recognition or understanding that these constituents will never work again. They do not need incentives or sanctions to work. The DWP agrees that they cannot work, but universal credit offers them no benefit, only a loss of income. Surely it is time to halt the migration of anyone currently claiming ESA and allow new claimants with an illness or disability to claim that benefit. We need a proper rethink about how we support those who most need our help.

The problem on social care is well documented. We know how many people are losing support, but it is still a silent misery for thousands of families, because until someone goes into the system, they do not understand how bad it is. The King's Fund said that public awareness of the system is very poor and that

"As long as the public view the issue from behind a veil of ignorance, it is easier for national politicians to trade on...rivals' proposals".

I do not want to trade on fear and misinformation; I want us to set a path for what we need. I would like the Budget to have helped, but it has not. The language needs to change. Spending on social care is not a drain, a time bomb, a burden or a threat to assets. It is an investment in people and in our future. Every business, every public service and every family is struggling to cope with social care, and investing in it is an infrastructure issue. It is essential to our prosperity.

The cycle of ill health, disability and poverty is well known, as is the problem of low productivity, and poor educational attainment does not help. Last month, one of my colleges came up with the Love Our Colleges campaign to talk about underfunding in further education and the need to bridge the skills gap. College funding has been cut by 30% since 2009 at the same time as costs have increased dramatically, including for pensions. At the same time, however, the number of adult courses has dropped by 62% and the number of health and social care courses by 68%. How can that be a priority when there is that level of disinvestment? This is a huge problem in Bristol South because we do not send youngsters to higher education—further education is the driver of prosperity for our people.

As I highlighted earlier, also not mentioned was the OECD report on early years education. There was nothing in the Budget about this, despite evidence that

early years education is a driver of prosperity. Nursery schools, which are under the control of local authorities, were forgotten even in the Chancellor's miserly throwaway comment. He has not given them anything. They do not even get the pittance he threw away in the Budget.

Finally, I want to say something about our police services. Some 75% of recorded incidents are currently non-crime and include missing persons reports and issues relating to people experiencing mental health crises, all of which are highly resource intensive. I am currently on the parliamentary police force scheme and spending a lot of time with our police force, so I have seen this at first hand. The police funding formula has not been updated for a decade and does not reflect current demand. The police and crime commissioner has been clear about this. In Avon and Somerset, we have a very good system for analysing demand and the associated resource needs, but we are still not getting the money, even though we have proved we need the resource.

In conclusion, the Government are ignoring all the data and evidence, and not linking up their policies in order to deliver the improved productivity that this country needs and which will drive prosperity for all our constituents.

6.16 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth). Yesterday, the Chancellor made his Budget speech and told us that the era of austerity was nearly over, that schools would be getting money for the "little extras" and that all would be rosy as he increased tax thresholds, but that it would all be off if there was a no-deal Brexit.

The Budget was telling for another reason, though: the areas that it did not mention. There was no mention of funding for policing. We have lost more than 21,000 police officers since 2010. The Home Affairs Committee, in its recent report, "Policing for the Future", said:

"Without additional funding for policing...there will be dire consequences for public safety, criminal justice, community cohesion and public confidence."

The report also told of recorded crime having risen by 32% in the past three years and of the number of charges and summons having decreased by 26%. Why are the Government not concerned about public safety and fighting crime?

There was also no mention of extra funding for local authorities. The Chancellor said that austerity was nearly over. Why, then, does my borough of Enfield, which has had to find £161 million of cuts since 2010, still need to find an extra £31 million? Local councils are embedded in their communities and perform many vital roles—they do not just fill in potholes. Why was there no extra money for youth services, social care and local authority CAMHS to meet the needs of children at school? We know what the Government think about local authorities. Rather than supporting councils, they let councils such as Northampton go bust. They should be ashamed of the way they are destroying local councils, which are at breaking point, and slashing their funding. It is death by a billion cuts.

On education, the Chancellor made mention of additional funding for schools to pay for the "little extras", as he described them. I wonder whether he has

spoken to any headteachers, staff, governors or parents. Many schools in my constituency are facing huge cuts in the hundreds of thousands of pounds to teaching assistants, support services for children, school trips and non-curriculum subjects. The Chancellor is delusional if he thinks that £10,000 for “little extras” will go any way towards stemming the tide of cuts to schools. Those cuts are real, and they are having a detrimental effect on children. I have nothing but respect for the headteachers, staff, governors and parents who are trying to keep things together for their schools. What an insult to provide more money for potholes than for schools—the Chancellor could not have been more patronising if he tried.

On universal credit, the £1.7 billion the Chancellor announced to fix the failing system is a fraction of what his predecessor took out of it. What would he say to a local resident I spoke to who is a single mother—not through her own choice—working part time, who will be £50 a week worse off as she migrates from tax credits to universal credit? Why is he not putting money in to make sure that no one is worse off under universal credit? Why are people who are being migrated to universal credit not being protected? The legacy of the Government’s austerity is the prevalence of food banks, homelessness and poverty across the country.

The Ministry of Justice has had its budget cut year on year. The cost of processing women in the criminal justice system is £1.7 billion a year. One of the most successful ways of stopping reoffending is to provide support in women’s centres, yet they have been cut and do not receive the funding they need, leaving many in a precarious situation. Women’s centres have been picking up the pieces from the failing privatised rehabilitation centres, which have been rewarded for their failure.

There is nothing in the Budget for legal aid, which means that people will not get the representation they need and that there will be more injustices. Having proper representation in criminal proceedings is becoming the preserve of the rich. The Government seem totally uninterested in support for the criminal justice system and content to allow injustices to continue.

The Chancellor may think that the era of austerity is over, but it is not over for schools, for councils, for people on universal credit, for the homeless, for those caught up in the criminal justice system or for victims of crime, and certainly not for those who are poor. This Budget is a façade; it does not stand up to scrutiny, and it could all be scrapped by Christmas.

6.22 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): After the Government have been taken to court and lost three times over air quality, and following the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stating that we have just 12 years to avert climate change catastrophe, I expected this Budget to deliver the investment we need in clean, green infrastructure for our lungs and our planet. In a quest to bring down costs, the Chancellor has not looked to capitalise on the opportunities that a modern, green economy would bring to the UK. Instead, he has focused on miserly cost-cutting measures. This is a Budget of abject complacency in the face of climate catastrophe. As usual, the Government’s obsession with low-cost public services and their lack of any serious investment have left our environment, the water we drink and the air we breathe off the agenda.

Not only are we on track to miss our air pollution targets, but the Government have lost three court cases and had their policy on air quality ruled unlawful. It has been left to local councils, which have been subject to extreme funding cuts, to deliver change in this area. Where is the commitment to clean air? Air quality affects our health and the health of our children and grandchildren. A recent study linked air pollution to more than 40,000 early deaths in the UK—that is 40,000 people dying before their time because the air they breathe in the fifth richest country in the world fails the required standard.

This is a public health nightmare. The Government have left our national health service strapped for cash as it is. Public Health England has estimated that air pollution costs could rise to £18.6 billion by 2025. If we do nothing and the quality of our air does not improve, there could be 2.5 million new cases of air quality-related illnesses such as lung cancer, asthma and heart disease by 2035. It is not cost-effective to ignore this problem; it is short-sighted austerity politics yet again.

The UK needs to lead the fight for cleaner air and carbon reduction. To do that, we need to incentivise a just transition for health, jobs and the environment. Why, then, has the Chancellor cut subsidies for plug-in hybrid and electric vehicles? How does he expect British drivers to make the switch from petrol and diesel cars if they are not encouraged to do so? Why does a Nissan Leaf have the same VAT rate as a Hummer? Should clean cars not be VAT-exempt? Where is the investment in the electric vehicle infrastructure that we so desperately need? In my constituency there is not a single public charge point; this is fourth time I have raised this issue in the House, and there are still no charge points. There are very few rapid charge points on British motorways, too. That does not build confidence in the new technology, and it leaves EV drivers with charge anxiety. There is no point in encouraging people to buy electric or hybrid vehicles if we do not provide the necessary infrastructure. The Government must do their bit. We need charge points in every community, rapid charge points across our road network and real investment in EV infrastructure and affordability.

Further, we need proper investment in northern heavy rail infrastructure to ensure that people have an alternative to using their cars. Clean rail is lacking in my constituency, where the Harrogate line is still running dirty diesel as the Government first promised then scrapped the electrification programme—a shameful example of this Government’s craven disregard for the north of England.

I recently submitted my consultation response on the plan to scrap feed-in tariffs. This incredibly short-sighted plan will end a scheme that has been successful in encouraging communities, councils and individuals to take ownership of their energy and carbon footprint. While the Government cite increased energy bills to justify their position, they have no plan to replace the scheme with anything other than business as usual for the big six energy companies, which they have conveniently left out of their analysis of consumer energy bills. Where is the investment in proper insulation of UK homes to reduce energy consumption and take so many people out of the fuel poverty they are suffering? All this, and we are still on course to miss our next carbon budget target. When will the Government wake up and realise that we are in the midst of an environmental and

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public health crisis, and take the necessary action to change course at international, national and community level?

Of course, this debate is about the Budget and health. We have a health service in which our Government's health economics put the interests of the private sector above those of the public. NHS trusts, including my own, have set up wholly owned subsidiary companies so that private companies can reclaim VAT. In Leeds it is just a service company, but many other trusts have set up wholly owned subsidiary companies that have transferred thousands of NHS staff into the private sector. The solution I had hoped to hear from the Chancellor was that he would put our hard-working public servants on an equal footing and allow the NHS to reclaim VAT in just the same way as those private companies do. But we have a Chancellor who finds a way to put the private sector ahead of our hard-working hospital porters, administrators and cleaners in the national health service.

In short, this Budget has come up short, put the interests of the few ahead of those of the many and put the planet on notice from which it might never recover.

6.27 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, may I preface my remarks by briefly mentioning the awful tragedy that took place at Leicester City football club in my Leicester constituency this weekend? My city—the city I represent—is grieving. We have lost a much loved friend who enjoyed the respect, affection and admiration of not just Leicester City football fans but everyone across our city. Our condolences go out to the loved ones of all who lost their lives in that terrible helicopter crash, and again I pay my tribute to our extraordinary emergency services—the police, the fire and rescue services, the NHS and all other staff—for their quick response, their dedication and their professionalism.

This was supposed to be the Budget that ended austerity, but instead, as my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor outlined, we have more of the same. Cuts to public services will continue. Poverty will increase. The very poorest households in society will lose out. Austerity has not ended; we know austerity has not ended because that is the headline in George Osborne's *Evening Standard* this evening.

Members have spoken in this debate with great passion, and I am sure the House will forgive me if I cannot mention each and every one of them, but some did catch my attention. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) began the debate with a tour de force and reminded the House that PFI was a Tory policy begun by—[*Interruption.*] Conservative Members are chuntering. Perhaps they should have a word with the International Trade Secretary who from this Dispatch Box used to urge us to pursue PFI because it was

“exclusively to fund private capital projects”—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 181.]

Perhaps they should have a word with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster who used to give a “warm welcome” to PFI. Perhaps they should have a word with the former Brexit Secretary; I know he is on the Back Benches now, but he used to say in this House:

“The PFI has many virtues—after all, it was a Conservative policy in the first instance.”—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 429.]

Perhaps they should have a word with the Business Secretary, who said:

“PFI was initiated by the previous Conservative Government.”—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2013; Vol. 558, c. 787.]

Perhaps they should also have a word with the Scottish Secretary, who said that PFI was a “successful basis for funding”, or with the Welsh Secretary, who said:

“I am a fan of PFI in general.”—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2010; Vol. 517, c. 1124.]

We will take no lessons on PFI from the Tories.

We have heard other welcome contributions to the debate today. My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), who is no longer in his place, spoke eloquently about the need for investment in radiotherapy and cancer treatments. It was a very constructive speech and I saw the Health Minister on the Front Bench nodding at the time; he has obviously had to leave the debate now. The hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean)—I do not know whether she is still here—mentioned the importance of more investment in and recognition of the menopause. I entirely agree with her on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) talked about the terrible and devastating consequences of gambling addiction. As someone who has spoken out about how addiction has taken a devastating toll on my own family, I completely endorse what my hon. Friend said today. The Government really need to push ahead with changes to fixed-odds betting terminals. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) and others talked about health inequalities and how the advances in life expectancy were beginning to stall for the first time in 100 years, and were indeed going backwards in some of the poorest parts of our country. This should shame us as a society, and I endorse the calls for an inquiry. If we had a Labour Government, we would have a specific target for narrowing health inequalities.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) spoke eloquently about the effects of the Budget on children. I commend all her work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on infant feeding. It is shameful in our society that, as we saw on Channel 4's “Dispatches” last night, one in 100 families are now turning to baby banks in our constituencies for access to baby clothing, food and toys. That is absolutely disgraceful. The hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) complained about chuntering from our side as he spoke about the importance of marriage. I agree that marriage is an immensely important institution, but I say to him that children should take priority in social policy and that the Government should be investing in children regardless of the marital status of their parents.

I hope that Members will forgive me if I do not mention everyone, but I did enjoy the passionate speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) on the value of public services. At one point, she said, “This is my truth.” I do not know whether she was referring to the Manic Street Preachers or to Aneurin Bevan, who also said:

“This is my truth, tell me yours.”

My hon. Friend's speech was a superb successor contribution to some of the speeches that Bevan would have made from the Dispatch Box when he created the NHS and the Conservatives voted against its creation.

The Health Secretary does not seem to be in this place to hear the wind-ups, but I am sure that he is on his way. I am told that he is a fan of horse-racing, but I am afraid that his speech fell at the first hurdle day. You see, Mr Speaker, it is not just the Chancellor who can do rubbish jokes in the Chamber. The Health Secretary forgot to tell us what eight years of austerity had delivered for the national health service and what eight years of the deepest and longest financial squeeze in the NHS's history had delivered. We now have 4.3 million people on the waiting list and 2.8 million people waiting for more than four hours in A&E, of whom more than 600,000 are designated as trolley waits. Over 25,000 people are waiting beyond two months for cancer treatment, which is twice the number in 2010.

Winters are now so bad in the NHS than they were branded a "humanitarian crisis" by the Red Cross. Last winter, 186,000 patients were trapped in the back of cold ambulances and not even able to be admitted to an overcrowded hospital. Hip replacements, knee replacements, cataract treatments and rounds of IVF are being rationed and restricted. There were 84,000 cancelled operations in the past year, including nearly 19,000 cancellations of children's operations for broken bones, for the removal of rotten teeth, for eye surgery and even for cancer.

Nowhere is the disgraceful neglect of children in our health service more prevalent than in mental health services. Three in four children with a diagnosable mental health condition do not get access to the support they need. The numbers of young people attending A&E with a recorded diagnosis of a psychiatric condition have trebled in the past eight years. A fifth of children and young people referred for an eating disorder wait more than four weeks for treatment, while more than 1,000 children are sent far from home—sometimes more than 100 miles away—for in-patient care. That is what happens after eight years of cuts, closures, service privatisation and failure to invest in staffing. That is what austerity has done, and it will continue.

One really must examine the small print of the spending readjustments for the NHS. The Health Secretary talked about £20 billion extra for the NHS over five years, but there is no new money for the winter ahead, which hospital bosses are already warning will be even tougher than last year's. According to Ministers, the NHS budget is set to grow by 3.6% next year. If the shadow Chancellor were Chancellor, it would grow by 5% next year.

Let us look at what is not included in the health budget, which the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who chairs the Health Committee, and others alluded to. First, even though the Health Secretary tells us staffing is his priority, we have 107,000 vacancies across the NHS. We are short of 40,000 nurses and midwives and of 10,000 doctors. The number of GPs is down by 1,000, the number of district nurses by 43% and the number of mental health nurses by more than 5,000. And what has happened to training budgets? They were excluded from that 3.6% allocation and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) pointed out, the Chancellor failed to reinstate the nursing bursary. There is no plan in the Budget to increase NHS staffing.

Secondly, the Health Secretary promised us a "technological revolution". Our NHS faces a £6 billion repair backlog, relies on 12,000 fax machines and uses at least 1,700 pieces of outdated and often faulty equipment, yet capital budgets are excluded from the 3.6% allocation. In fact, according to the Red Book, capital will be cut by £500 million. The Chancellor boasted that he was ending PFI—I do not why he thought that would embarrass the shadow Chancellor or the Leader of the Opposition; he has obviously not followed the history of the Labour party in recent years—but the Government's response to the Naylor report on infrastructure needs for primary care signalled that £3 billion would be raised from private finance investment. If PFI is abolished, where will that £3 billion for primary care transformation come from? Or is the reality that the Chancellor has not abolished private financing of public capital projects, but has simply abolished an acronym?

Thirdly, despite the Health Secretary's hollow commitment to prevention, public health services are still being cut. We have seen £700 million of cuts so far, with another £96 million to come. For example, substance misuse services in our constituencies will be cut by £34 million next year at a time when we have some of the highest drug deaths and alcohol-related hospital admissions on record. Sexually transmitted infections are on the increase, yet sexual health services are set to be cut by £17.6 million next year. We are falling behind internationally on children's health outcomes, from obesity to immunisations and support for new mums with breastfeeding, and the numbers of health visitors and school nurses are falling, yet early years health services will be cut next year because of cuts to the public health grant. Those cuts should have been reversed in the Budget, not endorsed.

Taken together, there will be £1 billion of cuts to public health, training and capital, which means this health settlement represents an increase next year not of 3.6% but of 2.7%. That is not enough to deliver the level of service that patients expect.

Let us look at what the £20 billion will fund. We have been told there is £2 billion extra for mental health, but growing mental health spending in line with the increase in overall health spending costs an extra £2 billion. That is more spin and smoke and mirrors. The Institute for Public Policy Research says we need £4 billion extra. NHS England advises us that NHS activity increases by 3.1% a year. Demand is rising, the burden of chronic disease is rising and the number of patients with multiple chronic conditions using the NHS is increasing. Those demographic changes and the rising burden of disease will take up £16 billion of that £20 billion. The pay increase, which the Government have been forced into because of campaigning of staff, the trade unions and the Labour party, will take up another £3.5 billion. That is £19.5 billion of the £20 billion already taken up—and still no plan to reduce waiting lists, tackle the A&E crisis, invest in general practice, or deal with the £4.3 billion of underlying deficits of hospitals and loans owed by NHS trusts.

The Chancellor's answer in the Red Book is to say that we should have 1% efficiencies a year in the NHS. What does that mean? It means more cuts and greater rationing of treatments. In the Red Book, the Chancellor also says that we can create savings through prevention—even though he is cutting prevention budgets—and

[Jonathan Ashworth]

integration of care. How can we integrate care with the health sector when billions of pounds have been cut from social care? Some £7 billion has been cut from social care, so 400,000 people now go without care support and over 50,000 over-65s with dementia are admitted to hospital because of a lack of social care.

The Chancellor said yesterday that he is giving more to social care, but he is cutting local authority budgets by £1.3 billion with one hand and is offering councils £650 million to be shared between adult and children's social care with the other. He is literally asking councils to choose between supporting vulnerable children with social care and supporting vulnerable adults with social care. That is not a serious choice; it is callous, cruel, nasty politics. We need a comprehensive settlement for social care, not the ongoing short-term drips from this Government.

We need a plan for the NHS. Yesterday was an opportunity to turn around our greatest institution, but it is not enough to deal with waiting lists or the crisis in recruiting the staff we need. There is no plan to bring waiting lists down and end rationing of treatment, no plan to recruit the doctors and nurses needed for the future, no plan to reverse the cuts to children's health services and end privatisation, no plan to rebuild social care and improve care for those living with dementia, no plan to expand community health services and general practice, and no plan to transform services for the future. The record will show, yet again, that you simply cannot trust the Tories with the NHS.

6.42 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): May I begin by associating myself and Government Members with the pertinent comments made by the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) in respect of the terrible tragedy that has befallen Leicester City football club in his constituency?

In 2010, we inherited an economy in disarray. It has been the discipline of a Conservative Government that has brought that back on track, combined with a monumental national effort on the part of millions of determined people in our country. Together we have turned the economy around. We now have near record levels of employment and near record levels of women in employment. Unemployment is at its lowest level since 1975, and we have halved youth unemployment since 2010. Debt is falling, and of course the deficit has been reduced by no less than 80%. Those points were all quite rightly made by my hon. Friends the Members for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan).

In yesterday's Budget, we showed the British people that their hard work has paid off, because the people of this country now deserve the rewards that are available in our strengthened economy. This Budget is a demonstration that we are coming out of austerity and into a brighter future. Today we have had a full and thoughtful debate on health and public services, and this Budget provides significant additional investment in our precious national health service, our carers, our schools and our police—those serving on the frontline, helping and caring for our families and communities, and working to build a better, safer and healthier Britain.

This Government have ensured an increase in NHS funding every year since 2010, including a pay rise for more than 1 million workers. We took this commitment still further in the Budget, delivering on the Prime Minister's announcement in June of the largest single public services cash commitment ever made by a peacetime Government—the biggest cash boost to the national health service in its history. Of course, it is essential that every pound of that money is spent wisely so that the national health service is put on a more sustainable footing, and we look forward to Simon Stevens's 10-year plan setting out exactly what the British people can expect to see.

The Chancellor announced yesterday that within the NHS settlement we will provide a significant uplift in funding for mental health, to the tune of at least £2 billion a year by 2023-24. We are committed to record levels of spending on this vital area, and the NHS plan will include up to £250 million a year by 2023-24 to support people living with poor mental health. It is time to address the stigma and the suffering of those affected by mental health issues and to work towards achieving parity of esteem between mental and physical health. Mental ill health is a pressing need to be addressed, and yesterday's Budget committed to doing precisely that.

Alongside our NHS settlement, the Budget's commitment to social care will give a much needed boost to councils, families and patients. The Government will provide £240 million in 2018-19 and a further £650 million next year for local authorities. This money will help people leave hospital when they are able, freeing up hospital beds. All of this builds on the additional £2 billion set aside in last year's spring Budget for councils to spend on adult care services.

Along with health and social care, a vital pillar of our public services is our world-class education system. Our children deserve the best, so we are already funding schools at record levels—schools will receive over £42 billion of core funding this year—and the results are showing: 86% of schools are now rated good or outstanding, compared with 68% in 2010.

We know that school budgets often do not stretch as far as we would like, so this year's Budget provides even more support. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a one-off £400 million in-year funding bonus for schools and sixth-form colleges in England, which means that the typical primary school will receive £10,000 and the typical secondary school will receive £50,000. All of this tops up our existing commitment to invest £23 billion in improving, refurbishing and replacing school buildings between 2016 and 2021. This is a Conservative Government committed to giving every child the greatest possible start in life, and we are investing in education to make sure that happens.

This Budget is the start of a new era for our country. After eight hard years of clearing up the mess left to us by the Labour party, we are now in a position to substantially increase our support for our vital public services. We have done that by facing up to the challenges laid before us in 2010. The crippling deficit, the highest in peacetime history, was the fallout from the wanton and reckless profligacy of the Labour party. A party that is always quick to blame, to point, to impugn and, of course, to promise without the inconvenience of having to deliver. A party that now finds itself captured by those who would return us to the dark days of the crash, and far worse. A party utterly incapable of facing up to the serious responsibilities of government.

It is we, this Government, who took the tough choices and did what we always knew to be right—to be responsible even when that was the hard way, not the easy way. Those tough choices were taken not for reasons of ideology but for reasons of compassion. For we knew all along that if we stuck the course, if we kept our nerve, if we could be brave and true to our values, then we could spare the country from the cruel impossibility of the Labour party's promises, and bring us to a place where better times were in reach.

That is where we are now. The deficit is fading, real wages are rising, better times are returning and there, right at the heart, lie those things we hold most dear: our national health service and our public services. This is a Budget for them, and I commend it to the House.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Michelle Donelan.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PETITION

Business Rates Reform

6.50 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition on behalf of 1,459 constituents from across York and a further 400 online; 1,859 residents and business owners are calling for a transformation in business rates. Although some progress was made in the Budget, it is absolutely clear that a fundamental reform of business rates is still needed, as some will lose out as a result of yesterday's Budget.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the current business rates system is out-of-date, unfair and is undermining the viability of our high streets, our hospitality industry and many small businesses across the UK.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to carry out an urgent review and reform of the Business Rates system to help protect the future of the UK High Street and create a level playing field for all businesses.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002282]

Local Authority Budget Reductions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Michelle Donelan.)

6.51 pm

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the effects of the reduction in local authority budgets, Mr Speaker. I rise this evening as someone who, both as a Member of Parliament and also now as the Mayor of the Sheffield City Region, works closely with our local authorities. Not only do I get to chair the mayoral combined authority of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, with the Derbyshire Dales, North East Derbyshire, Chesterfield, Bolsover and Bassetlaw as non-constituent members, but, through the Yorkshire Leaders Board, I get to work closely with all of Yorkshire's local authority leaders, many of whom will be very well known to the Minister. I can tell the House that the work that those local authorities do is of the highest standard of public service, but for too long the reputations of local authorities have been smeared with accusations of profligacy; their councillors have been accused of a lack of concern for value for money and their workers have faced accusations of idleness. In my experience, all these allegations are unfounded, and have served only to undermine the important role that local authorities play in our communities and to serve as justification for eight years of budgetary cuts.

Councils and councillors are improving people's lives, every day. The work that they do is community-led public service at its best. Although austerity has forced them to make difficult choices, councillors have stretched and continue to stretch every pound available. They listen to the communities that they both serve and live in, and they work tirelessly to shield the most vulnerable from the worst of the austerity agenda. Labour councils, in particular, have refused to buy into the narrative that they are simply "managing decline".

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I apologise for missing the first minute of this debate, Mr Speaker. My local authority in Torfaen has been doing precisely that—cushioning the impact of universal credit. Does my hon. Friend agree that one problem is that if austerity continues in the way it is, local councils simply will be left with only the money to fulfil their statutory functions?

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend is exactly right. That is the risk. The stakes in all this are incredibly high.

It is important to make the point that even at the height of austerity, Labour councils' innovations have seen them deliver new community facilities, form groundbreaking energy networks and use technology to improve social care services.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): If funding continues in the same way, local authorities may not even be able to fulfill their statutory duties. Britain's adult social care system is deteriorating; the reduction in funding is leading to fewer people getting care. That affects quality and increases pressure on the NHS. Does my hon. Friend agree that local authorities need increased Government funding to place adult social care on a stable and sustainable footing? If things continue like this, we will not even be able to provide the basics in the 21st century.

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The reality is that councils receive more than 5,000 new claims for adult social care support every single day. The additional funding on offer from the Government is the equivalent of £350 for each new claim. That is significantly less than the cost of a week's stay in a care home. The announcement of an additional £650 million of grant funding for adult social care is not even half what is actually needed. That only serves to show that the Government are not addressing this massive public policy challenge.

We have seen some examples of innovation by local authorities throughout the country, despite the difficult economic circumstances in which they find themselves. I include among them my own local council, Barnsley, which has established a warm homes campaign that seeks to tackle fuel poverty. Doncaster Council has set up an education and skills commission, with a view to shaping a system that works both for the people of Doncaster and for local businesses. Local authorities are making a difference and giving people in our communities support in difficult and testing times. Their accomplishments are a testament to the hard work of councillors and staff. That should be recognised, not only by the local communities that they serve but by a national Government prepared to trust and empower public servants at the most local level of government.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that things are particularly difficult in two-tier areas such as Gloucestershire, where my local authority, Stroud District Council, lost all its rate support grant? Although we are part of the business rates initiative that the Government have introduced, we are still very much on the back foot and have had to cut back on staff and a lot of local initiatives.

Dan Jarvis: I absolutely agree. My hon. Friend makes an important point about a common experience right around the country. The reality is that councils are facing a funding crisis. In my area, since 2010, Doncaster and Barnsley councils have both had to make £100 million of cuts; Rotherham has had to make £177 million of cuts; and Sheffield City Council has had to make £390 million of cuts.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour on securing this important debate. On his point about funding cuts, he will know that our local council is doing a fantastic job, despite difficult times, but has he, like me, noticed the number of charities—often small, volunteer-led charities offering bereavement services, youth services or support for victims of domestic violence—that just cannot rely on the previous level of funding so have had to cut back the support that they offer to our local community?

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour is absolutely right that the cuts to council funding have a much wider impact on our society. They simply mean that councils do not have the vital match funding that keeps so many worthwhile local organisations going. The reality is that austerity has caused huge damage to communities up and down the UK. It has undermined the way we protect children at risk, disabled adults and vulnerable older people. It has reduced the quantity and the quality of community services, such as street cleaning,

libraries and rubbish collection. Reduced funding also means reduced capacity to invest in prevention and, as such, these cuts represent no more than a false economy. If councils are unable to fund sufficient support for older people—

7 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Michelle Donelan.)

Dan Jarvis: If councils are unable to fund sufficient support for older people, more of them will end up being admitted to hospital. Less money for children's services means that our young people will only get by rather than thrive. Failing to invest in public transport stifles economic growth, isolates communities, reduces social mobility and damages our environment. These are just a few examples of an austerity agenda that lacks any form of long-term strategy.

I am proud of the way in which Labour-run councils have dealt with these challenges, even in the face of unfairly distributed funding. The poorest local authorities, which tend to be Labour run, have had their spending cut by £228 per person since 2010, while the richest councils have had their spending cut by only £44 per person. These cuts are not just affecting local residents. Years of pay freezes and below-inflation increases mean that some of our council workers are resorting to food banks, are over-reliant on credit and are asking for financial help from family and friends. Unpaid overtime is now essential to keep services going. Nearly half of our council staff are now thinking about leaving to do something less stressful.

Recent research by my union, Unison, found that 83% of council staff do not think that the quality of services delivered for the public have improved and seven in 10 council employees across South Yorkshire think that local residents are not receiving the help and support that they need. Those are figures that should concern us all.

Following eight years of austerity and some £7 billion of cuts, yesterday's Budget offered little comfort to our local authorities. Local councils face a funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025 and are still going to be cut by £1.3 billion next year. Yesterday's Budget offer of £650 million for the coming year is nowhere near enough to close even the funding gap for social care, let alone address the shortfall in other services.

Once again, local authorities have to make do with short-term fixes. The creation of yet more short-term funding pots is no way to get value for money from public spending. Unless meaningful changes are made, the most vulnerable in our communities will continue to suffer. Central and local government need to work together on the fundamental reform of the way community services are funded. If the era of austerity is truly coming to an end, it needs to feel that way to our local residents.

It seems to me that we live in a time of increasing disenfranchisement and distrust. Across the UK, only 27% think that our system of government is working well and only a similarly small number feel that ordinary people have a big say in decision making. When I look at my home county of Yorkshire, it is easy to

understand why. Government spending is nearly £300 per person lower than the national average; transport infrastructure investment is one 10th of that in the capital; and income is only 80% of the national average. These concerns cannot be addressed by the piecemeal redistribution of income that we saw yesterday. They can be addressed only by redistributing power. The Government should be working to empower communities by devolving decision-making closer to the places that it will affect.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank and congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter forward. Just yesterday, the Chancellor announced £350 million for the Belfast city deal, which will benefit my constituency of Strangford. My council of Ards and North Down got together with adjoining councils to make this deal a reality. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, where possible, if councils can come together to secure a city or a regional deal, it is a great and a good way of securing extra funding for the local areas? I spoke to him beforehand, and he knew that my question was coming.

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention; he makes a very important point. I think back to many of the conversations I had with members of the public during the referendum campaign, many of whom used it as an opportunity to vent their frustration against a political system that they felt had not served them well. If we are going to address those feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation, the closer that we can place political decision making to the people who will be affected by those decisions, the better. That is why devolution provides a really important opportunity for the Government to engage with those communities and place not just political power but resources closer to the communities who will be affected by the decisions that are taken.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that we are also seeing greater inequality as a result of the way in which devolution is being dished out? Some places are advancing with a devolution deal, yet for Yorkshire, where the local authorities desperately want to advance into devolution, it is apparently being denied.

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend makes a really important point to which I will return in a moment. I am very grateful for her intervention.

I was talking about the redistribution of power and how, together with investment, this will lead both to better public services and to the re-engagement of people in a common sense of community purpose. I believe that devolution does offer the opportunity to do this. Whether it is a mayoral or an assembly model, when we get devolution right, it offers a fairer and more democratic means of governing and delivering—one where working people have a greater say in the choices that affect their lives and a greater stake in the services on which they rely. We can seek to achieve radical transformative change in the communities that we serve only if those communities control their own destinies. That means this Government listening to those communities, and to the leaders they have elected to represent them.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) referred to devolution. Will the Minister say when the local authorities of Yorkshire—I know that he will take a very close interest in these matters, for obvious reasons—will get a response to the recent Yorkshire devolution proposal submitted by me and the council leaders? It is not just a matter of basic courtesy that this happens soon; it is in everybody's interests—the Government's and all our local authorities across Yorkshire—to move it forward as quickly as possible.

I said that it was important for the Government to listen to the communities that they are there to serve. Well, I have been listening to what the Government have been saying. I know from ministerial responses to parliamentary questions that I have recently tabled that the Minister's Department intends to publish what is being referred to as a devolution framework. When will this be published, and what consultation has taken place to underpin it? The Minister is obviously very welcome to say what is going to be in it, although I suspect that he may not wish to take up that opportunity. Whatever is in it, I very much hope that it will be driven by what communities actually want. "One size fits all" will not work in this regard.

If we are to enable the right level of devolution to take place, we need to abandon an economic and political model in which the only hope is for wealth to trickle down and prosperity to ripple out. We must replace it with a three-tier system of government—local, regional and national—giving each tier the powers and resources it needs to make a difference in the communities for which it is responsible. Only if we do this correctly will we put the right people at the heart of decision making, end the status quo whereby so many people have become disenfranchised, and allow communities to overcome the challenges they face and to thrive. Greater funding and stronger powers for our local authorities should be the first stage of that journey—but yesterday's Budget represented, I am afraid, another missed opportunity.

7.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this important debate. His pride and commitment to his local area is clear. I share his passion for local government and join him in paying tribute to the incredibly important work that our local councillors up and down the country do every single day. As someone who is passionate about local government, I thank him for sharing his knowledge and experiences of his area. It is always important for me to hear from colleagues about their areas and what they feel is happening on the ground.

Before I respond to the hon. Gentleman's points, I will set out my vision for the role of local government, which consists of three broad areas: first, driving economic growth; secondly, helping the most vulnerable in our society; and, thirdly, building strong communities. I will take those three areas in turn and deal with the questions and points raised by the hon. Gentleman, as well as talking in particular about the area that he has the privilege to represent.

I will start with economics and finances. In this financial year, councils in the Sheffield city region, including Rotherham, Sheffield, Doncaster and Barnsley,

[*Rishi Sunak*]

had aggregated core spending power of just over £1 billion. Core spending power is the standard measure of a local authority's financial resources. It rightly includes money not just from the central Government grant, but from locally raised council tax, the local area's share of the business rates pot, and specific Government grants for things such as adult social care and the new homes bonus. Core spending power across the Sheffield city region is up every year since 2016, and across the country core spending power will see a real-terms increase in this financial year.

Beyond grants from central Government, driving economic growth is the only sustainable way to ensure the vibrancy of our local communities and to raise the vital money that we need to fund our local public services. Business rates retention is one such opportunity. Indeed, across the Sheffield city region, local authorities will generate around £16 million in additional funds this year as a result of keeping the proceeds from the economic growth that they have helped to create. Next year it is estimated that that figure will increase to £24 million.

That is not the only incentive for local growth, however, as it sits alongside the Government's other work to support local authorities' wider ambitions through local growth and devolution deals. For example, £52 million has been invested in a business investment fund, which will unlock direct investment in small and medium-sized enterprises across the Sheffield city region. An additional £3 million has been invested to speed up the delivery of the state-of-the-art Supertram network, which I was delighted to see launched last week by the hon. Gentleman and the rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson). Finally, a further £36 million has been invested in the region's integrated infrastructure plan, opening up new employment sites, delivering new homes and fuelling the growth of the advanced manufacturing innovation district between Sheffield and Rotherham. As evidenced by the devolution deal, which I know the hon. Gentleman is passionate about, and the £30 million a year in incremental funding that will come with that deal, the Government will continue to work hand in hand with the new Mayor to back the Sheffield city region and to drive local economic growth to fund local services.

I turn to my second theme. One of the most undeniably crucial roles that local government continues to play is helping the most vulnerable in our society. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is local authorities that support the elderly, the disabled and our children in need. We owe councils an enormous debt of gratitude for the incredibly important work that they do, and this Government are backing local authorities to carry out those vital duties. Last year's Budget provided an additional £2 billion for social care. Just last month, another £240 million was announced for social care winter funding this year, and at yesterday's Budget, the Chancellor announced that a further £650 million will be provided for care services in the next financial year.

It is not just about money. The increased collaboration that this investment has fuelled between local authorities and the NHS has delivered real benefits on the ground in local communities. I am pleased to say that social care has freed up 949 beds a day since the February 2017 peak, which represents a 39% reduction in social

care delayed transfers of care. In the Sheffield city region, Barnsley is among the best performing local authorities in the country, achieving zero social care delayed transfers of care according to the most recently available statistics. I pay tribute to the local authority, and others in places such as Doncaster and Sheffield, for their terrific work in this regard.

The Government's troubled families programme is another area in which we are making amazing strides to support our society's most vulnerable families. Indeed in Barnsley, the safer neighbourhood service and the early start, prevention and sufficiency service are bringing together council services—including family centres, targeted youth support, education and the youth offending service—to improve outcomes for local residents. We have heard about the importance of prevention, and indeed across the Sheffield city region the troubled families programme is working with over 13,000 families and benefiting from the more than £25 million of available funding.

One of the unique privileges I have as the Local Government Minister is to travel around the country to talk to families participating in this programme and to see at first hand its life-changing work. I am proud to say that £1 billion of funding has been committed to the troubled families programme over this spending cycle. Nationally, more than 130,000 families are already achieving significant and sustained progress. For example, for families on the programme six to 12 months after the intervention, the proportion of children designated as children in need has decreased by 14% compared with the period just before the start of the intervention. In almost 17,000 of these families, one or more adults had succeeded in moving into continuous employment. The programme has ensured that work, and the transformative effects that it can bring to a whole family, is never off the table.

Finally, we can all see that local authorities' work in building strong communities that thrive and move forward together is beneficial not just to them, but to wider society as well. This work, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, is absolutely vital. Strong communities are cohesive. It is with that in mind that the Government have announced a £19 million fund to help to ease pressures on local services resulting from recent migration. The fund has already committed £484,000 to Barnsley Council, partly to support activities to understand communities' concerns and to help to address them.

Strong communities need to be connected. The roads that our constituents travel on every day form a key part of our daily experiences. That was why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced yesterday that £420 million will be made available this year for local authorities to fix potholes and carry out other road repairs, which will ensure safer and better roads across our communities. Strong communities also need vibrant high streets to bring us together and to ensure that our towns have beating hearts. That is why the Government have just announced a £675 million fund to support high streets, which local authorities will take the lead in developing.

Lastly, strong communities nurture and celebrate their open green spaces—providing sanctuary from the busy world, enabling us to come together to keep fit and healthy, and helping to make our areas more pleasant places to live. The pocket parks fund, which was launched

two years ago, has helped to transform neglected and derelict spaces. It has led to the creation of more than 80 new green spaces for communities to enjoy in urban areas across the country. I am delighted that Barnsley is home to one of these pocket parks—the community pocket park at Bradford Forster Square. I am also pleased to say that the Government intend to build on this success with a second round of funding for pocket parks, which will provide access to new smaller parks and vital green spaces for our communities in areas where there are limited opportunities today.

The hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about devolution. He will know that I am not the Minister with particular responsibility for that, so I hope he will bear with me when I cannot give him the exact response he wants. My understanding is that the Government and the Minister responsible are considering the matter of One Yorkshire devolution, which the hon. Gentleman rightly identifies as being of some personal interest to me. There is no fixed timeframe for a response that I am aware of, but if there is one, I will be sure to write to him in short order.

On the hon. Gentleman's broader question about the devolution framework, my understanding is that the Minister with responsibility for devolution and the northern powerhouse will publish that towards the end of this year.

However, again, if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will write to him when I can get the exact date from my colleague, if one has been published.

On that note, I agree wholeheartedly with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument about devolving power to local people. He is obviously an exponent of that, and I hope he will agree that this Government have undertaken an ambitious and significant devolution programme to bring government closer to people up and down this country. I think that we are all excited to see that programme continue.

In conclusion, I thank the hon. Gentleman again for calling this important debate. It is a real privilege for me to have this job and to champion local government in Westminster. Whether it is driving economic growth, caring for the most vulnerable or building stronger communities, local councils in Barnsley, throughout the Sheffield city region and across the country do an important and incredible job. I am grateful for their dedication, and I will continue to ensure that their voice is heard and that they get the support they need and deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

7.20 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 30 October 2018

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

Ovarian Cancer: Diagnosis and Treatment

9.30 am

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered ovarian cancer diagnosis and treatment.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the debate, as well as everyone who is here to support this important and timely event—both my colleagues in the Chamber, and everyone in the Public Gallery. The issue is extremely important, and I am privileged to open the debate. This will be the first time since 2014 that ovarian cancer has been debated in either Chamber.

Ovarian cancer is a quiet, invasive cancer, that robs wives, daughters, sisters, mothers and grandmothers of years of their lives, often unexpectedly and quickly, with devastating impacts on their families. Today about 25,000 women are living with the cancer and every day 20 will be diagnosed with it. Despite some progress in recent years the disease still takes away the lives of 4,000 women a year, and hundreds of thousands around the world. Because of its devastating effects its survival rate is, tragically, not as high as everyone would like, and 46% of sufferers do not survive for five years or more.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I warmly congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. To improve survival rates, we need earlier diagnosis. For many years ovarian cancer was known as the silent killer, but there are a number of signs and symptoms. Will he join me in encouraging anyone with those signs and symptoms to see their GP urgently?

Lee Rowley: I absolutely will. That is a timely and important point. I was on Radio Sheffield only this morning talking about the debate with someone from Target Ovarian Cancer. We spent an awfully long time talking about the symptoms, because it is important that people understand them, and are aware of them, so they can get the treatment they need if they are, unfortunately, affected.

All cancers are important. Extremely sadly—sometimes tragically—ovarian cancer tends not to receive the bulk of the attention or funding. That is partly because it does not affect as many people as other cancers, but it is also because of survival rates. The 46% rate of survival beyond five years compares unfavourably with the rate for breast cancer, which is 87%, and prostate cancer, which is 85%. There are simply fewer survivors of ovarian cancer in the UK who could highlight the importance of fighting the disease and succeeding than there are survivors of other cancers. There is a need for people to speak up about ovarian cancer. Thanks to the work of those who are doing so, it has started to receive

the attention that it needs. Charities such as Target Ovarian Cancer work tirelessly every day to raise the profile of the disease, support those who have been affected, improve diagnosis and treatment, and work for a cure. I pay tribute to the work of the all-party parliamentary group on ovarian cancer, and in particular the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who chairs it. It has been a privilege to be involved in the work and I am grateful to be able to help in a small way.

What is it about ovarian cancer that requires a particular focus? From the work I have seen, there are four things: improving awareness of the disease, as the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) mentioned, so that it can be caught earlier; speeding up the diagnosis when it is suspected that someone has the disease; improving the data available for tracking the disease and our progress in the fight against it; and improving the treatment, allowing people to recover and be disease-free more quickly.

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): On the point about early diagnosis, my constituent and good friend Jane Sagar had a cyst of 6.5 cm, which a specialist identified. However, its removal was not recommended, although she was later told that any cyst greater than 5 cm on her ovary should automatically have been removed, because it was likely to be cancerous. As a result she is entering her fourth year of treatment for advanced ovarian cancer.

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Treatment around the country needs to be made more consistent and clearer, to put a stop to the issues that many of us have heard in stories from constituents.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I apologise that I shall not be able to stay for the whole of this important debate. Does my hon. Friend agree that the additional resources that the Government are devoting to the NHS are welcome, and that it is important for it to use them wisely, which includes improving early diagnosis and treatment of cancer? Early diagnosis is crucial to successful outcomes and the raising of survival rates for ovarian and other cancers.

Lee Rowley: My right hon. Friend is right and I hope that the Minister will recognise that. It is a matter of getting a diagnosis, and encouraging people who feel that something may not be quite right to go to the doctor, so that the pathway starts. Then, if there is an issue—most of the time there is not—there can be progress, and people can get the treatment they need earlier.

The first step in improving outcomes on ovarian cancer is improving awareness among the general public, and among GPs and in doctors' surgeries in general. As has been mentioned, the symptoms of ovarian cancer are often easy to mistake for something else. Too often it is easy to dismiss them as inconsequential or not worth further attention. Symptoms include bloating, a need to go to the toilet more frequently, pain in the tummy or always feeling full. Recognising that those symptoms are potentially problematic is a key to survival. Those diagnosed at the earliest stage, stage 1, are almost

[*Lee Rowley*]

certain to be alive a year after the diagnosis; 98% of them will be. Only half of those diagnosed at stage 4 are alive a year later.

Awareness of the symptoms among the general public remains low. For example, only 20% of women can name bloating as a symptom, and only 3% can name feeling full and loss of appetite as an issue. A regional Be Clear on Cancer pilot on ovarian cancer symptoms in 2014 was promising. There was an increase in both spontaneous and prompted awareness of the issues. There were also promising findings from a further regional pilot last year, which focused on abdominal symptoms, including bloating. Initial findings showed that the campaign led to an increase in the number of GP referrals for suspected cancer. We ask that if the Government propose to run any future public health campaigns, they should include work to make people aware of those symptoms.

The second area where there is work to be done is diagnosis, not least because 45% of women reported that it took three months or longer from first presenting to their GP with concerns to recognition that they might have an issue. Diagnosis relies on two forms of assessment—an ultrasound and a blood test called CA125. In too many areas the assessments are done sequentially rather than simultaneously, which often means vital weeks are lost. We have urged the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the NHS to review that process and extend the coverage of multidisciplinary diagnostic centres. Those centres prove very useful for the sort of cancers that hide behind vague, less common symptoms, which it is important to get to the bottom of as quickly as possible.

The third area is data. There are many calls on the Government from many sources to ensure that the cancer dashboard demonstrates the progress already being made on a variety of cancers. I understand the challenge, but we also hope that in time the Government may look favourably on the idea of including ovarian cancer data in the dashboard. We hope that that would be relatively simple, as much of the data is already collected and published elsewhere. Good data is vital in driving forward and improving early diagnosis. Huge strides have been made in its collection, and making it available would help with the continuing work to drive up standards.

Finally, treatment also requires further attention. As with many health issues, ovarian cancer treatment is invasive and often difficult. It centres primarily on surgery and chemotherapy. There has been much progress in recent years on drugs to treat the cancer, with the development of a number of PARP inhibitors, providing new tools and opportunities to improve the outcome. However, spending and research on ovarian cancer remain lower than for other cancers, and there is much work to focus on. Where surgery is required there is a strong case for specialist centres around the country, supported by a detailed service specification from NHS England.

To further drive up the quality of treatment, charities such as Target Ovarian Cancer and Ovarian Cancer Action, together with the British Gynaecological Cancer Society, are funding an ovarian cancer feasibility audit. Over the next two years, it will map and analyse existing data on ovarian cancer, and look at the treatment provided and the outcomes for women.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating Target Ovarian Cancer and other cancer charities on highlighting this issue and putting forward some very sensible recommendations for improving treatment? Does he agree that it is shocking that our survival rates in the UK are among the lowest in Europe?

Lee Rowley: I absolutely do. All these things are a work in progress, but I hope that through debates such as this, through talking about it and through all the fantastic work the charities and the APPG do we can move things forward, make progress and, in time, have fewer women suffering from this and more women getting treatment more quickly than today.

The question of ovarian cancer is, however, more than a technical discussion about diagnosis, awareness, data and treatment, as important as those are. Behind each statistic is a real person who has been unexpectedly struck down by the disease and, in far too many cases, might not be around today to tell the story of their fight. As part of the preparation for this debate, the parliamentary digital team and Target Ovarian Cancer asked people to share stories of their fight and those of their family members.

I am hugely grateful to both organisations for helping with that, and to everyone who got in touch. The stories we received were heartbreaking and heartwarming in equal measure, tragic and terrific, and whatever the outcome, they were inspiring to us all. I cannot possibly do justice to everybody who got in touch or to all the stories and experiences out there, but I will share a few today to remind us of the importance of making progress on this disease.

Danielle got in touch to tell us about her mum, who was diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer in September of last year. Like many other people's, her symptoms were fuzzy: irritable bowel syndrome, feeling full, swelling and weight loss, which could have been a hundred other things. By chance, the doctor who saw Danielle's mum also sent her for a blood test, which quickly confirmed that there was an issue. A month or so later, Danielle's mum started chemotherapy, and in January this year she had a full hysterectomy. After a 10-hour operation, it was hoped that everything had been caught and the focus was on recovery. By June, however, the cancer had returned; sadly, a few months later, in August, Danielle's mum lost her battle, just 10 months after diagnosis.

Forty-year-old Sarah also had symptoms such as weight loss, feeling full and ovary pain. Before the cancer was diagnosed, she tried many times to find out what the issue was, including once being told, "Well done," for having lost weight. In Sarah's case the blood test that often highlights an issue came back normal, which emphasises the imperfect nature of the diagnosis. A nine-hour operation and six rounds of chemotherapy later, Sarah continues to battle her cancer while looking after her two young children.

We also heard the story of the daughter of Jean, who was diagnosed in 2011 with stage 4 ovarian cancer as a result of severe bloating and loss of appetite. After major surgery and four rounds of chemotherapy, the news came through that the cancer had spread. Her battle ended early in 2013.

Emma told us about her mum, who was told she was suffering from irritable bowel syndrome; the actual issue was found too late and she lost her battle, aged 64, just six weeks after diagnosis.

Seren started feeling unwell while at university, aged just 19. Unable to get a doctor's appointment, she came back home and was diagnosed with cancer. Her tumour was the size of a rugby ball and her operation was pushed forward as it was stopping her eating and affecting her breathing. Chemotherapy followed and today Seren is recovered and working for a cancer charity.

Christine is also one of the good news stories. She was diagnosed with stage 2 ovarian cancer aged 35, having had to visit three different GPs to resolve the problems she was suffering from, which had initially been put down to colitis and anxiety. After her diagnosis, an emergency operation and 10 chemotherapy sessions followed. That was in 1985 and Christine is still here; she has been able to share her story in the last few days.

Finally, Linda was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in September 2017, having initially felt unwell at the beginning of summer while she was on holiday. The classic symptoms were there: bloating, feeling full and knowing that something "wasn't right". Multiple trips to the GP followed until, finally, a blood test was taken, confirming the cancer. Linda had a full hysterectomy that same month and spent much of the next few months recovering.

I know that many hon. Members may be wondering the obvious: why am I standing here making the case about a disease that cannot and will not ever affect my body? As with so many others, although it may not have touched me personally, it has touched my family. Linda is my mum. Up until last year, she had had relatively good health and there is no history of ovarian cancer in my family. I generally try to keep my family out of politics—I was the fool who ran for Parliament, not them—but last year was a nightmare that none of us wants to experience again, and we have no wish to see anyone else experience the same. My dad, my brother and I watched my mum live through an extremely scary diagnosis, hugely invasive treatment and one of the hidden aspects of all cancers, the brush with mortality that takes time for sufferers to get to grips with.

Happily for me and my family, my mum is one of the lucky ones. She is sitting at home in north Derbyshire right now, possibly watching this debate on the internet. She has had a hard year and we are extremely proud of her. Yet I know that for every family like mine who have had good news, there are more people who face a tragic outcome. My mum and Danielle's mum were diagnosed about the same time and I know that my mum's journey, like that of Danielle's mum, could have been so different. I do not want anyone else to face what those of us who know and understand what this disease forces on sufferers have faced. Better treatment, diagnosis and a cure cannot wait. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss these hugely important issues; I look forward to the debate and the Government's response. Together, I hope we can beat ovarian cancer.

9.46 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) on securing this debate. He is right that ovarian cancer does not affect us men, but it affects people we know, and that is why we are here. I thank him for his introduction and for the extensive work he has done on the issue in his role as vice chair of the all-party parliamentary group on ovarian cancer. I was particularly impressed

by the group's report, "Diagnosing ovarian cancer sooner: what more can be done?". If hon. Members have not had a chance to read it, I suggest that they do so, because it is very helpful. It was published earlier this year and contains a number of key recommendations and findings, which I will pick up on today.

Every single year, more than 7,000 women across the United Kingdom receive the devastating news that they have ovarian cancer. The hon. Gentleman, in his examples at the end of his speech, referred to those who have survived and those who have not; it is important to realise that sometimes people do survive it. Unfortunately, in my time as an elected representative, most of the people I have known who have had it have caught it at a late stage and have not lived as long as perhaps they could have. UK survival rates are among the lowest in Europe and less than half of all women diagnosed with ovarian cancer survive five years or longer.

The fact that we are at the lower end of that league table is an indication that perhaps we need to do more. I look to the Minister, as we always do, for a positive response. We also know that the earlier a person is diagnosed, the better chance they have of beating the disease. More than a quarter of women with ovarian cancer are diagnosed through an emergency presentation, for example via accident and emergency. The hon. Gentleman referred to those who thought they had irritable bowel syndrome, had a bad stomach or were bloated, or whatever it might be, and suddenly found it was something much greater. Over 80% of women diagnosed following a GP referral will survive for a year or more. I think if an early diagnosis can be made, the figures speak for themselves. We must do more to raise awareness about the disease, something I will come on to later.

Before I continue, I would like to share a bit of welcome news for ovarian cancer patients in Northern Ireland. As colleagues may be aware, drugs approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for use through the cancer drugs fund in England are now being considered in line with the country's existing endorsement of NICE recommendations and will be equally accessible in Northern Ireland. That has just been announced recently. In cases where a drug is yet to be fully approved by NICE, it can be made available for use under the CDF. I will mention one lady who is no longer with us, Una Crudden, who I got to know when she met us here, as someone who had had ovarian cancer. I think it was six years after her diagnosis. She was a remarkable lady and her story was a very real one: I remember it probably every day of my life.

CDF-approved drugs were previously unavailable in Northern Ireland, meaning that patients had to wait for their full approval by NICE, which can take up to two years. This change in Northern Ireland will help more people to survive, and for longer.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Whenever ladies go through this treatment, their aftercare and companionship with other people is important. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating a lady in my constituency, Mrs Maureen Clarke, who set up the Angels of Hope charity some years ago? It has been a tremendous help, psychologically and in every other way, for people who suffer from ovarian cancer.

Jim Shannon: I wholeheartedly support the tremendous work of the great many people in charities and elsewhere. Una Crudden was one of those who inspired everyone around her. We think of her often.

Without CDF approval, cancer patients in Northern Ireland have been unable to access life-extending drugs that have been approved for use in England, Wales and Scotland, such as niraparib. It is a PARP inhibitor, meaning that it blocks the action of the enzymes PARP1 and PARP2, which help to repair any damaged DNA in cancer cells while they divide to make new cells. Niraparib blocks PARP enzymes, which is incredibly important, and it is good news that we will have direct access to it in Northern Ireland. When researchers trialled niraparib on women with ovarian cancer, they discovered that the women lived for longer without the disease worsening and could go significantly increased times between treatments, meaning that they had more time between chemotherapy sessions.

Almost 200 women in Northern Ireland are diagnosed with ovarian cancer every year, and more than 50% lose their battle with it. It is particularly frustrating and upsetting for patients, and their families, who did not have access to the same potentially life-changing drugs as their English, Scottish and Welsh counterparts. However, that has changed in the last month; patients in Northern Ireland are finally set to have the same access to drugs as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. According to reports, the implementation of this policy will take place at some point in this financial year. We look forward to that. I am sure that colleagues will join me and my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) in welcoming this fantastic news.

Access to drugs is one thing, but it is reactionary, rather than preventive. Evidence, including in the APPG's report, suggest that much more needs to be done to raise awareness about ovarian cancer, which could affect the number of people diagnosed with the disease. Early diagnoses give longer life and prevent death. Although not limited to these, the four main symptoms are abdominal pain, bloating, feeling full quickly and needing to pass water. Most concerning is that only 20% of women could correctly identify those as being symptomatic of ovarian cancer, which goes back to a point made by the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire.

Ovarian cancer has low survival rates and, sometimes, delays in diagnosis, so we need a reinvigorated effort to ensure that the general public know what to look out for and when to see a doctor. The Be Clear on Cancer campaign was introduced in 2011, and I take this opportunity to put on the record my thanks to Public Health England for launching it. It is an excellent campaign that has undoubtedly played a vital role in improving cancer awareness more generally among the general population, which is part of the strategy's focus.

National campaigns have been successfully run for bowel, lung, breast, bladder and kidney cancers, but only regional and local pilot campaigns have been launched for ovarian cancer. Does the Minister intend to launch a pilot campaign for ovarian cancer? A regional campaign launched in 2014 included the use of television, radio, online and face-to-face events and led to a significant improvement in women's awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer and a greater inclination to visit their GP to discuss any concerns that they might have.

Raising awareness—especially about potential symptoms—is obviously important and can only be a good thing, so I will be grateful if the Minister indicates what discussions he has had with Public Health England about the possibility of running a national campaign for ovarian cancer that covers the four nations. We could work together to raise awareness at every level. I always think it is better to do things together. As you know, Mr Bone, we are better together in everything that we do, and I would like that to continue to be the case, especially for this.

Another way to improve awareness about ovarian cancer would be the introduction of a national screening programme. Screening programmes exist for breast and cervical cancer, but there is no equivalent for ovarian cancer. I understand that the UK collaborative trial of ovarian cancer screening looked at the possibility of an ovarian cancer screening programme, with a blood test to identify changes in the levels of the CA 125 protein, which is a tell-tale sign. If levels had risen, the patient would be sent for an ultrasound, so a system would be in place to offer early diagnosis, and it would be preventive as well. It is estimated that, if a national screening programme were rolled out, 12.5 million women over the age of 50 would be eligible to attend, with around 2% required to have a further ultrasound. Such a programme could take preventive help to the next stage.

I understand that, when women are contacted about making an appointment for a cervical or breast cancer screening, they are provided with informative leaflets that detail possible symptoms. Of course, although the screenings are vital, it is entirely up to the patient if they follow up and make an appointment. However, just having access to the leaflets is helpful in raising awareness. Does the Minister intend to produce a leaflet to raise awareness of ovarian cancer? Recognition of the symptoms of ovarian cancer remains low, so it would be helpful if women were provided with a similar leaflet that might help to improve awareness of this specific disease.

I understand that the cost of national screening programmes is high, but that needs to be measured against the long-term benefits. If people can be screened and ovarian cancer caught early, people have a greater chance of survival, and their long-term reliance on the NHS could well be reduced. That is ultimately cost-effective, because it reduces the amount of care that they later need.

I understand that one concern with rolling out a screening programme of that nature is the lack of sonographers, who are of course required to provide ultrasounds. Are the staff with those skills in place? I am interested to hear what consideration has been given to the use of artificial intelligence to fill the gap of highly skilled diagnosticians. Would it be possible to provide some sort of incentive for those considering postgraduate UK ultrasound qualifications? We often say this, and I know that the Minister is responsive to it, but if we set out the graduate positions that will be available in the future and encourage graduates to study towards those jobs, that will be helpful.

Prevention is vital. Approximately 15% of women with ovarian cancer develop it as a result of a mutation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene. Identifying women with ovarian cancer with a BRCA mutation not only helps in designing their treatment plans; it enables family members to be tested. We sometimes look at the individual,

which is important, but we should also look at the family circle—sisters and daughters and so on—and test them as well, which would allow them to make decisions about reducing their risk of developing ovarian cancer.

“Achieving world-class cancer outcomes: a strategy for England 2015-2020” calls for all women with ovarian cancer to be offered access to genetic testing at the point of diagnosis. That follows 2013 NICE guidelines that require all women with a 10% or higher risk of carrying a BRCA mutation to be offered genetic testing. However, in reality, testing varies between regions and between hospitals, because the guidelines are often interpreted differently. This clearly needs to be addressed, as the same testing should be available for all, without variation depending on postcode or because of the funding—or lack thereof—available in different genetic testing centres across the country. Obviously if eligible family members were tested to identify potential mutations, they might be able to take steps, including surgery, to ensure that ovarian cancer cannot occur.

Concerns have been raised about what genetic testing could mean for individuals with private health or life insurance. Members may not have thought of this, and the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire did not mention it, but he and others will be aware of it. For example, does a person with private health or life insurance need to declare if a genetic test has been carried out, and its results? I am interested to hear from the Minister what work the Department is doing alongside the insurance industry to address any disparity for cancer patients and their families who undergo genetic testing, which may have an impact on their private health or life insurance.

We can all agree that, while improvements have been made in the last couple of decades, survival rates for ovarian cancer continue to lag behind other cancers. We need to do more to raise awareness of ovarian cancer, to ensure that women know what to look out for and when to see their doctor—particularly those in higher risk categories, either because of family history or because of their age.

I am very pleased about the recent news for cancer patients in Northern Ireland: as is the case with genetic testing, it is unfair for patients to access different treatments, tests or drugs simply because of their postcode. I hope that the Minister will work with Public Health England and NICE to consider national campaigns, which take in all the regions, and screening programmes for ovarian cancer, as well as to ensure that guidelines are implemented and funding made available for testing.

I again thank the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire for the opportunity to speak on this subject. It is close to my heart; indeed, that can be said of all of us who are here and many who are not here because they are doing other things. Ovarian cancer is one of those diseases on which we need to give hope and support to the people affected. We all know people who are affected and we are here today to speak on their behalf.

10 am

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) on securing

this important debate and on speaking so compassionately and movingly about his constituents and, indeed, his family.

Like other hon. Members present, I am sure, I was inundated with emails and correspondence from constituents urging me to take part in the debate, so I want to make a few remarks on their behalf. Of course, those emails come from the lucky ones—the women who, like Amanda Gilham from Makerstoun in my constituency, benefited from timely diagnosis and treatment. Amanda was totally unaware that she had ovarian cancer and was diagnosed only because she was fortunate enough to be given a blood test, as her GP suspected that something else entirely was wrong.

When talking about statistics, it is important to remember that the numbers on spreadsheets represent people—our constituents—and, in the case of ovarian cancer, grandmothers, mothers and sometimes daughters. Clearly, early diagnosis and treatment are crucial to tackling ovarian cancer, as they are to tackling all types of cancer. If ovarian cancer is found early, the five-year survival rate is 90%, compared with 4% if it is found late. Although survival rates have doubled in the past 40 years, survival rates in the United Kingdom are lower than the European average, and still not enough people are diagnosed early.

The NHS in Scotland is of course entirely devolved and therefore the responsibility of the Scottish National party Government. I want to spend a little time talking about the situation in Scotland and the circumstances that my constituents have to experience. Patients in Scotland are being let down. Much more needs to be done to improve diagnosis and treatment. This summer, for example, the Scottish Medicines Consortium approved the use of niraparib, but only for women without a gene mutation that affects about one fifth of women living with ovarian cancer. That restriction does not apply in England, meaning that women with a BRCA gene mutation in England and Wales have more treatment options than their counterparts north of the border, in Scotland. A postcode lottery for accessing life-enhancing drugs is unacceptable. I agree with Ovarian Cancer Action that women in Scotland deserve better.

Women in Scotland also deserve better in terms of the time that it takes to receive a diagnosis and treatment. Scotland's cancer treatment waiting times are at their worst in six years. Only 87% of patients with ovarian cancer started treatment within 62 days of referral. In response, the Scottish Government have admitted that that is “simply not good enough”. Just last week, the Scottish Government announced that they were not planning on meeting their own diagnosis target until at least 2021. That was spun as a new “three-year plan” to meet waiting time targets—something that was supposed to be good news. Given that the SNP has been in charge of the NHS in Scotland for the past 10 years, the Scottish Government's record, particularly on cancer treatment, deserves further scrutiny. I hope that some of the extra £2 billion a year that the Scottish Government will be receiving to spend on the NHS, thanks to yesterday's Budget, can be put to good use to reduce those waiting times.

Ovarian cancer is not the most common type of cancer in the United Kingdom and is not easily diagnosed at the moment, but the impact of early diagnosis is significant. I again congratulate my hon. Friend the

[John Lamont]

Member for North East Derbyshire on securing this important debate. I support the efforts across the United Kingdom to improve diagnosis and treatment of this terrible disease.

10.4 am

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) on securing the debate and on bravely speaking of his own experience and that of his mum, Linda. I am sorry to hear about the experience that his family have had in the past year and I wish Linda well.

I thank hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber for highlighting the issues faced by their constituents. They have talked about both the successes of the health service and the lessons that need to be learned for the future. Healthcare in Scotland is of course devolved to the Scottish Government, so I can only speak to that experience, but ovarian cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in women. It typically affects those who have been through the menopause, and more than 7,000 diagnoses are made each year across the UK. In Scotland, 350 women die of the disease each year. However, the survival rate for ovarian cancer is high compared with that for other types of cancer and, like other cancer survival rates, it increases with early detection.

One key issue with this disease is that awareness of the symptoms is still low among both GPs and the general population. As we have heard from both sides of the Chamber, more needs to be done to raise awareness of the early signs and to secure an early diagnosis. Most women with ovarian cancer are diagnosed when the disease has, unfortunately, reached an advanced stage.

In many regards, Scotland still leads the way on UK ovarian cancer diagnosis, but there is no denying that there is always more to do in this area. Scotland has improved its diagnostic pathway and the access to much-needed treatments. The SNP Government developed the Detect Cancer Early programme to improve survival rates through diagnosis and treatment at an earlier stage. Scotland has been able to tackle cancer through world-class scientific research. The Scottish Molecular Genetics Consortium uses DNA to detect a range of genetic disorders, including cancer. The Scottish Genomes Partnership is pioneering Scottish research in human genome discovery in four key research areas, of which cancer is one. That partnership involves the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee. However, although that research is saving lives, its funding is being slashed. The proportion of EU funds allocated to universities in the UK has already dropped and will continue to fall because of Brexit and the uncertainty about the future. Programmes such as those will collapse unless a post-Brexit Government are prepared to plug the funding gap.

In Scotland, the SNP wants to improve cancer care and treatment, which is one reason the Scottish Government are investing £100 million in their new cancer strategy. In addition to the SNP Government's work on prevention and early detection, the strategy includes enhanced radiotherapy services through new technology, and

recruitment drives to reduce waiting times and improve patient outcomes. The Scottish Government have outlined actions for end-of-life care needs through the "Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care", which encourages a culture of openness and dignity around dying and death.

In June, I was contacted by a constituent from Hamilton, Mr Gerard Murphy, who sadly lost his wife, Elizabeth, last year after a battle against late-diagnosed ovarian cancer. Mr Murphy expressed a lot of the sentiments articulated during this debate, calling for publicly funded awareness campaigns so that women and GPs know the symptoms to look out for, faster diagnosis so that women can start treatment earlier and have a greater chance of survival, and treatment in specialist centres such as the Beatson West of Scotland cancer centre, where Elizabeth was treated, in his words, "wonderfully well". I am sure that Mr Murphy would welcome any advances for other families experiencing this disease.

We have heard calls from both sides of the Chamber for greater knowledge and awareness of the signs and greater investment in early diagnosis. This is something that we would like to tackle across the House. I hope that the Minister will pay heed to the comments that have been made.

10.8 am

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) for securing this very important debate and for his vice-chairmanship of the all-party parliamentary group on ovarian cancer, which I am extremely proud to chair. We work very well together. Indeed, earlier this year he and I shared the chairing responsibilities for two oral evidence sessions as part of the preparation for publication of our report entitled "Diagnosing ovarian cancer sooner: what more can be done?" to mark World Ovarian Cancer Day 2018. I thank him for that also.

The hon. Gentleman made an excellent and extremely moving opening speech. He shared many examples of women's lived experiences of this awful disease, including his own experience with his mum Linda. I have no doubt she will be proudly watching him lead this debate. We are all MPs—that's for sure—but we are also real people with lived experiences and families. Sharing those personal experiences can improve the debate, as it has done today. I thank the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) and for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for their contributions to this important debate. We have also had some excellent interventions.

Many of the key statistics around this awful disease have been covered so far in this excellent debate, but if something is worth saying once, it is worth saying twice. Over 7,000 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer every year in the UK, but sadly survival rates are among the lowest in Europe. Less than half of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer survive five years or more. Tragically, 4,000 women in the UK die each year because of this awful disease. Although progress has been made in diagnosing and treating ovarian cancer, there is still much more to be done and I want to highlight some ways the Government can do that.

I was extremely grateful to the Minister for meeting with me recently to discuss the key recommendations from the APPG's report, which I just mentioned, and I will raise some of them now. Diagnosis is one of the key ways that women with ovarian cancer are often let down. Many women report experiencing delays in diagnosis. An astonishingly high proportion, 45%, say that it took three months or even longer to receive a diagnosis after first approaching their GP with symptoms. As we have heard, symptom awareness is one of the key things we must address. This is most concerning because we know the significant impact early diagnosis can have on chances of survival. Nine in 10 women who receive an early diagnosis of ovarian cancer can survive for five years or more, compared with less than five in 100 women who are diagnosed at a very late stage.

I want to share a story, as a few hon. Members have. My constituent Gail wrote to me ahead of this debate telling me the experience of her younger sister, who has stage 3 ovarian cancer that has spread to her stomach lining. Although she is currently responding to treatment, it took a long time to get the diagnosis in the first place. At one point, she was being incorrectly treated for rheumatoid arthritis. That changed only when she developed blood clots in her legs, which led the hospital to look for cancer. We can only imagine the added distress that this kind of delay can cause in an already extremely difficult experience.

As a result of her sister's diagnosis, Gail underwent genetic testing and discovered that she had the BRCA2 gene, which, as we know, gives her a high predisposition to ovarian and breast cancer. My constituent underwent elective surgery at the start of the year to remove her ovaries and fallopian tubes, and is awaiting the next step with regard to the breast cancer risk. This case shows how important it is that patients are diagnosed as soon as possible, not only for themselves, but for their family members who may have to undergo further testing.

On early diagnosis, will the Minister support a review of the referral pathway for ovarian cancer, particularly in relation to the introduction of the shortened pathway that we have seen in Scotland, so that, as the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire also requested, the CA125 blood tests and ultrasound tests can be done at the same time, rather than sequentially, as they are now? What steps has the Department taken to ensure that NICE guidelines, which say that women should be offered BRCA testing at diagnosis, are adhered to? Ovarian Cancer Action found that 30% of women are not being offered this testing. I know that the new multidisciplinary diagnostic centres will also help with early diagnosis, but they are in the pilot stage and limited to 10 sites. Will the Minister confirm whether there are plans for more centres, so that everyone can have access to those services regardless of where they live?

As we know, the four key symptoms of ovarian cancer are a bloated tummy, needing to urinate more often or urgently, experiencing tummy pain and always feeling full. Anyone newly experiencing those symptoms 12 times a month or more is advised to see their GP. However, awareness of these symptoms is worryingly low. According to Target Ovarian Cancer, just 20% of women can name bloating as a symptom and only 3% can name feeling full or loss of appetite. Awareness

campaigns run by Public Health England have been shown to be highly effective. The one currently running focuses on blood in urine. Considering that we know how important it is that those with ovarian cancer are diagnosed quickly, it would be helpful to know whether Public Health England has any plans to run a Be Clear on Cancer campaign that focuses on either ovarian cancer or a cluster of symptoms for a range of cancers, including ovarian.

I recently attended Ovarian Cancer Action's research grant award ceremony, where I heard about some of the incredible work being funded across the UK. The innovation and determination of some of the projects is truly astonishing. One project—it is hard to describe, but I will give it a go anyway—had a huge number of examples of DNA that needed going through on an individual basis and labelling. Due to the sheer quantity of data that needed sifting, those in charge of the programme invented a Tinder-style app—I know it sounds unusual—that enabled people to quickly categorise the different examples of DNA by swiping left or right. That information was then fed back into the research team's data, to build up a comprehensive body of data.

Another project that received funding was that of Dr Jonathan Krell and Dr James Flanagan of the Ovarian Cancer Action Research Centre. They are investigating how changes to our genes can play a big part in the risk of developing cancer, including assessing how feasible it would be to implement a new genetic testing model that identifies and supports families at risk of ovarian cancer because of an inherited BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation. With that in mind, does the Minister's Department have any plans to increase Government funding into medical research for the early detection, diagnosis and prevention of ovarian cancer?

Finally, I want to cover the issue of surgery. As the Minister knows, surgery for ovarian cancer is widely considered one of the biggest factors in survival rates. Surgery for ovarian cancer is extremely difficult. Someone I know well who had the surgery once described it to me as being like trying to remove a bunch of grapes, and if any of the grapes was punctured or broke that would cause huge internal damage by spreading the cancer. Although there are a number of surgical centres of excellence across the UK, there are many women who do not have access to them and are being operated on by general surgeons—no generalist will ever be as good as a specialist. Through no fault of their own, those women will have a lower chance of survival than those who receive the specialist surgery. What assurances can the Minister give that steps are being taken to ensure that all women with ovarian cancer have access to a specialist surgeon and that the regional variation can be brought to an end?

Before I conclude I want to pay tribute to some of the incredible organisations and campaigners that I have had the pleasure of working with on this issue over the years. They work tirelessly not only to combat the disease, but to provide support and comfort to those who have it. They include Ovarian Cancer Action, the Eve Appeal and Target Ovarian Cancer, which also does much to support the work of the APPG on ovarian cancer in its role as the secretariat to the group. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about the ways in which the Government can support the work of those

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

great charities and campaigners, and support the thousands of women across the country who sadly suffer from this disease.

10.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Bone. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) on securing the debate. As vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on ovarian cancer, the subject means a great deal to him. We also heard more about why it means a lot to him. I place on record my thanks to the all-party group and to the excellent ovarian charities. Target Ovarian Cancer is the biggest, but others work tirelessly in that space, such as Ovacom.

Watching my hon. Friend brought back memories of sitting in that exact chair as one of the vice-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on ovarian cancer almost exactly seven years ago, in October 2011. I was talking about ovarian cancer, which has also had an impact on my family, although sadly not with the outcome that my hon. Friend currently has. I described it as a “silent national scandal”, which was then trending—quite something in 2011. I was also present for the 2014 debate that he remembers, which was the last time the subject was specifically debated in the House. It was a pleasure to hear him today; he reminded me of me—but I put on record the warning that this is where I have ended up.

I was pleased to meet with the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and Target Ovarian Cancer a couple of weeks ago to discuss the all-party group’s report, as the hon. Lady said. As she knows, I take the all-party groups very seriously. I have the report here—this is my coffee table copy in the Department of Health and Social Care, and anybody who knows my office knows that what is on the coffee table is what counts. It is an excellent report with many important recommendations and I will return to it a lot in my remarks. I have already committed to responding fully to it and the hon. Lady knows that I will do that.

I am responding to my third cancer debate in the House in less than two weeks, which demonstrates that improving cancer diagnosis and treatment is a priority for right hon. and hon. Members, as it is for me as the Minister with responsibility for cancer, the Government, the Prime Minister and the Opposition. In this job, I am fortunate to see first hand the superb work being done by our NHS staff and by our many partners and charities across the cancer community in implementing the 96 recommendations in the cancer strategy for England.

We are three years into that work and cancer survival rates have never been higher, as has been said. About 7,000 people are alive today who would not have been had mortality rates stayed the same as before Cancer Research UK and Harpal, who led the work, published the strategy. As I make clear every time I respond to a cancer debate, however, I know that we must do more and that people want us to do more, because we still lose 12,000 women a year to breast cancer and far too many women to ovarian cancer. We must do better. Despite the huge strides that I have mentioned, and the best-ever survival rates, ovarian cancer survival rates in

the UK are among the lowest in Europe with fewer than half of all women diagnosed surviving five years or more, so there is much that we need to do.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): The Minister has mentioned the success rates in dealing with cases of ovarian cancer in our country compared with some of our European partners. Can he set out what we can learn from them in improving outcomes for women in this country?

Steve Brine: I will certainly cover that. Put bluntly, as I will come on to in a second, and as almost all hon. Members have mentioned, it is about early detection. That has an impact because, as the former chair of the all-party parliamentary group on cancer, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), has said many times, early diagnosis is cancer’s “magic key”. We have that magic key in some cancers in this country. We do very well in breast cancer, where the early-stage survival rates are well over the 75% target that the Prime Minister set out at the party conference earlier this month, but it is true that we do not yet have the magic key in enough cancers. I will come on to what we need to do.

I was pleased when the Prime Minister announced the ambitious package of measures for cancer care and treatment earlier this month, which will be at the heart of our long-term plan for the NHS. It will be backed up by the new funding that was announced in the summer and confirmed in yesterday’s Budget. We will overhaul screening programmes, provide new investment in state-of-the-art technology to boost our research and innovation capability and, critically, transform how we diagnose cancers earlier. As I have said, our ambition is to diagnose 75% of all cancers at an early stage, which will result in an estimated 55,000 more people surviving cancer for five years in England each year from 2028.

All hon. Members have mentioned early diagnosis, and many have mentioned some stats—or the same stats. The important one for me is that a quarter of women with ovarian cancer are diagnosed through an emergency presentation. When I first became an MP, I remember going to meetings with the all-party parliamentary group on ovarian cancer and the all-party parliamentary group on cancer, where I was shown the stats for my constituency of the number of people who presented in the emergency department with cancer. That really frightened and shocked me—it still does—and along with my personal history, it was one of the reasons I wanted to get involved in health and cancer when I joined the House.

Of that quarter of women with ovarian cancer who are diagnosed through an emergency presentation, just 45% survive for a year or more. That is no surprise—if someone is diagnosed in an emergency department, they have exhibited more outward symptoms, so they are at a later stage and their survival rate is lower. The survival rate is more than 80% when women are diagnosed following a GP referral, so it is crystal clear where improvements are urgently required. That is why early diagnosis is a key strategic priority in the cancer strategy. As has been said, it allows for more options for treatment and, crucially, the earlier a cancer is diagnosed, the

more likely it is that doctors will be able to provide successful treatment or operate on the “bunch of grapes”—that is a good analogy, which I have heard before.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire talked about the multidisciplinary diagnostic centres. NHS England and the Department are testing new innovative ways of diagnosing cancer earlier. As regular attendees of cancer debates will know, I never tire of praising the accelerate, co-ordinate, evaluate—ACE—centres, which are the multidisciplinary diagnostic centres for patients with vague or non-specific symptoms. As the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West said, they are being piloted across 10 sites in the country. They offer patients a range of tests on the same day—a point that has been made by several hon. Members—with rapid access to results.

The centres are magnificent. I visited the ACE centre at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford earlier this year. I met the practitioners who work there, the commissioning group and the GPs who are involved in it. GPs are tremendously, and rightly, excited about the centres. They will make a huge step-change improvement in early diagnosis, particularly for cancers such as ovarian cancer, where symptoms can be vague and can appear less serious at first. The plan is for that innovation to address the delay that the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West and other hon. Members spoke about, so instead of a GP having to refer for one test and wait for the results, then refer for the next test and wait for an appointment, the ACE centres will allow for a snappy, quicker turnaround. They could be a game-changer and could unearth the magic key when it comes to ovarian cancer.

The APPG’s report says that we should roll out ACE centres nationwide, so I am delighted, as I know the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West is, that the Prime Minister recently committed to doing just that, as part of our long-term plan. I do not get excited easily, Mr Bone, as you well know, but I am excited about the ACE centres and they are potentially transformative.

I turn now to early diagnosis in primary care. Other support measures are necessary to ensure that more cancers are caught in primary care. The NICE guidelines for suspected cancer referral recommend safety netting for those people who are at higher risk of cancer but who do not meet the referral criteria. Both Cancer Research UK and Macmillan have produced additional advice and support for GPs to implement those guidelines, including the safety netting that I have just mentioned, over the last few years.

I was blown away to meet Macmillan GPs at Britain Against Cancer earlier this year. They are an excellent innovation and have an awful lot to give, but they are few in number. I am very interested in them and I talk to Macmillan about the potential use of Macmillan GPs in helping to transfer specialist knowledge of cancer to wider general practitioners. I always say of GPs that they are not dissimilar to MPs when we hold our surgeries, in that almost everyone who comes to our surgeries is more of an expert on the subject that they have come about than we are, because we are general practitioners. So GPs get a hard rap, but they are general practitioners and that is the area of the profession that they have chosen to go into.

We need to support GPs better through diagnosing cancer, from our targeted lung cancer screening in the lorries in car parks in the north-west—we trialled that approach in Manchester and it has been very successful—to the ACE centres that I have mentioned. That is all aimed at supporting the NHS, especially GPs, to identify cancer earlier.

The shadow Minister asked about the review of the referral pathway. As she knows, the implementation of the faster diagnosis standard requires trusts to review and speed up diagnosis pathways for suspected cancers. NHS England and NHS Improvement are working closely together to emphasise the key principles for improvement that we need in this area, which include ensuring that the most value is derived from each appointment. The standard is being measured for a year from April 2019 to April 2020, when it comes into place. That will ensure that patients are told that they have a cancer diagnosis or an all-clear within a maximum of 28 days of being urgently referred by their GP for suspected cancer. As I always say, 28 days is not a target; it is a maximum. When someone has a cancer worry, 28 minutes can seem like a lifetime, and such things always seem to come on a Friday night, when the weekend lies ahead. Twenty-eight days is our new target, but it is certainly not what we aim for; we aim to do better than that.

We heard from several Members—including the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and the shadow Minister—about Be Clear on Cancer. That campaign is one of the great successes of public policy in recent years. The APPG’s report also recommends, as the hon. Lady said, running a Be Clear on Cancer campaign to raise awareness of ovarian cancer symptoms. However, she is experienced and smart enough in this area to know that Be Clear on Cancer cannot focus specifically on a cancer type, such as breast cancer; it is about clusters. That is where we have found it to be most successful.

Public Health England, for which I have ministerial responsibility, takes a number of factors into account when deciding which campaigns to develop; of course, there is healthy competition in this space and unfortunately there is always more demand than supply. One of the main criteria in deciding which campaigns to run with is the scope to save lives through early diagnosis; that measure is what I will judge that work against.

Campaigns can be effective only if the cancer has a clear early sign or symptom that the general public can act upon if it should emerge. Being honest, even blunt, that is part of the challenge here, as has already been said and for the reasons that have already been given. So the regional Be Clear on Cancer pilot for ovarian cancer took place in the north-west of England in February and March 2014—a while ago now—with this simple key message:

“Feeling bloated, most days, for three weeks or more could be a sign of ovarian cancer. Tell your doctor.”

PHE is currently undertaking new data analysis and research to determine Be Clear on Cancer campaigns for next year, which is 2019-20. At this time, no decisions have been made, and I will take the bid from today’s debate very strongly. The outcomes from the regional pilot—and a pilot that focused on a range of abdominal symptoms such as diarrhoea, bloating and discomfort, which can be indicative of a number of cancers, including

[*Steve Brine*]

ovarian cancer—will of course be taken strongly into consideration, and that is where I think we will head with this work.

However, let me clear that PHE and NHS England have had a very clear steer from me that I want to run the campaign on lower abdominal symptoms as soon as practicably possible. We have to make sure that the operational capability is in place across the NHS, because the worst thing that we could do is create a demand without being able to meet it. That is a rather boring, practical reality, but it is a reality. I reiterated this point to the APPG recently when we met and I will of course keep Members updated; I know they follow these matters very closely.

The hon. Member for Strangford also asked about genetic testing and its role in identifying the increased risk of ovarian cancer. One area where England is very much at the cutting edge of cancer diagnosis is in the creation of the new national genomic testing network, which will be delivered through seven new genomic laboratory hubs, as we call them. They will give patients access to state-of-the-art tests that can diagnose their disease or help to inform their treatment. So the genomic lab hubs will do three things: provide consistent and equitable access to genomic tests, which is very important, as it will ensure there is a level playing field; operate to common national standards, specifications and protocols; and deliver the single national genomic testing directory, which will cover the use of all the genomic technology, from the single gene to the whole-genome sequencing for cancer and for rare and inherited disease.

The labs are in a period of transition, to embed fully the new infrastructure and the new national genomic test directory. I hope that this transition will ensure the safe roll-out of the service without disrupting clinical care. Patients will continue to receive the testing they need to inform their clinical care, and the new national test directory will also include the BRCA testing for women with ovarian cancer in line with NICE guidance, which the hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned.

While I am talking about the hon. Gentleman, or “the hon. Member for Westminster Hall” as I like to call him, I note that he also touched on screening programmes, as did the Opposition spokesperson and my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire. The UK National Screening Committee is awaiting the updated results of the UK trial of ovarian screening, which is the UK collaborative trial of ovarian cancer screening, as it is known. The secretariat is in contact with the researchers and the committee will review the findings as soon as they are published.

The hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to talk about the workforce. On page eight of its report, the APPG outlines the importance of sonographers. There will be increased emphasis on diagnosing cancers earlier, but we will not be able to find the magic key without those people who do the searching, who are our NHS workforce. So we must ensure that we have the right workforce in the right place to deliver that frontline care and meet the Prime Minister’s ambition.

Last December, Health Education England published its first ever cancer workforce plan, committing to the expansion of capacity and skills. HEE will follow that

plan up with a longer term strategy that will be aligned with the NHS long-term plan, which seems sensible to me, and that will look at workforce needs beyond 2021. We have to look at a very long landscape when it comes to the NHS workforce. I will not pre-empt that plan, but I can assure hon. Members that it will set out how we will ensure that a sustainable cancer workforce are in place to deliver on the ambitions that we have set out.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire talked about the cancer dashboard. The APPG report, which of course he was involved in drafting, also recommends including ovarian cancer data within the dashboard. The dashboard was first published in May 2016 as a tool to help the cancer alliances, the commissioners and the providers in the acute trusts to quickly and easily identify the priority areas for improvement, and to enable easy tracking of progress towards our national ambitions.

PHE is working with NHS England’s cancer programme team on the next phase of the dashboard development, and that will be informed by the needs of the key stakeholders and the cancer charities, with which I hold a regular roundtable; some of those charities’ staff are here in the Gallery today. It is no secret that hon. Members know that I am frustrated about the cancer dashboard. I am impatient about most things, as my private office will sadly attest, and I am incredibly impatient about the dashboard being limited to the top four cancers. I want to see it expanded and I intend to see it expanded: NHSE and PHE have a very clear direction from me that I will be watching their work and I expect to see it producing what I and other Members in this House want.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West spoke about surgery and the mixed picture around the country. I do not want to short-change her by not giving her the detailed answer I want to provide to her good point, so I will look into it and write to her and the other Members who have been in the debate today. We obviously must diagnose early, as that gives us better and less radical treatment options, but for some surgery is a sad reality. We must ensure that the NHS is good at not only sharing best practice but implementing it, and that is as true in surgery as anywhere else.

I pay tribute to the hard work and professionalism of our dedicated cancer workforce, and to the Members who care so passionately about the subject and have brought it to the House today. Ultimately, it is our workforce who will determine the success of the cancer strategy and the long-term plan for the NHS. We can only set the direction and the ambition and ensure that the resources are in place, and I believe that I am doing that, as Minister for cancer.

I am excited by the huge potential for the next 10 years of cancer diagnosis, treatment and support. We have fully established the 19 cancer alliances. We have backed them with the funding they need to transform services, and will go on doing that, to ensure that the NHS long-term plan can be delivered on the ground through the alliances, with cancer at its heart. The plan can turbo-charge all that we have achieved through the cancer strategy. I have said before, and I will say again, that I want the alliances to be much more open and accountable and much more approachable, especially by Members of Parliament in England, who should be

able to call them to account much more than they do. I suspect that many Members here have the chief executive of their local trust on speed dial; I hazard a guess that they do not have the leader of their cancer alliance there also, and that should change.

It was interesting to get the Scottish perspective from my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont). We would like to see the ambition in England matched across the whole United Kingdom and we absolutely stand ready, as always, to work with Scottish Members and the Scottish Government. If there is anything we can do to help share that ambition, we will do it.

NHS England, Public Health England and I, with the tireless support of our cancer community—team cancer as I always call it—are committed to making a reality the ambitions that the Prime Minister has set out. That will ensure, as I said in this place not two weeks ago, that we continue to make huge leaps forward over the next 10 years to a future where cancer has no future.

10.42 am

Lee Rowley: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to this exemplary debate. It has been one of those debates that we all aspire to have, in which we talk about the detail and leave out a lot of the politics, and in which there is unity regarding wanting the same outcome: we all want to be able to treat the disease more quickly, with better outcomes and fewer people experiencing it. I am grateful to everyone for entering into the discussion in that spirit.

I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for attending this morning, for highlighting the importance of the issue to him, and for mentioning all the work being done in Northern Ireland—particularly for raising the point about genome testing. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for sharing his experience north of the border. He, like so many others, provided some of the most important elements of the debate—examples of constituents' own experiences. I also thank the Front-Bench spokespeople: the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for also sharing her experience north of the border; and my colleague on the all-party parliamentary group, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who spent so much time highlighting the group's great work. It has

been a privilege to be part of that work over the past few months; the report is a great piece of work and I hope to see improvements coming out of it.

I also thank the Minister. I am a relatively new Member, but I can often tell in debates when Ministers are going through the motions and when they actually care, and today I have heard a speech that demonstrates a genuine interest. It was great to hear about the Minister's personal connection and about how he cares about the issue, and it was interesting to hear some of the things he highlighted. "Lots to come" is the summary I think it is fair to say we can take from the speech, with regard to the ACE centres, the potential for more public health campaigns, the genome point and the screening. I was particularly glad to hear about the dashboard, which I hope, in time, will give us an opportunity to push forward and demonstrate greater transparency.

Although they are not all still in their place, I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) and for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), and the hon. Members for Blaydon (Liz Twist), for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and for Upper Bann (David Simpson). I am incredibly grateful for their contributions. I also thank everyone in the Public Gallery, who has listened and provided support. I am aware that there are Members in the room to whom the matter means much but who, by convention, are not able to speak: my hon. Friend the Members for Erewash (Maggie Throup) and you, Mr Bone. You are undertaking a different role today, as Chair, but you were so kind in supporting me when we applied to the Backbench Business Committee for the debate. I am grateful to you and my hon. Friend for your silent but heartfelt support.

This is an important area. It has affected me personally, but it is not about the personal effects; it is about ensuring that we make progress as a country in sorting out the disease and resolving the issues, reducing the number of people out there who get a diagnosis. The debate has shown that a lot has been achieved, that a lot can be done, and that there is a lot of progress we can make, and I look forward to seeing that progress in the coming years.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): I thank all Members for the excellent debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered ovarian cancer diagnosis and treatment.

10.46 am

Sitting suspended.

Leaving the EU: Port of Sheerness

11 am

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered use of the Port of Sheerness after the UK leaves the EU.

I will try to keep my remarks in order, Mr Bone, and I hope everyone else will, too. Whether or not the Government agree an acceptable post-Brexit deal with the European Union, something will have to be done to relieve pressure on the port of Dover. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, most of the roll-on/roll-off traffic in south-east England is via the Dover-Calais route. That means that Dover handles a huge volume of business. It is one of the world's busiest passenger ports. In 2017, some 11.7 million passengers, 2.6 million lorries, 2.2 million cars and motorcycles, and 80,000 coaches passed through Dover. In addition, Dover's cargo terminal handles 300,000 tonnes and 9,000 containers every year, and business is increasing. As you can imagine, Mr Bone, with all that traffic heading in and out of Dover, the local roads are badly congested, even at the best of times. When there is a problem with the ferries—often caused by strike action at Calais—that congestion gets even worse and Dover becomes gridlocked.

The Dover traffic assessment project, otherwise known as the Dover TAP, holds around 1,000 lorries on the A20 just outside Dover and has been used hundreds of times recently. Thankfully, Dover TAP has been preventing a repeat of Operation Stack. I am sure my hon. Friend will recall it bringing the roads in Kent to a near standstill for a month in 2015. If the UK leaves the EU without a deal, what happened to Kent's roads in 2015 could look like a walk in the park. Indeed, unless a contingency plan is put in place to combat a no-deal scenario, the situation could become critical and have a huge impact not only on Kent's economy, but on that of the UK as a whole.

Highways England has been looking for an alternative to Operation Stack, including closing the M26 and using it as a car park. In my opinion, such an option would not solve the problem, but simply move it from one part of Kent to another. Some days, 10,000 lorries pass through the port of Dover in a 24-hour period. If those lorries were held up, that would be equivalent to a queue more than 90 miles long. That is a lot of potential traffic congestion, and it could see whole swathes of the south-east grind to a halt, but such a scenario is avoidable. Parking up thousands of lorries does not have to happen, because there are other solutions. For instance, rather than relying on Operation Stack or similar parking arrangements that have not worked in the past, would it not be better to provide lorry drivers with alternative routes to and from the continent? The port of Sheerness offers one such alternative.

Mr Bone, you might ask, "Why Sheerness?" Well, it has a number of advantages. For a start it has a ro-ro terminal that is available for use today. It was built to service the Olau Line, which ran a ferry service from Sheerness to the Netherlands. Although that ferry service stopped running in 1994, the ro-ro terminal is still in perfect working order. The port of Sheerness has other excellent facilities and is already one of the major ports for the importation of cars into the UK. Unlike Dover,

it has plenty of spare space and room to expand. Although Sheerness is further away from Calais by sea than Dover, it is closer by road to London and the midlands, so the longer sea journey from France would be counter-balanced by a shorter road journey to the lorry's final destination. In addition, Sheerness is closer than Dover to the Netherlands, which opens up the possibility of routing more freight via the Dutch ports, such as Rotterdam.

It is worth pointing out that Sheerness is the only port in England with water as deep as that at Rotterdam, so it would make a perfect partner. Another advantage of encouraging a Rotterdam-Sheerness route is that the road journey from Germany and eastern Europe to Rotterdam is shorter than that to Calais. Once again, although the sea journey would be greater, there would be a saving on road travel at both ends. While having a longer sea journey might seem a disadvantage, in a post-Brexit world it would be an advantage, because it would give more time for the customs paperwork to be sorted out electronically at either end. That is what is happening at Felixstowe, which manages to import £86 billion of goods every year from inside and outside the EU without the need for lengthy customs checks. Such a system replicated in other ports, such as Sheerness, would ensure frictionless borders and no hold-ups.

One final advantage of using the port of Sheerness is the amount of commerce that already takes place in the area. In my constituency, I have the Morrisons regional distribution centre; the new Aldi regional distribution centre; the Kemsley paper mill, which is the second largest fibre-based paper operation in Europe; and the Sittingbourne Eurolink, which is one of the largest industrial and manufacturing estates in southern England. As you can imagine, Mr Bone, all those industries generate a lot of lorry movements, many from the continent. Routing those lorries via Sheerness would reduce pressure on Dover and makes a lot of sense logistically.

Making better use of the port of Sheerness post-Brexit would require some investment. For example, the A249 dual carriageway would have to be extended half a mile into the docks. An improved electronic customs system like that at Felixstowe would have to be installed to ensure lorries could be cleared with as little delay as possible. I appreciate that that would come at a cost to the Exchequer, but when we consider the wider impact on the country if goods are held up at either Calais or Dover and the costs involved with providing an alternative to Operation Stack, the investment would be a small price to pay for what would effectively become a safety net for Dover.

11.7 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) on securing this important debate. It highlights an issue that is topical for both his constituency and the wider economy.

Our ports are key to our economic success. They deliver 95% of our exports and imports. I hope that we can agree that first and foremost, the United Kingdom ports are exemplary. My experience visiting our ports as

Maritime Minister has reinforced my belief that our ports are the best in the world. We have the most liberalised ports sector in Europe and arguably the world, with the private sector predominating and ports competing to attract and facilitate trade with both the EU and the rest of the world, all on a fully commercial basis with minimal expense to the taxpayer. This responsible sector has invested vigorously throughout fluctuating conditions in world trade and the domestic economy. It has adapted to changing patterns of demand, including radical changes in the requirements for energy generation over recent years. Consequently, it is well placed to meet the challenges and opportunities that the country will welcome as we resume our position as an independent trading power.

The Government have set a highly facilitative context for private investment through the national policy statement for ports, which was designated in 2012. It sets a strong presumption in favour of socially and environmentally responsible development. The sector has long recognised its environmental stewardship duties as it often occupies sensitive sites at the land/water interface. Moreover, ports have permitted development rights that help to facilitate modest adaptation of port estates in a nimble way where that has no adverse environmental implications.

Our ports have many strengths, especially being nimble and flexible, so the ports sector as a whole stands ready to meet challenges. As the ports sector is such a competitive one, I must remain neutral in that commercial arena, so I hope my hon. Friend will understand if I do not sing the praises of Peel Ports or of any other individual port operator at the expense of others.

Many other hon. Members will doubtless be quick to point out that they have equally alert and vigorous ports in their constituencies, which I know to be true as I have had the privilege of seeing several in operation at first hand.

Gordon Henderson: I want to make it clear—I thought I made it clear in my speech—that I was using Sheerness as an example only because it is in my constituency and I know a lot about it, but the case could apply to many other ports. We should point out to those who are filled with doom and gloom about what will happen post-Brexit that we have ports other than Dover. That is all I am trying to say.

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend makes an important contribution. He is absolutely right. We must seize the opportunity and recognise that we have many productive and flexible ports up and down our country.

One of the reasons prompting this timely debate is the success of the port of Dover, along with the channel tunnel, which is why any sizeable proportionate reduction in their traffic would be so challenging to replace elsewhere. My hon. Friend talked about the level of traffic and freight going through the port of Dover, and he also referred to the port of Felixstowe. That remains the largest UK container port and is another example of a world-class port capable of accommodating today's ultra-large container vessels. Its sister port, Harwich, is a versatile ro-ro facility that handles both accompanied and unaccompanied ro-ro trailers. Also, Associated British Ports has advertised the strengths of its Humber ports for unaccompanied ro-ro and is also investing in short sea container capability at Immingham. Those are just

a few examples. The Government are involving the whole UK ports industry in discussions on resilience issues directly and through the UK Major Ports Group and British Ports Association. Nevertheless, the initiative of Sheerness in promoting its ro-ro facilities is a good example of an enterprising and positive transport sector.

My hon. Friend will have heard from Ministers that we are confident of securing a withdrawal deal with the European Union that is in the interests of both the UK and the EU member states as trading partners, for this is not a zero-sum game. All the participants in international trade stand to gain, and that applies as much to the UK's ro-ro business with the EU 27 after we leave as it does to our trade with the rest of the world, so we expect an agreement and a transition period that will enable a sensible adaptation to the inevitable technical changes in border arrangements. However, as a responsible Government, we must plan for all eventualities.

There has been a great deal of speculation, especially in the past week, about the Government's intentions in the event of a no-deal outcome. The Government have made it clear that UK border controls—those that we control—will continue to enable trade to flow as frictionlessly as possible, which is what we are working towards.

Gordon Henderson: I am sorry to interrupt again. I accept everything the Minister says, but, because the Calais-Dover route is so short, it does not lend itself to electronic trans-shipments at the moment, so we have to upgrade those facilities. My understanding is that the software used at Felixstowe could be changed to accommodate Dover. When asked how long it would take, someone said a few minutes, and we should explore such options.

Ms Ghani: Once again my hon. Friend makes a positive intervention on how our ports can continue to be flexible and take on board new technology to ensure that all the checks are made in good time, especially when we consider the very short journeys to Dover.

Certain checks and controls, including those already undertaken from time to time on EU goods, have to take place at the frontier to be effective, and that will continue to be the case. But there is much that we can and will do to expedite flow, especially where checks can be undertaken away from the physical frontier. We cannot control what controls the EU will require or what member states will do in response to those requirements in the event that we leave without a deal. We can seek to influence such things, of course, but ultimately there remains a risk that the flow of traffic will be affected.

The Dover strait, encompassing the channel tunnel, concentrates the greater part of accompanied HGV trade with the continent. It is a 24/7 operation that includes a stream of ferries departing at half-hourly intervals. Inevitably, such a dense flow of HGVs could become subject to some constriction in the event that prolonged checks feed back into the queue of arriving vessels. We would be failing in our duty to the public if we did not take such possibilities very seriously and prepare for all eventualities.

On the opportunities proposed at Sheerness, earlier this year Peel Ports issued its pamphlet, "Brexit unlocked—A Contingency Option Using Uncongested

[Ms Ghani]

Ports". That report highlighted the ability of ports that are geared up to welcome and handle unaccompanied trailers to provide a service to customers whose cargo is not perishable or otherwise necessarily quick to the market. That can have further benefits, allowing a little more time to clear border controls in either direction and within commercially agreeable bounds to use temporary storage on ports rather than increase stockholding in the customer's onsite warehouse or distribution centre.

Of course, unaccompanied cargo is nothing new. Indeed, the pamphlet itself points out that more than 70% of unit-load traffic from ports in France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands already travels unaccompanied, whether in trailers or sea containers. Equally, of course, Dover and the tunnel will remain open for business whatever the outcome on borders, and along with the ferry operators will themselves continue to attract a powerful commercial pull through geography as well as customer service, especially on the more time-critical traffic, although not limited to that. It is not my job to pick winners or direct traffic. Decentralised decision making by traders who are best placed to weigh their own needs and time pressures will continue to do that. However, it is my and my Department's job to consider all reasonably possible outcomes and pursue the overarching objective for traffic to be as frictionless as possible. That is what we have been doing and will continue to do. I am glad that port, ferry and rail operators are also engaging with those challenges.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of traffic management. My Department, Highways England and other partners are working closely with the Kent Resilience Forum and other partners to develop contingency plans that will replace Operation Stack. First, we have established the Dover TAP—traffic assessment protocol—which has successfully avoided the need to deploy Stack since 2015. That will continue and Operation Stack will be superseded by Operation Brock, which will ensure that the M20 can be kept open and that traffic will continue to flow in both directions at times of cross-channel disruption from whatever cause.

Operation Brock consists of three phases: a contraflow queuing system between junctions 8 and 9 of the M20, with holding areas at Manston airport and, if necessary, on the M26. This represents a significant improvement on previous deployments of Operation Stack when junctions were closed and traffic diverted off the M20 on to local roads, adversely affecting local communities and businesses in Kent. We will therefore have substantial truck-holding capacity while maintaining flow of traffic on the M20. Obviously, we hope that none of that will be needed, but I hope my hon. Friend will be reassured that the Department and the agency are working hard to cover all eventualities and improve the quality of our collective response.

Gordon Henderson: Although we have been talking about the implications of Brexit, I said at the beginning that we have to solve the problem whether or not we have a no-deal scenario. It is bad for Kent and for the country. Whether or not we have Operation Stack, we need more lorry parks. Every constituency in Kent suffers from all its lay-bys being cluttered with lorries.

Lorries are parked on the M2 every night. We have to do something about that. I have been working with Kent County Council and Highways England, and I have offered sites in my constituency for lorry parks, but nothing ever happens. I hope that the Minister can encourage something to happen on that.

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend again raises the important issue of lorry parks. We know we need more, but no Member would like them in their constituency. I value his contribution, and I will ensure that his passion for ensuring that we have lorry parks is passed on to the Roads Minister.

I know that the A249 is important to my hon. Friend. Road connections are vital to any ro-ro port, and indeed to most others. Our port connectivity study, published just last April, surveyed the situation in England nationally. It acknowledged that there is a good case for strengthening sections of the strategic road network and specific potential to upgrade sections of the A249 near Sheerness. The study is a platform for future investment in worthwhile improvements at a range of ports including Sheerness, but of course the port is open for business with its existing connectivity. I would welcome another meeting with my hon. Friend to try to take that forward, especially with the Roads Minister.

Gordon Henderson *rose*—

Ms Ghani: I see another intervention on its way.

Gordon Henderson: I am sorry to intervene yet again. The A249 and the link I mentioned into the port are important. I mentioned it to the Secretary of State a year ago, and he instructed Highways England to go down and have a look at it. The response from Highways England was that it is not necessary because it is not busy enough. Highways England does not seem to understand that we will make it busier only if we get the road link in. That is where it is sadly not always singing from the same hymn sheet as the Department for Transport.

Ms Ghani: I hope Highways England will acknowledge my hon. Friend's intervention. Our port connectivity study made it clear that that part of the A249 requires investment to ensure that our ports continue to do what they do best, which is not only bringing freight in but moving it up and down the country.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising an important topic. He has rightly highlighted the potential of an important port business in his constituency, as well as of other significant businesses up and down the country. I am sure that he and I agree that it is part of a wider picture of readiness to seize commercial opportunities across the UK ports sector. I look forward to working with him in flying the flag for UK ports. I have no doubt that you will agree, Mr Bone, that the UK was a great maritime trading power for many years before we joined the European Union, and we will continue to be a great maritime nation after Brexit.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 am

Sitting suspended.

Beauty and the Built Environment

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered beauty and the built environment.

It is a great pleasure to speak on this subject. I am prepared to be corrected if anyone knows better, but I imagine that this is the first House of Commons debate specifically on beauty for a very long time indeed. Yet the journey through life should be the pursuit of the sublime. It should be a search for absolute truth. In it we should experience and rejoice in all the exposure to beauty that characterises each and all of our journeys.

Beauty, whether in the laughter of a child, the scent of a rose, a glorious landscape or the setting sun, makes life richer and more fulfilled. In doing so, it does not merely satisfy our aesthetic needs; it takes us closer to the understanding of truth. As Keats wrote:

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all”.

What Keats meant was that absolute truth is exposed to us—explained to us, one might say—through the experience of beauty. It is very hard for human beings, who are frail, faulted and fallen, to understand that truth except through the means that I have described: those touches or experiences of something pure, special and magical.

Sadly, we live in an age that is dull and utilitarian and in which mystery and magic are extraordinarily unfashionable. It is odd that that should be, for it was not true for most of our history, and has not been so for most great civilisations. It is unusual to be as utilitarian as we are, but now it is time for a change—for a renaissance. It is time for beauty to be put back at the heart of Government policy. I am delighted that the Minister shares that view, as I know from our conversations. It is a delight to have a Housing Minister who cares about the quality of housing, and all that says about its look and feel and our sense of place, rather than simply the quantity of houses that we build. I shall say more about that in my long and fascinating speech.

The scale of the housing problem means that some may dismiss concerns about style, regarding them as indulgent or even irrelevant. “Aren’t there more important things to worry about?”, we hear people say. Indeed, the focus of housing policy has long been on targets for quantity rather than quality. We risk having a competition across the political spectrum to build the most houses the most quickly by stacking them high and selling them cheap, regardless of their quality or what they look like. That is not good enough. It short-changes our countrymen and the generations to come. Everyone should have the opportunity to live in a place of which they can feel proud and through that to develop a sense of place that informs their sense of worth, which in turn feeds social solidarity through fraternity.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend in the flow of such an elegant speech, but does he share my view that we gave ordinary people the ability to concentrate on the essence of good design as one of the key things in putting together neighbourhood plans? I am disappointed that very few

have taken that up. Will he help me to try to instil it in the minds of those who are conducting neighbourhood plans?

Mr Hayes: That is a good and important point that relates to something I shall say later about taking a bottom-up approach to delivering better-quality housing, rather than imposing top-down targets. My hon. Friend is right that we need to inspire a new generation to believe that this can be done, because there are some who say that it does not matter or even that it cannot be done—that it is no longer possible to build wonderful, lovely things, and that we are no longer capable of imagining what generations before us created. I just do not believe that. I think we can and should do better, and my hon. Friend rightly describes one of the mechanisms that might achieve that.

To dismiss concerns about the quality of what we build is both wrong and, ultimately, destructive. We cannot hope to change the public perception of new development unless we fundamentally change its very nature. Beauty should be at the heart of the public discourse. It should be part of our conversation about housing and development. As the great philosopher Roger Scruton puts it,

“we are losing beauty, and there is a danger that with it we will lose the meaning of life.”

If I am right that the journey through life requires us to experience beauty to build the personal fulfilment and communal contentment necessary to make a society that works, ignoring beauty does not merely short-change future generations; ultimately, it will destroy our chance to make a nation of which we can all feel proud. There is a close relationship between the sense of place and the social solidarity necessary to build a harmonious society. I could say a lot about harmony, but that is a subject for another time or another debate and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has spoken about it far more eloquently than I ever could, so perhaps I should defer to him.

The first misconception that I would like to quash, which sometimes prevents the debate about quality from taking place at all, is that the kind of approach that I am trying to articulate, which concentrates on beauty, is both marginal and gets in the way of getting things done. According to that view, constantly demanding more of development—I am talking about commercial as well as domestic buildings, because this is not wholly about housing—somehow acts as a barrier, an impediment, to delivering the bigger objective of building to provide a basis for growth and prosperity. I just do not believe that. Actually, I think the opposite is true.

When Her Majesty the Queen came to the throne, her reign was marked by talk of a new Elizabethan age. After the destruction caused by the war, people looked to new development with optimism. They believed that we could create a society that both looked better and was better to be part of. How curious and how sad that during Her Majesty’s reign, attitudes to development have diametrically altered. Whereas people once anticipated development with joy, they now very often look on it with despair. Frankly, that is the result of successive Governments and local authorities of all political persuasions; I cast no slur on any single party in this House.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Hayes: And certainly not on my dear friend the hon. Gentleman, to whom I am delighted to give way.

Mr Cunningham: As usual, the right hon. Gentleman takes a difficult topic and makes it understandable—to say the least—in a very jocular way. I am sure he will remember as I do when Governments used to announce at general elections that they would build about 300,000 houses a year. That has gone by the board now.

Planning is one issue when we talk about housing, and particularly social housing, in this day and age, but, more importantly, many years ago we used to have the Parker Morris standards for social housing. That is all gone now. Even in the private sector, we very often see houses that are nothing better than boxes. They look okay on the outside, but inside they are very small indeed. I do not think people are getting value for money. There is the design, but there is also the importance of bringing local people's views into the discussion as well, and Members will probably have heard me talk of the King's Hill area in Coventry, which is a beauty spot with lots of history where they now want to build houses. Before I sit down, I would just add that when we had a problem in Coventry with council houses, we let residents take part in the process of the design of alterations. That went very well. We have to get back to times like that—

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Mr Cunningham, that is a speech, not an intervention. I call Mr Hayes.

Mr Hayes: I am delighted to say that I agree with every word that the hon. Gentleman said. I think of where I was brought up in south-east London. It was a council estate built, as so many were, in that period during the war and just after. Houses were not only well built—they were attractive. Care was taken about the design of the house. There were a variety of house styles across the estate. There were houses of different sizes to accommodate different kinds of people; there were smaller properties, suitable for elderly people, and large homes suitable for families. The variety of houses, the look and feel of the development, the street layout, the presence of a widely used parade of shops, the church, the school, the community hall, and so on, were the component parts of a functioning community, of which everyone felt part. I am not sure that can be said of many developments now.

The hon. Gentleman is right that privately owned, but also rented properties, are often soulless, ubiquitous and indistinguishable from one another, looking the same from Penzance to Perth, with no sense of the vernacular, no sense of local personality and thereby, incapable of inspiring the local and particular sense of place necessary to build communal feeling. That is where we have got to. It is extraordinary that we have, given the opportunity that existed in the post-war years after the bombing of many of our cities. The redevelopment could have been not only regenerative, but inspiring. I have to say that we, as a nation, failed. Now, this Minister in his time in this job has the opportunity to put that right.

In my roles in the various offices of state, I have tried to influence the quality of development and what we build. As Energy Minister, I acted to ensure that wind turbines were constructed in appropriate locations after

proper consultation with local communities, which is critical. Consideration about the impact on landscape became a vital part of the approval process. Some then simply dismissed the argument I made as irrelevant, on the basis of the easily grasped but utterly crass notion that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The notion that beauty is relative has been used to justify much of the ugliness imposed on our towns and cities by architects, planners and developers since the war. Such developments have succeeded only in undermining public confidence in new housing. What is often not appreciated is how the public's perception of development has changed.

I think what I have already described would be agreed by Members across the House of Commons, and certainly beyond it, but the sad fact is that planners by and large still have not learned their lesson. Even today, for example, some still laud the idea of streets in the sky. Plans are apparently afoot to extend the misconceived network of elevated walkways constructed in the City of London after the war. Streets in the sky were never a substitute for real streets—for architecture on a human scale, in proportion and in harmony with its environment. As anyone who has ever attempted to walk to the Barbican Centre knows, urban walkways are alienating, confusing and a poor substitute for design that puts people first. The Barbican is far from the worst example. There were any number of large developments, mainly of social housing, with walkways and gantries that not only became havens for criminals but often isolated rather than united blocks of flats.

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): This is not a whimsical issue for my right hon. Friend, but a long-standing issue of concern, as it is for me. My postgraduate thesis was on the Gothic revival in domestic architecture in the mid-18th century. That brings me to my question. How do we reconcile space for innovation, as the Gothic revival was in some respects, with respect for the vernacular in our very different counties and neighbourhoods?

Mr Hayes: As a direct result of that intervention, let me make my first demand of the Minister. I have more demands to make at the end, so I will get this one out of the way now—I see the Minister glancing at his civil servants nervously.

It is critical that every local authority has a design guide that is not only particular to its locale, but that has site-specific design appraisals for those most important regenerative opportunities. It is not enough for a local authority to rely on some county-wide or area-wide design guide or very broad general motherhood-and-apple-pie design principles. There have to be specific requirements for developers, which allow places to continue to change in a way that is in keeping with what has been done before. That is about materials, scale and sometimes eclecticism; there are particular places that look a particular way. We do not want every high street and every housing development, every town and every city to be indistinguishable one from another, but that will happen only if we are very demanding of what we expect of developers.

As you know, Ms Dorries, I have been Minister or shadow Minister for virtually everything, and I was once shadow Housing Minister. I met many big developers, big names that we could reel off if we wanted to, and

they all said to me, “John, if you are clear about the requirements, we will build our business plans to meet them. We understand that you want to build lovelier places, and we know that that is what people want anyway. We are quite happy to build things that people will like and want to buy, or places they will want to rent. Be very clear about your requirements and we will work to them.” It is not about taking on developers; it is about working with them, but being demanding of them.

Mr Jim Cunningham: One of the things I learned in local government when I was leader in Coventry was that if someone is clear about what they want to do, they do not get any major problems—that happens when they are vague and unclear. I was reading an article in one of today’s papers, which showed a link between crime among young people and the design of buildings, particularly social housing, and certainly in areas in London, for example. Has the right hon. Gentleman read that report? It is worth looking at.

Mr Hayes: The hon. Gentleman knows of my extremely strong views on social justice and the redistribution of advantage in society. If we are going to redistribute advantage, as I think we should, it is not good enough to suggest that people who are less well-off, people who need to rent a home or young people who are looking to make their first home could make do with something inadequate, while those who are advantaged and privileged can buy the kind of lifestyle that was available to my working-class parents. The lifestyle I enjoy in my constituency in Lincolnshire is a bit like the lifestyle I enjoyed when I was a little boy on that council estate. We still use local shops, we have a garden to play in, we have a nice home and we have what might be called a traditional way of life because I am in a position to be able to provide that for my children—going to the village school and all the rest of it—but if I went back to places such as the place where I was brought up, by and large that life would not be available to most people who are rather like my mum and dad were that short time ago. I emphasise that it was a short time ago, Ms Dorries, but you knew that anyway. I want beauty for all, not for some or for the privileged or rich alone.

John Howell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hayes: I happily give way to my hon. Friend, who is just as committed to social justice as I am.

John Howell: My right hon. Friend is being incredibly generous with his time. One point that I would bring out strongly is something that he has mentioned in passing but has not concentrated on: the need to include the environment in housebuilding, to be able to enjoy the space that comes with that, and to be able to provide opportunity for the family.

Mr Hayes: It will be alarming to some, but a delight to others, to know that I am only on page 3 of my very long speech, and I want to make a bit of progress. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that part of the sense of place, to which I referred earlier, is about green space. I will come in a moment to some of the research done by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales’s organisations on what people want, because a lot of the interventions

have mentioned the role of consultation, engagement and involvement in shaping policy around what people actually want. There has been a lot of work done on this by a variety of organisations, to which I want to refer.

Let us be clear about what we aim to achieve. We aim to build homes of which people can be proud. Le Corbusier, who is responsible for many bad things, said:

“A home is a machine for living”.

A home is not a machine for living. Homes are a reflection of our humanity. William Morris said:

“Have nothing in your home that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.”

That was because Morris understood that beauty and wellbeing are inextricably linked, and that a politics that is serious about welfare and wellbeing must be serious about beauty. It is not possible to believe in the common good as passionately as all those here in the Chamber do but not care about aesthetics—the two are inseparable.

That beauty is somehow detached from matters of fairness and social justice is the second misconception that must be challenged. For the ancient Greeks, aesthetic and moral judgements were inseparable. In the 19th century, many artists considered beauty to be the vital link between freedom and truth. I sense that today there is once again a growing understanding of how aesthetics are a vital part of our judgment of value and worth. That is partly intuitive; people instinctively understand the connection between the value of beauty and a wider conception of worth.

This can be seen in protests at the ugly buildings that developers still attempt to foist on communities against their will. It can be seen in the despair at identikit supermarkets that lack any sense of craft or character, built with no consideration of the past and no regard for the future. Indeed, at the heart of modern architecture, like all modern art, is the Nietzschean idea that the past is irrelevant and we can create our own value system. Much modern architecture, like modern music, fails precisely because it rejects those principles of harmony that time has taught us to delight in, and that excite our senses not because they are discordant, but because they are harmonious.

Where modern design does succeed, that is largely by accident or because, where form has at least followed function, a building has a high degree of utility. That is important, because we often hear architects, planners and engineers speak about ergonomics, but they frequently confuse ergonomics with aesthetics. It is not sufficient for a building to be ergonomically sound, irrespective of its aesthetic.

Just occasionally, a combination occurs that unites those two things—the extension to King’s Cross is a very good example. Looking at the extension to King’s Cross and the engineering of the roof, it is clear that what is a functional requirement has been turned into a work of art, as aesthetics and ergonomics have come together. That is such an exception that it is frequently mentioned, because people are searching for an example of something joyful. Every time I go to King’s Cross station, which I do frequently on my journey to and from Lincolnshire, I look in wonder at that development. I know that we should be doing that time and again in towns and cities across the county—if not in scale, certainly in essence.

[*Mr John Hayes*]

These lessons are not new, and I offer nothing that is not the wisdom of the people. The buildings that are most often treasured and valued by the public at large—our constituents—are usually older buildings that are shaped by vernacular style, where architects have taken care to be in harmony with the surroundings and where craftsmen have laboured over detail. A study by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment found that, when asked to name the most beautiful buildings in Sheffield, most respondents cited the two cathedrals.

Even the very same architects, planners and technocrats who foist ugliness on the rest of us often choose to live in beautiful, old houses in communities that still have a sense of place and a link to their surroundings. In fact, it is quite alarming that most modernists choose to live in Georgian or Victorian houses. That is the problem: escaping to gated lives, they leave well alone those who are forced to live in the kind of houses that the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) mentioned, and that is just not acceptable. Beautiful housing has become increasingly unaffordable to the kind of people he mentioned, precisely because it has become so scarce. We have seemingly become incapable of building anything of comparable quality or of planning new developments with a similar sense of place and community, which are values that matter directly to our quality of life, our sense of wellbeing and our health and happiness.

It cannot be fair that beauty is increasingly the preserve of the few, which brings me to the third misconception that cannot be left unchallenged: that beauty belongs to the past. It is often considered, sometimes unthinkingly, that it is no longer possible to build beautiful buildings. We have somehow, rather depressingly, come to believe that the supply of beauty is both finite and exhausted, perhaps because people assume that it must be dated, kitsch or whimsical to build according to the principles of classical architecture, or to extend such a vision across a development so that it is harmonious, with a sense of community and place.

Such snide comments are sometimes made about the Prince of Wales's vision for Poundbury, although the popularity of that place reminds me of what one wit said about the original Broadway production of "The Sound of Music": "no one liked it, apart from the public". The truth is that, when surveyed, the public repeatedly identify those kinds of place as places where they would like to live and that they aspire to own one day.

Beauty does not have to come at too high a price and it does not have to be sacrificed for the sake of utility. Those assumptions are false. When the city fathers of Birmingham, Nottingham and Manchester built great town halls in classical or gothic style, they did so because they understood that these styles had endured. A fine example is Nottingham, a city I know very well, having lived there for 20 years, studied there and been a county councillor in Nottinghamshire. The Council House in the centre of Nottingham, which is a great neo-classical building, was built in 1929. Right up until then, we understood, but the problem has grown in scale and depth since the war. Those planners, engineers and architects built something that they wanted to last, and they succeeded. The modernist library in Birmingham's Chamberlain Square was recently demolished, just 40 years

after it was built, but no one would seriously consider doing the same to the classical town hall or the other great public buildings of the Victorian era.

Despite their appearance, those buildings are, in other respects, modern: they were built using modern construction techniques. In historical terms, compared with the cathedrals I mentioned, they were built yesterday. Many were built in the late 19th or early 20th century. There are no good reasons that we cannot continue to build beautiful buildings, as the Prince of Wales has demonstrated to such wonderful effect.

While I am dealing with the Prince of Wales, I want to return to the issue of what the public want. The Prince's organisations consulted widely on the principal things that people want and do not want. I will highlight four. They do not want their town or village to lose a strong sense of identity; they do not want green space to be unduly threatened by urban sprawl; they do not want too many tall or large buildings, out of scale with what is there already, to be built; and they do not want change to be too rapid or overwhelming. In other words, people want building development on a human scale that is incremental and in tune with the existing built environment. Is that really too much to ask of our generation? I think not, and I hope the Minister agrees.

The irony is that many modern and postmodern buildings are more expensive than buildings built and designed according to classical principles. Even in cases where improving design and build quality comes at a price, in the longer term that will save money, and not just on maintenance. A British Land study estimates that better design could save the UK economy an estimated £15.3 billion by 2050, making us all happier and healthier.

Good design has the power to strengthen communities and improve physical and mental health through abundant green space and walkable streets. It has the power to improve safety and security through the abolition of semi-private spaces, walkways and underpasses, which trap people and encourage criminality. All those considerations should be fundamental to planning policy.

It would be a genuine tragedy if concerns about the supply of housing led us to revisit the failed post-war experiment in high-rise living. That is not the answer. Tower blocks are actually built at lower densities than terraced housing. We must consign such misconceptions to the past, and in their place develop a planning system that has true regard for people and communities. For almost 60 years, our planning system has encouraged or allowed out-of-scale buildings. We need fundamental change.

I will say one other thing about His Royal Highness, who put this issue in such clear terms and speaks, I think, for the people when he said that he did not want the place "which I love greatly disappear under a welter of ugliness".

How many communities and individuals have felt that? How many have felt that their voice is not heard by architects, planners, engineers and—I have to say it—politicians of all persuasions?

We need fundamental change. In the future, buildings should be in harmony with the landscape, vernacular in style and built from local materials, and they should offer local distinctiveness, which is the foundation of people's sense of place. Pride in communities is unlikely to flourish if people have no say in how housing is built or how their neighbourhood develops.

As the hon. Member for Coventry South and my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) said, that obliges us to engage and involve local people in the character, shape and scale of developments close to them. Although the revised national planning policy framework now encourages local authorities to produce design codes and styles, we must go much further.

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. Just to make the right hon. Gentleman aware, there are three Front-Benchers to speak, and other Members have requested to speak.

Mr Hayes: That is most kind of you, Ms Dorries. I always regard your advice seriously, and I will move reasonably swiftly to my exciting peroration so others can contribute.

Policy Exchange found that most people do not want to live in glass-covered high-rises or sprawling concrete estates. They want homes that are built in traditional styles, such as Georgian and Victorian-style terraced housing, and tree-lined streets. Similarly, research by Create Streets found that, in overall planning, people value green spaces; walkability, both in terms of consecutiveness and street-level interest; and a minimisation of the internal semi-private space that is a function of tower blocks, walkways and so on.

The success of the “Save our parks” campaign run by *The Mail on Sunday* is indicative of how much we value green space, yet parks and open spaces across the country are being lost, eaten up by greedy developers and unprotected by careless councils. We should not just protect green spaces, but build new parks and squares. I was pleased by the Budget yesterday, but we need to do more. Why does the Minister not stand up and say that it is his plan, ambition and intention to create 100 new parks and green spaces in towns and cities across the country?

In practice, much greenfield development is degenerative. All development should be regenerative where possible. It should be not a bolt-on to communities, but an opportunity to enhance and develop them in a way about which we can all feel proud. Policy Exchange estimated that, in London alone, there are 6,122 hectares of brownfield land, the mixed use of which could accommodate between 250,000 and 300,000 new homes. Bad design must no longer be tolerated. I want beauty for all.

I am coming to my exciting peroration, Ms Dorries, so excitement can build from now on—just in case anyone wanted notice of the need to be excited. We plant trees for those born later—for our children and grandchildren—and we should build for future generations, too. The built environment we leave behind is our children’s inheritance. We must not leave them a poisoned legacy of lost beauty and present ugliness. Such a legacy has already led to the burgeoning interest in local history. Bookshops are filled with illustrated history books, invariably with the word “lost” in their title. Towns and cities, pictured as they once were and no longer are, fascinate our constituents, because once we knew how to build and develop. They show a lost world of proud local shopkeepers, well-kept shopping arcades, community and Victorian civic pride. How much more can we afford to lose before we end this destruction? When will we start adding to our stock of beauty once

more? Beauty once lost must now be regained. The Government can play their part. We must demand and do more. We must deliver beauty in our time.

Several hon. Members rose—

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. The Front Benchers are going to have 10 minutes each. Two other Members wish to speak, so to be fair and equitable they have just over 10 minutes each.

3.8 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) on securing it and, as ever, for speaking so eloquently and poetically. I would never be able to emulate his use of the English language and his flow, but others might be able to—I suspect that the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) will do so.

The focus of this debate is the national planning policy framework, which provides a framework for producing local plans for housing and other developments. Those plans, in turn, are the background against which applications for planning permission are decided. I appreciate that the NPPF applies only in England, but it is important to have well-designed and visually attractive developments across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I am sure most, if not all, hon. Members will have heard me talk about my beautiful constituency of Strangford, which I have the honour and privilege of representing, and working and living in. I genuinely believe it is the best place to be in all of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Other hon. Members will say, “I expect the hon. Member for Strangford to say that,” but I honestly believe it. I urge those who have not been there to make that journey. When they see the beauty that we have, they will undoubtedly have the same opinion as me. We have large towns, small towns and lots of small villages, but for the most part we are a rural constituency with rolling green hills, a glistening lough, beautiful walks, canoe trails, and much more, all under the protective gaze of Scrabo Tower as it looks down from the edge of Newtownards down to Strangford Lough and across the constituency of Strangford.

Those of us who represent rural constituencies know how important it is to balance the need for development with the need to maintain natural beauty, ensuring that buildings are in keeping with the local area. In 1943, having seen a burnt and crumbling House of Commons, Winston Churchill remarked:

“We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us.”—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1943; Vol. 393, c. 403.]

That is spot on. As a boy, one of my childhood heroes was Winston Churchill, as was Blair Mayne and a former Member of this House, Dr Ian Paisley. To receive planning permission to build in the countryside in Northern Ireland, one of the requirements is to

“promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development”.

It is no longer enough for buildings to be structurally sound and to simply do the job. It has to be more than that. They must also be aesthetically pleasing to the eye, whether they are in the countryside or an urban area.

[Jim Shannon]

While we battle to maintain our green spaces, we also recognise the demands for more housing and the infrastructure to support it and keep villages and towns connected. In Northern Ireland, the regional development strategy—RDS 2035—sets out eight aims, two of which are:

“Promote development which improves the health and well-being of Communities”—
and—

“Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake”.

According to neuroscientists, buildings and cities can affect our mood and well-being—I believe they do—and specialised cells in the hippocampal region of our brains are attuned to the geometry and arrangement of the spaces we inhabit. For example, evidence shows that people’s happiness levels can be more easily achieved by living in an aesthetically beautiful city or a beautiful location in the countryside. I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on healthy homes and buildings. Last week we launched a white paper in which we outline the need for modern homes to be energy-efficient, to have the correct air quality, and to be aesthetically pleasing to the eye inside and out. Last week the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on those issues and how we can make housing more accessible to people right across the United Kingdom.

John Howell: The hon. Gentleman talks about the need to provide infrastructure along with housing, but environmental infrastructure is the big thing that is mostly missing in the development of new housing estates.

Jim Shannon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. He is right. That is why we make sure that the environmental impact is a big part of development approval in Northern Ireland. He is clearly right and that should be at the centre of any development on the mainland as well.

Studies have shown that growing up in a city doubles the chances of someone developing schizophrenia and increases the risk for other mental disorders such as depression and chronic anxiety. Despite a higher concentration of people, much of that stems from a lack of social cohesion or meaningful neighbourly interaction. It could be one of the reasons that access to green spaces, where people can gather and escape, is so important for people living in cities. The correct environment around someone helps emotional and mental well-being.

Although we face potentially different issues in rural areas, the need to ensure that developments are in keeping with the area and, if possible, enhance it rather than detract from it is vital. The greatest problem in rural areas is the increasing need and demand for developments, and, as a result, improved infrastructure in terms of roads and transport. Of course, rural development always poses difficulty, especially in areas that have either seen an influx of new buildings or in more remote areas that are almost untouched by architecture or by any development at all. In both cases—I can speak with some authority on this because it is something that many constituents have come to speak to me about—the fear is that something is being lost, and that natural beauty and natural habitats are being replaced by concrete and stone. Perhaps unsurprisingly, that rarely sits easily with residents.

We are also, arguably, more aware than we ever have been before of the impact that we are having on the world: our carbon footprint and the increase in pollution and waste. That is an issue for us every day in this House and outside. Those are fairly new considerations that architects now must deliver as well as ensuring that buildings are safe and structurally sound, along with providing an element of beauty for the local area. The Government have set some money aside within the health budget to address mental health issues. I read the other day that among students and young pupils in school there has been a 50% increase in mental and emotional issues. In Northern Ireland we have 10,000 children who have such issues. It is good that the Government have set that money aside. We need to have departmental co-operation and interaction to ensure that what we deliver in terms of houses also helps to reduce the mental and emotional issues.

In rural areas we must ensure that the requirement to bring something to the local area and to enhance it—at the same time as complementing the local environment—is always met. In urban areas more needs to be done to ensure that, where possible, residents have access to green open spaces and that architecture can respond to the demand for something different and interesting, particularly as simple and monotonous architecture has already been shown to have a more negative impact on citizens. When something as simple as our surroundings can have such an impact on our daily lives and therefore on our mental health, it is important that measures to improve the aesthetics of new and existing buildings should be considered.

Again, I congratulate the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings on securing this debate and I look forward to other contributions.

3.16 pm

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): I am grateful for the chance to appear under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) for securing this important debate. He started by asking whether we could remember a time when beauty had ever been debated in this mother of Parliaments. I confess I cannot recall a particular date, but what is lodged in my mind is 6 June 2005. The Tory party was still on its knees after yet another election defeat, but that great man, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), made a speech about beauty.

That has always stuck in my mind, because it was the first and probably the last time that a politician talked about beauty. My right hon. Friend was the environment spokesman, and he made many of the points that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings has made so eloquently in today’s debate, with almost mirror-image quotes about how people despise litter and love their landscapes, and how people are up in arms if someone threatens to build over much-loved parts of our country. So why do politicians not talk about beauty when most people live their lives yearning for beauty in some shape or other?

Of course, the language of bureaucrats and bureaucracy takes over, but when we talk about planning we are really talking about beauty. Planning is a system that is designed in some shape or form to try to regulate

beauty. It is ironic that many of the buildings and much of the architecture that my right hon. Friend praised were built when planning laws were much more relaxed. When we walk through the medieval streets of the City of London we walk through an entirely unplanned city, which would have been planned after the great fire of London had not the merchants revolted against Christopher Wren's masterplan, but we cherish such beauty.

Modern planning is a system to try to regulate beauty. As a new Back Bencher and then later as Minister for Culture, I lobbied hard for the terminology of beauty to be put into our national planning framework. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps) was Housing Minister, he came up to me in the Lobby after the 2010 election and thanked me for being a pain over our years in opposition when I was lobbying him to put design principles in the national planning policy framework, and he thanked me for helping him to understand its importance.

Nevertheless, we have not covered ourselves in glory since. I, for one, hold my hand up as having been at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport when we downgraded and merged the role of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment—I think it was subsumed into the Design Council. I should be interested to hear from the Minister what engagement he has with what is left of it.

I do not say that CABE was a perfect model, but to have just one organisation out there holding planners and, more importantly, developers to account for design principles was important. In fact, someone from CABE, when it was still alive, kindly took me around a development in my constituency and pointed out where the developers had put in money and effort, and where that had petered out, resulting in the creation of buildings that were not, of course, unliveable, but were certainly not designed in a way to create harmonious surroundings. It was not really a question of money; it was a question of laziness.

What my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings said about how easily things could change is true. I remember bringing the architect Terry Farrell to my constituency. I am not going to defend his buildings, but as an urban planner he is quite impressive. He sat down with residents of Wallingford, a medieval town in my constituency, pointed to the thousand-year history of settlement around it—towns and villages that developed around what had been marshland—and talked about how it might be developed sympathetically and harmoniously. The residents were supportive. I do not say that if his master plan had come to fruition and the houses had been built they would not still have manned the barricades, but just to be engaged and have someone acknowledge the history of their beautiful town was enough.

I should like to hear from the Minister not only about the incorporation of design in planning principles, but about a slightly more mundane although still important issue—the quality of new buildings. Linden Homes, probably the worst developer in my constituency—the bar is pretty high—is building houses in Cholsey that are literally falling down. I have had to go and visit constituents. Miller Homes in Drayton and Kier in Shrivenham have also had some problems with their buildings. The quality of building is shockingly bad. The great irony is that the building trade has not yet

been disrupted by technology. Despite the terrible connotations, we should be building prefabricated homes. The Germans have done so for years. We could build quality homes in factories and erect them at lower cost, and with higher design quality, than the terrible homes being built by Linden Homes at the moment.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings mentioned the work that Policy Exchange is doing, which I applaud. A remarkable meeting is happening at lunchtime on Thursday, when a Syrian architect called Marwa al-Sabouni will be interviewed by Sir Roger Scruton. In the middle of the bombardment of Homs, that lady emailed him to ask him a question about his book on aesthetics. His talk is about the role of architecture in the Syrian civil war, which sounds completely out there, until one hears her quotation about the “lack of beauty” in Homs and

“the promise of a good life that architecture can inspire”.

She said:

“The old city of Homs used to be known as ‘the mother of the poor’. You didn’t need money to live there. It was a place of trees, and jasmine and fruit.”

That phrase could almost have been written by my right hon. Friend. She continued:

“But then the new city, with its corruption and its modern blocks, developed over it, bringing with it a lack of hope, despair.” She is someone who, in the midst of an incredible conflict, with her family at risk and her friends being killed, was able to take time out to appreciate the importance of beauty.

Everything I shall say after that will seem mundane, but I certainly want design and beauty to be incorporated into planning principles. Policy Exchange has called for places of special residential character. The idea was put to me by the Duke of Richmond, about Chichester, for example. Could a heritage listing be given to some of our great cities and towns, to preserve them?

Will the Minister update us on whether what I read in the newspaper last week is true—that the wonderful, protected views of St Paul's in London are now under threat from developers? That really would be a case of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. Those wonderful views keep London as the green, liveable city it remains, despite its being one of the world's most globally successful cities. Everywhere we look in public policy, design and beauty are vital. How pleasing it was, even given the delays with Crossrail, that design and beauty were thought about in the design of stations. How pleasing it is that design is being made central to the character of High Speed 2; I hope it will get built. To echo, again, what my right hon. Friend said so eloquently, within the design of HS2 people in Birmingham want to build a station that is a homage to the great stations of the 19th century—a place of arrival, great welcome and beauty.

I want finally to give a small nod to my old beat of the arts, and mention the White Paper that I managed to publish before I got fired. It put place making at the heart of cultural policy—the opportunity to work with the arts to help to create and support places of great beauty.

3.25 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries, and I thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) for bringing

[Douglas Chapman]

this important debate to the Chamber. I reacted to some of the points he made with great empathy and understanding, and I appreciate his approach.

When I first looked at the Order Paper, and thought about the legislation and the planning frameworks that underpin these matters, it seemed on the face of it that this would be a very English debate, because the frameworks in Scotland are different. However, the speeches have been very full in their coverage, and we have had an exciting view of what the future might bring if we can get the frameworks right.

My constituency contains one of the largest housing developments in western Europe—the Dunfermline eastern expansion—and perhaps that fact allows me to contribute to the debate on design and beauty, which are applicable in all constituencies and communities, irrespective of the planning guidelines that are used. The eastern expansion has brought what seems like never-ending growth to our mid-sized Scottish town, which has grown by easily a third in the past 10 to 15 years. The homes can be regarded as fairly similar in their design, reminding me of the song about houses that are

“all made out of ticky tacky

And they all look just the same”.

However, while there are some good examples of design and layout within that massive development, quite a lot of opportunities have probably been missed. If all the houses were triple glazed, with higher standards of insulation, and had solar panels or different kinds of renewable power built in as standard, that would give an environmental boost to the way we look at homes. The fact that people now need to retrofit some of that new technology is a backward step. Perhaps we should pay more attention to the guidelines on how to make homes more environmentally friendly in future. Some of the things I have mentioned are not visually appealing, but when we put less pollution into the environment that is surely a benefit for all citizens. It improves the environment we live in, especially when such things as air quality are so far up the environmental agenda.

Scotland starts with quite an advantage, in terms of general layout. Urban Scotland is more green than grey, and green space covers more than half of urban land in Scotland; I think 54% of urban land there is deemed green space. That translates into the equivalent of a tennis court-sized piece of publicly-accessible green space for every person, which is quite a high bar to have set and to maintain. This is not just a matter of the new homes such as those in the eastern expansion. We can surely get big wins, if we have imagination, by bringing empty houses and derelict land back into positive use, especially if that breathes life into town centres.

A great example in my constituency is the rebuild of an old linen mill that lay empty and unloved for the best part of 10 years. It is now being restored and rebuilt to create 200 new flats, but without losing all the outward appearance of the old mill building. That new life will bring vitality to our town centre, not to mention new homes for people to rent or buy.

The Scottish Government fund the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, in conjunction with Shelter Scotland, to help councils to work with owners of empty homes to bring them back into use. Some 700 homes have been

brought back into the market this year alone, and Scottish local authorities can remove council tax discounts on empty homes. They can even increase council tax on those homes, so that there is an incentive for homeowners to refurbish, re-let or sell their properties, and perhaps allow an uncared-for home, or an eyesore in a town or village, to come back into use. That initiative is supported by the £4 million Scottish empty homes loan fund, which supports 17 housing projects and is targeting 500 homes across the country.

The old linen mill I mentioned is a short walk from the new Dunfermline galleries and library—a development that was crowned “Scotland’s best building” in 2017. It has already won numerous design awards and is likely to be shortlisted for many more. The architects have managed to integrate the older Carnegie library, which was built last century, with a new glass and stone structure that has an open aspect across to the 10th-century Dunfermline Abbey and views across the Firth of Forth. Taking in that view, we can see Dunfermline High School, which opened a few years ago. I am particularly proud of that development, because in a previous life I was one of those councillors who Members mentioned in thinking about how we can encourage councillors and people who make local decisions to be more open to the visual aspects of our buildings.

I was chair of the council’s local education committee when Dunfermline High School was built, and I remember the endless meetings, care and attention that went into the design and functionality of that new school. In the end, we got a school that is light, airy and fit for purpose. Many Members have highlighted the psychological effects of good planning and design, and how that can affect our mental state and general outlook. Educational attainment figures for Dunfermline High School have risen on the back of that new building, and such examples highlight why good investment in public design and smart, aesthetically pleasing architecture raise both spirits and performance, and give us all a feel-good factor.

This has been a bit of a constituency tour—I am sure other Members have examples of great buildings in their constituencies—and I have saved the best to last. The Queensferry Crossing opened last year, on time and under budget; I am sure the Minister would be interested in having budgets like that all the time. It is a superb structure of immense architectural beauty, and it is framed against the backdrop of the Forth road bridge, and the iconic UNESCO-recognised Forth rail bridge. Those bridges were built in different centuries—if Members are interested, they can look on my Twitter feed, @DougChapmanSNP, because I managed to take a picture of all three bridges during my flight on Monday morning. If people want to see those views, they should do so. That might raise their spirits for the rest of the afternoon.

This has been an extremely valuable debate, especially in Budget week. Usually, anyone in charge of spreadsheets knows the price of everything and the value of nothing, but this debate has shown that many Members do know the value of our built environment, albeit it sometimes comes at a price. If we can better train our councillors and planning authorities to value design and beauty, and if we give them the planning frameworks and legislative tools, such as the Scottish Government’s Creating Places policy, we can start to put those factors at the

heart of the communities we are trying to build or rebuild. If we can do that, today's debate will have been very worth while, and I look forward to the Minister's comments.

3.35 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Ms Dorries, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) not only on having the most beautiful name for his constituency, but on securing this important debate on beauty. I will return to his comments in a moment, but first I wish to thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his remarks. I think he introduced a very important aspect of this debate, which is the link between beauty, a healthy environment and people's health, including their mental health. He also reminded everyone how wonderful and beautiful Strangford is. After everyone has been to visit Durham, I encourage them to go and visit Strangford—I hope he is happy with that.

The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings made an amazing speech. I will not be able to match his eloquence in any way, but I hope I can offer him a service by endorsing his comments, which were long overdue. I hope that this debate starts a different discussion in this place about what planning can and should deliver.

The right hon. Gentleman raised an incredibly important topic that I learned about early on as a young academic in Belfast. One of the first projects on which I was included in the research team evaluated the impact of Divis flats on the health of the local community. Some Members might not know this, but the Divis flats were completed in 1966, as were a lot of deck-access blocks in this country. There were 12 eight-storey deck-access blocks, with one 20-storey block at the edge. I carried out my research in the 1980s, but people had maintained for many years that those blocks of flats adversely impacted on their health and wellbeing.

During the study we discovered huge amounts of asbestos; that ultimately led to the blocks being demolished, which is what the local community wanted. People were propelled into campaigning, however, by the fact that they simply felt that they were not living in a good environment. They had to walk a long way along deck-access corridors that frequently had no lights, and they could not easily access transport. All the space was common space—there was very little external space. I do not know whether what replaced the Divis flats would pass the test set by the right hon. Gentleman, but it is interesting to note that those flats were replaced by streets of houses with lots of garden space and public areas of green space. The streets are near the city centre, and there is access to employment. People got better access to bus routes, and the community went from having a great many problems to being self-sustaining. I learned early on that the scale and quality of a development is very important to our sense of wellbeing.

This is not a new topic; it is a lesson we have learned before and we appear to have to learn it again. Raymond Unwin, whom I think we all accept as the father of town planning, said in 1909 that we needed to make a real case for the importance of attaching beauty and art to town planning policy. Somewhere along the way, we

lost that attachment, and that needs to be addressed. ResPublica found that English people believe beauty to be a right rather than a luxury, and 81% of those polled believed that everyone should be able regularly to experience beauty, whether in the natural environment or through other methods, including those that planning can deliver for local areas.

Through the debate, the right hon. Gentleman has encouraged us all to focus on what the fundamentals of planning should be and how planners working with local communities—I will say more about that in a moment—can deliver a vision for what an area needs. Tools are also needed so that that vision can be realised in a way that local people are happy with, which means that planning has to move from using the very technocratic methods that it employs at the moment to doing something more visionary and inclusive.

As we are in the middle of a housing crisis and know that we need to deliver many more homes every year, much of our discussion in this place concentrates on the need to improve housing delivery. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman can usher in a new discussion about place making, because although it is important that we have the homes that we need, those homes sit in communities. All too often we do not pay attention to the other things that communities need to thrive: proper infrastructure, access to public services and access to employment.

We do not talk enough about good-quality design, or about how to not only save green spaces, but make them. The Minister could consider incentivising taking brownfield land in cities back to being green space, because there is often no land that has not been built on to be made into such a space. I also hope that he will consider how to give the national planning policy framework more teeth. It is okay to exhort people to have better design and have discussions in this place about it, but unless we get some regulation in the system and create the level playing field for developers that the right hon. Gentleman talked about, we are never going to raise the quality of new building. In particular, local people need to be involved at an early stage, so they can talk about the type of development that they want and make the historical and modern references that they would be willing and able to make if they were supported through the planning system.

The Minister also needs to look at permitted developments. Yesterday, I was horrified to hear the Chancellor say that there might be more. Permitted development is leading to some of the poorest housing we have had in this country for a long time—barely a third of it meets basic standards. We need proper planning in place to deliver the quality homes that we need, but permitted development does not provide that, and having more of it on our high streets could be a problem. Of course, we want change of use and a flexible planning system—it has to reflect changing needs—but permitted development ushers in poor quality, and I hope that the Minister will reject it and look instead at developing a new planning system that is much more community focused. That system could have regional or national planning tiers and focus on what our neighbourhoods need and what people say they need to thrive as communities. I know that the Minister is quite new to his job, but I look forward to hearing his response.

3.44 pm

The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Ms Dorries. You and I were both brought up in a city punctuated by architectural superlatives, but also scarred by some of the worst examples of architectural vandalism over the last three or four decades, so this debate is of interest to us both. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) on his fantastic speech. It will sit in his canon, alongside his groundbreaking and remarkable speech, “The journey to beauty”, which I have read several times now. He gave it as Transport Minister and it caused quite a stir in the industry at the time. He is without doubt an aesthete and a patriot, and I salute his indefatigability in the face of the ugliness that he rightly calls out. I am tempted to say “I agree” and sit down. He knows however that the issue of beauty in the built environment is close to my heart, so I shall continue.

One of the advantages of having a poet on your speechwriting team in the Department is that they quite often recall to us some of the poetry of our youth. In preparing for this speech, we considered Larkin’s “An Arundel Tomb”—a wonderful poem—which reminds us, with his image of the earl and countess captured in stone, that the things we build today could last for centuries, and that we have a duty to future generations to ornament their lives as ours have been ornamented by the generations that preceded us.

When the Prime Minister asked me to take this job, she was clear about my task: she wanted more, better, and faster homes. Those are the three indivisible words by which I live. We are talking in particular today about the “better” bit; building more beautifully, because in the words of the architect Frank Lloyd-Wright:

“If you foolishly ignore beauty, you will soon find yourself without it.”

Back in 2010, just 134,000 net additional homes were added to the country’s housing stock, but today, the Government are in delivery mode. The number of additional homes is up 55% to 217,000 per annum, and we are well on our way to reaching our target of 300,000 per year. We have always been clear that building more does not mean that we cannot build better. As my right hon. Friend said, we have to quash the myth that quality and quantity cannot go together. In fact, the more we build, the more important it is that we get it right. While I accept his challenge that beauty is not a relative term, when it comes to our built environment it is often in the eye of the beholder, so no matter what we do, some people will be unhappy.

We all know what beauty should feel like. Beautiful places not only make us happy but keep us well, and move us from fear and anxiety to hope and happiness. They welcome us, inspire us and elevate the mundanity of human existence. Great housing developments do not have to be billion-pound projects—the overall winner of last year’s Housing Design Award was a mixed-tenure regeneration scheme in Camden—and critically, beautiful places to live and work should not be the preserve of the wealthy, as my right hon. Friend also pointed out. No matter where one stands on design, our first obligation is to ensure that communities get what they need in a form that they appreciate.

The Government are leading on that by putting beauty at the heart of our housing and communities policy. In both the housing White Paper and the social housing Green Paper, we are focused on creating great places and on design quality. Homes England, our new and more assertive national housing agency—I launched its strategic plan this morning with an exhortation to beauty in all that it does—is promoting design quality through its programmes. In July, our revised national planning policy framework put another stake in the ground. It states that

“permission should be refused for poor design”

especially when it

“fails to take opportunities to improve the character and quality of an area.”

In decades to come, we want to look back on this golden age of housebuilding not through the windscreen of a bulldozer, but with a view to treasure, preserve and invest in what lies before us.

We must learn the lessons of the 1960s and 1970s. My right hon. Friend referred to the Birmingham central library, which has now been demolished. The same is true of Robin Hood Gardens, as well as Pimlico school—a brutalist concrete school in a ward where I served as a councillor—which I played a part in having demolished. They are temporary buildings.

Mr John Hayes: While the Minister still has 10 minutes left, let me ask him if he will agree to three things: first, to draw up a blacklist of blight, which would allow us to demolish many more buildings of that kind; secondly, to put in place obligatory local design guides so that local authorities have to build in a style that is suitable and appropriate; and, thirdly, to back the *Mail on Sunday* campaign to protect urban green spaces. The hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) spoke about level playing fields, but any playing field will do. Playing fields are places where people dance, play, meet friends and enjoy the open space. We need to protect them. Will my hon. Friend do those three things?

Kit Malthouse: My right hon. Friend raises some interesting issues. As he knows, I am in the process of producing the guidance to the NPPF, and I shall certainly take his advice as I do so. He might be interested to know that when I was at City Hall, I suggested a competition for Londoners to vote each year for a building that should be demolished, and that we should provide grant support to assist in the demolition of that building, if required. However, let us see where we get to with the guidance.

My right hon. Friend mentioned local materials and the vernacular, and we want to draw from the history of any area the use of materials that mature and age gracefully. Critically, we want to build the conservation areas of the future. That is a challenge I have put to the housing development community in a number of forums over the past three or four months that I have been in this job. That does not mean that all new homes and public buildings need to be a replica of the local style, but they do need to fit in, in the broadest sense of the term.

We are therefore supporting high-quality, high-density housing such as mansion blocks, mews houses and terraced streets, typical of the English urban townscape and rural context with which we are all familiar. In

particular, I am keen to see the re-emergence of that great British gift to the world of architecture, the garden square. It is possible for modern, efficient and technology-driven design to echo our history and to reflect the local area without becoming pastiche. That is something we have sought to achieve with our garden communities programme.

More than a century ago, Sir Ebenezer Howard first outlined his idea of a garden city. He had a vision of places where people could work, raise families, travel easily and enjoy green spaces. We are renewing that idea for the 21st century, and we have set out clear expectations for high-quality place making across our country. That is a chance to aspire beyond identikit housing, which my right hon. Friend identified, and town centres that look like everywhere and nowhere. We are championing ambitious councils, which see garden communities as a central part of their plans for housing and growth. Our programme supports 23 places to deliver more than 200,000 new homes by the middle of the century. I hope that we might be able to rise to his challenge to produce 100 new parks, if each of those places has four.

We are not only building homes; we recognise that we are building neighbourhoods. Developments of 500 units or more are bigger than most villages, so we have to think in terms of neighbourhoods that function, as my right hon. Friend pointed out. To achieve that, however, we know that local planning authorities need design capacity, so we have directed almost £5 million to 26 local authorities through our planning delivery fund, to support them in developing innovative ways to increase design skills throughout the country.

We are also running workshops for councillors, to help them to understand and to support their role in ensuring beauty in the built environment. The workshops will offer them the opportunity to discuss the challenges that they face and, importantly, to share their own experience of promoting design quality. We are bringing in people from across the sector—from local authorities to developers, housing associations and architects—to share their ideas about beauty and great design.

Mr John Hayes: Will the Minister—we are lucky to have him, by the way, and the shadow Minister—agree to meet me and the Prince of Wales’s organisations to discuss how to learn from the work he has done and is now doing?

Kit Malthouse: I am more than happy to meet. In the past, I have worked closely with the Prince’s Foundation for Building Community—I knew Hank Dittmar quite well before he sadly passed away—and I would be delighted to become reacquainted with the prince’s work, not least because earlier this year we held a design quality conference, the first of its kind, which was attended by 380 people from across the sector, and we want to do more of that kind of work, because the responsibility to build more beautifully rests with all of us.

Where the Government are leading, I encourage the private sector to follow. When I bring that message of “more, better, faster” to the sector, I always stress how design matters at every level, from planning to community acceptability: build beautifully and get permission, build beautifully and sell more houses, and build beautifully and communities will actually welcome developers, rather than drive them out of town at the tip of a pitchfork.

Mr Vaizey: First, I echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) said: we have had far too many Housing Ministers, and I call upon the Prime Minister to keep this wonderful man in office until the 2022 election and many years beyond. Secondly, I caution against this debate tipping over into an attack on modern architecture. Robin Hood Gardens may not be lamented, but Park Hill in Sheffield—a similar design—has been restored and is much loved. As the Minister who listed Preston bus station to much anger, I am delighted that it is now treasured by the local community.

Kit Malthouse: I acknowledge what my right hon. Friend says, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings said, that is often an accident of ergonomics, form and beauty coming together, just as it did for the roof at the British Museum—an extraordinary structure in which, exactly right, ergonomics and form come together.

Some of the best examples of beautiful buildings are delivered by small and medium-sized enterprises, from self-build to the refurbishment of historic buildings. Sadly, the 2007-08 economic crash killed a number of such growing developers, and we are yet to see a new talent pool emerge. I believe, however, that SMEs are part of the key to the challenge. That is why we are directing our home building fund towards SMEs—to give them the confidence to grow and build, and to raise the bar on design quality. By having more players in the market, we shall get them to compete on innovation and quality.

Ultimately, it comes down to delivering houses that people want to live in, buildings where people want to work and places that people want to call home. More than that, we must build things that elevate and entertain. That is what the Government are hoping to and will deliver in the future. I look forward to working with many hon. Members on that most important of missions. I close by—

Mr Vaizey: London views?

Kit Malthouse: Sorry, yes. I asked my team to update me on the London views. Apparently, there is a campaign by London First and other developers to relax the protections, but so far they remain in the draft London plan. We shall see where that plan lands.

I shall finish my speech by returning to that Larkin poem. Members may remember—I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings does—that the most affecting part of that poem is in the second stanza, when Larkin reveals that the couple he has been looking at are actually holding hands. They have been holding hands for the centuries for which they have been lying there. At the end of the poem he ends with that famous line:

“What will survive of us is love.”

In 200 or 300 years’ time, what will future generations see as a symbol of our love for them, projected forward in time? All that will survive of us is those things that we build today. We are joined in our ambition to ornament their lives and to create the beauty that will enhance their existence for centuries to come, as ours has been enhanced by the generations who came before us.

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): I am not sure, Mr Hayes, if there is any point to me asking if you would like to have the last two and a half minutes.

3.57 pm

Mr John Hayes: Simply to repeat, Ms Dorries, that we are lucky to have a Minister—and, by the way, a shadow Minister—of such calibre. He is right: we are talking about what we do for generations to come—those born later, as I described them.

Speaking of Larkin, urban planners have done to too many of our fellow Britons what Larkin said all our parents do to us. Now it is time for Government to raise their sights to a more distant horizon. Beauty is not a bolt-on, an extra or something that we may opt for; it is intrinsic to developing a sense of place, which is essential to a sense of value and worth, as the Minister clearly understands. That is not only about future generations, but about the common good now.

As the Government move forward on their plans for housing, they need to have a debate about quality and not to be limited to a debate about quantity. It is absolutely right for those two things not to be paradoxical. It is entirely possible to build homes that people want to live in.

I hope that the Minister will make the ambition of 100 new parks come to life; that he will prohibit development on the green spaces where, as I said, people play, make friends, dance and dine; and that he will be insistent that all that he has said today informs not only his thinking but Government policy into the future. It is right for buildings to elevate, as he said, but more than that the buildings and the politics should enthrall. That is not merely an aspiration, but the duty of all of us, which is why I am delighted to have introduced this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered beauty and the built environment.

Five Year Forward View for Mental Health

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the five-year forward view for mental health.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. The key purpose of the debate is to represent the recent report of the all-party parliamentary group on mental health, of which I am vice-chair. We published “Progress of the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health: On the road to parity”, which is a report on the progress of the five year forward view at the halfway stage.

I pay tribute to the cross-party group of MPs and peers who took part in the inquiry, particularly the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), who is the chair of the APPG; she is with us in this debate and I think she will make some remarks. I also pay tribute to Rethink Mental Illness and to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which provided us with excellent secretariat support and supported us throughout the inquiry. I thank the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who attended the parliamentary launch of the report and engaged in a very helpful question and answer session.

The report is a summary of more than 70 pieces of written evidence, two oral evidence sessions, a focus group of service users and carers, and a visit to a mental health trust. It is a serious and informative piece of work that could help to make a difference in informing the NHS's long-term plan. There are three main sets of recommendations in the report, including some important ones on joining up work with other services, particularly social care and housing, but this is quite a short debate so I will focus only on two questions.

I am interested to hear from the Minister about the Government's plans to support people with severe mental illness. The report shows that adults severely affected by mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder are left behind. We saw no consistent and coherent approach on how to support people diagnosed with personality disorders. The inquiry heard that there are no targets for how long adults should have to wait to access eating disorder services. Those illnesses have a severe impact on people's day-to-day lives and can be lifelong conditions. It is not acceptable that people who are the most ill often wait the longest to get care.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Although I appreciate, as he will, how big a task this is, I welcome the Government's commitment to mental health funding in the Budget. But I am concerned that we are getting nowhere in reaching parity of esteem. The number of children and young people experiencing mental health problems has risen sharply, and they often go to A&E for help. Does he share my view that funding is needed to ensure that children and young people suffering with poor mental health have safe places in the community to turn to for help and support, without having to rely on A&Es, which are already under duress?

Jeff Smith: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. Although I will never say that increased spending on mental health is not good, the announcement in yesterday's Budget of extra funding for mental health teams in A&Es points to a problem because we should not have to increase spending on A&Es. We should try to cut the number of people who have to go to A&Es at an earlier stage, and we must invest at an earlier stage.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am very grateful for the APPG's work. One of the biggest concerns is about mental health support in further education colleges, which seems to have gone completely off the radar. Both colleges in York have told me that there is increasing crisis in further education, particularly on self-harm by young people—now that there are more exam-based assessments, that is escalating at a pace. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must focus on prevention in FE colleges, to ensure we have the right health professionals based in those colleges?

Jeff Smith: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Child, adolescent and early adult mental health is a big and growing problem.

The five year forward view recognised creating treatment pathways for people with bipolar disorder, adult eating disorders and personality disorders, but halfway through the plan, the inquiry found that those are still to be published. It is vital that NHS England implement in full all pathways recommended in the five year forward view.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Although there has been a commendable focus on increasing talking therapy through the IAPT—improving access to psychological therapies—programme, that tends to be cognitive behavioural therapy. The evidence base for helping people with personality disorder, particularly emotionally unstable personality disorder, is dialectical behaviour therapy. There is a real paucity of other talking therapies such as DBT available throughout the country, but particularly further north than where we are sitting, in London.

Jeff Smith: The hon. Gentleman has great experience and knowledge of those issues and makes an important point. He has anticipated some of the comments I will make and I strongly agree with him.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): We, as MPs, are among the first to come across the sort of patients the hon. Gentleman is talking about. Does he agree that training ought to be provided for MPs, so that we know how to deal with those people when they appear at our surgeries?

Jeff Smith: That is an excellent point; some training packages are available for MPs' staff. I encourage all colleagues to take advantage of that.

The vast majority of people severely affected by mental illness will receive support within a community mental health team, which is the type of core service that provides help to around 700,000 people in England, often with quite complex needs. Although some specialist services have benefited from additional funding and

targets, core services for adults severely affected by mental illness have stood still. Core community services did not receive any funding under the five year forward view, and we found that only £50 million was allocated to other core services nationally.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): In Hartlepool, there is no drop-in centre for people in crisis. Crisis teams are stretched to the limit, and often people wait for two hours or more to access them. Given the current funding review, does my hon. Friend agree that we must urgently resolve such situations?

Jeff Smith: Again, that is an excellent point and I strongly agree. The report makes it clear that core services are underfunded and under pressure. There has been great success in getting people better access to psychological therapy, but while IAPT is an excellent service it is not designed for people with severe mental illness. Core services are too overstretched to provide timely talking therapies to people with more complex needs, so those who are most ill often have to wait the longest to get help. Simon Stevens, the head of the NHS, said at the Global Mental Health summit that he believed that we must restrike the balance between new talking therapy services for patients with less severe conditions and the core services for those with long-term and severe mental health needs.

We heard many examples of people with severe mental illness struggling to get therapy. One service user came to us; they had a history of psychosis and were told by their GP that if they wanted to access psychological therapy quickly, they should lie to the IAPT team about having psychosis to avoid being rejected for treatment, because it was too difficult to get the treatment they needed for their condition.

In the worst case scenario, people can be hit with the double whammy of being told they are too ill for IAPT but not ill enough for a core mental health team. People are then left struggling. Another service user, Dani, who has a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, spoke at our parliamentary launch and contributed to the report. She said that she felt it was strange to be called a service user because her experience was mostly of being told that she was not suitable for services, rather than actually using them.

The inquiry saw the consequences of what happens when people do not get timely support in the community. First, there is a rise in inappropriate out-of-area placements. At the end of June this year, there were 645 inappropriate out-of-area bed placements. Secondly, there is a rise in mental health crises. The report notes that attendances at A&E for a mental health problem have risen 94% since 2010. In our inquiry, we heard from service users who expressed their frustration at turning up at A&E and waiting hours to be seen, before being sent home after a brief chat with a professional. Extra services in A&E, as we were promised yesterday, are positive but a much better solution would be intervening so people do not have to go to A&E. A model already exists where mental health calls to 111 or 999 are redirected to a specialised 24/7 support service staffed by experienced psychological wellbeing coaches, social workers and mental health nurses, who can provide assessments and real-time support. That is successful and it could be rolled out as a national standard approach, which is something the report recommends.

[Jeff Smith]

Mental health crises should not be considered an inevitability for people severely affected by mental illness. It is entirely possible to stop people having to go to A&E in a crisis if community services intervene early enough to support them. Support across the country is patchy, unfortunately, as core services struggle to meet the increased demand on budgets. We should not be creating a system that steps in only when people reach breaking point. That is why the report recommends that NHS England should increase resources for core mental health services, such as community mental health teams. Will the Minister set out how the Department of Health and Social Care will help people with severe mental illnesses who are being left without support?

Secondly, I would like to focus on the issue of workforce. Will the Minister set out how we will ensure that we have the staff to meet the needs of everyone with a mental illness? Throughout the inquiry, we heard regularly that the issue of workforce is the biggest barrier to achieving the five year forward view. When workforce and funding for them do not meet demand, the thresholds for accessing treatment rise. That is a problem not just in core services, but in child and adolescent mental health services and across the board.

Dr Poulter: The hon. Gentleman is again making an important point. It is all very well talking about the aspiration of putting more money into mental health and expanding services, but improvement cannot be delivered without the workforce on the ground to provide care. There are serious recruitment and retention challenges across the mental health workforce. If we are talking about the crisis with young people, there is a real problem attracting people into the CAMHS workforce, particularly to become CAMHS consultants and CAMHS psychiatrists. That is an issue that the report picks up in great detail, but I hope he will join me in urging the Government to address this as a matter of urgency.

Jeff Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes another excellent point. Health Education England's plan commits to 19,000 more people working in mental health by 2021, but between March 2017 and March 2018 the number of mental health staff in the NHS increased by just 915 people. That does not look like progress is on target. One in 10 consultant psychiatrist posts is empty and between April 2010 and 2018 there was a 12% fall in the number of mental health nurses. What are the Government's plans to tackle the problem of the mental health workforce?

The report makes some recommendations and suggests that Health Education England and the Government look at all measures to increase the mental health workforce. There is a huge interest in mental health among young adults. Until we undertook the report, I did not realise that psychology was the third most popular undergraduate course for students starting university in 2016. We should make it easier for those capable, ambitious and keen graduates to work in NHS mental health services.

The hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) made the point earlier that recruiting more psychologists for specific therapies, such as dialectical behaviour therapy or cognitive analytic therapy, would

mean that people had a wider choice about the type of therapy they received, instead of, as often happens, just being prescribed cognitive behavioural therapy—if they are able to get a prescription at all—because it is the only therapy available.

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): As well as having more specialists in the NHS, does my hon. Friend agree that to tackle mental health we need good training in schools, workplaces and all the different parts of society? The point was made earlier that we, as Members of Parliament, need to have training, as well as being able to encourage a more positive attitude to mental health.

Jeff Smith: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I am probably not going to take any more interventions because I want to give the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on mental health time to make remarks and to hear from the Minister. I will rattle through the rest of my comments.

The report suggests that the peer workforce, where people with their own personal experience of mental illness support those who are currently in mental health services, should be expanded. Service users told us that it was invaluable not only in terms of positive role models, but to prevent an “us and them” barrier between patient and professional. It is effective and leads to a reduction in readmissions.

Finally, funding—the elephant in the room, as always. The five year forward view came with a headline commitment of over £1 billion invested each year in mental health by 2021. This has undoubtedly improved lives. However, the APPG heard that it is difficult to be certain that funds are reaching the frontline and that historical underfunding means that mental health is still the poor relation in the NHS. I note that a report from the Institute for Public Policy Research suggests that spending on mental health will have to double from £12 billion to £23.9 billion in the next decade to make parity of esteem a reality.

The mental health investment standard means that every clinical commissioning group has to increase mental health spend in line with its overall increase in health spending. However, last year, 24 CCGs reduced the amount they spent on mental health. Eight CCGs were classed as meeting the mental health investment standard despite the fact that they cut the amount they spent on mental health. We would welcome clarification on what the Government are doing to ensure that each CCG meets that target.

The five year forward view was never intended to solve every problem in our mental health system, but where it has been focused it has made a difference. For example, there has been success in perinatal mental health and improving access to IAPT. This report focuses on where the gaps are. We need to prioritise investment in core services and to ensure that we have a robust NHS workforce. I hope that the Minister, with NHS England, will respond positively to the report and hopefully this will reform NHS long-term planning.

4.18 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I sincerely thank the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) for giving me a chance to speak in the debate, as that was entirely at his discretion. It has

been a real pleasure working with him on the report. I also reiterate his thanks to Rethink Mental Illness and the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which have done a huge amount of the work that has been condensed into the report. A great deal of hard work went into it, and they did most of the legwork.

I have been on quite a journey with this report. We originally conceived it back in 2016 and it came to fruition this year, at a moment that feels timely because we are mid-way into the five year forward view. NHS England is working on its long-term plan for the NHS and I hope it will be drawing on the recommendations in the report. The Chancellor has just announced a welcome £2 billion of funding for mental health out of the £20 billion for the NHS.

During the inquiry we heard about some areas of mental health where real progress has been made. We heard some truly inspiring success stories of how the five year forward view and the changes in it are changing people's lives. For instance, we heard about new perinatal services—four new mother and baby units—which mean that when a mother is severely ill, she will be able to receive in-patient treatment and have her baby there with her, rather than their being separated, as has too often been the case in the past.

We heard about the success of talking therapy services and how many people are getting timely access to them. We also heard about the success of early intervention in psychosis. In the past, a diagnosis of psychosis could be seen as a life sentence, but early intervention really does make a difference and we heard success stories of people recovering and going on to lead mentally healthy lives.

Although there are some real success stories, there is much more to do. The report makes 24 recommendations, but given the time I will mention just three of them. There will be a little bit of repetition of what the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington said, although I will try to avoid it as far as I can, but I think it is worth emphasising these three areas.

First, the report includes the recommendation that the Government develop evidence-based treatment pathways more widely. We heard from the eating disorders team at North West London NHS Foundation Trust that having firm waiting time targets and a clear pathway for treatment had immeasurably improved care, but although the five year forward view included a timeline for creating treatment pathways across all areas of mental health, there are many areas where they have not been implemented.

Secondly, the question of workforce came up time and again as the biggest barrier to achieving the ambitions of the five year forward view for mental health. There is a desperate need to train, recruit and retain more staff at every level. We simply cannot make meaningful improvements to services without the staff to deliver them; there must be new routes into the NHS workforce, making use of psychology graduates—as has been mentioned—and psychotherapists, and bringing in more people with lived experience of mental illness, who do valuable work. It is also important that all frontline staff get some mental health training.

We heard that mental health training now forms a greater part of the training for new nurses and doctors, for instance, but there is a huge established workforce who could benefit from at least some mental health

training. We heard from one carer who had done a mental health first aid course and said she had more of knowledge of mental health than her sister, who was a nurse.

Thirdly, core services are truly the backbone of mental health care. We heard that they are consistently struggling to cope with demand, leaving more people unable to get help until they reach crisis point. The focus on some of the new, exciting services has perhaps meant that the focus has turned away from those vital core services.

To sum up, great progress has been made. We are on the road to parity between mental and physical health. I feel optimistic because of the Government's attention to this agenda and the extra funding coming in for mental health, but there is indeed some way to go.

4.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Nigel Adams): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing the debate and all hon. Members present on their contributions and interventions.

Improving care and reducing the stigma around mental health is a key priority for this Government. We welcome the report from the all-party parliamentary group, and I congratulate both the vice-chair and the chair on their work. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) probably underplays the amount of effort that she and her vice-chairs put into it. The report is a timely piece of work and a well-considered contribution to the dialogue on mental health services in this country. In many ways, it mirrors the thinking we have already seen from Mind, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and others.

The statistics on mental health demonstrate the size of the challenge we face. One in four adults experiences at least one diagnosable mental health problem in any given year, yet NHS support for mental ill health has historically been seen as a “Cinderella service”, of secondary importance to other NHS services. The stigma attached to mental ill health has, at times, led mental health service users to feel marginalised.

That is why, in 2016, the Prime Minister made a commitment to improving mental health services. As has been mentioned today, we set out to achieve greater parity of esteem between physical and mental health services. In February 2016, NHS England published “The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health”. This is a timely debate in that regard; I suspect we could have done with an hour and a half at least, and I am sure that when the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), returns to her post there will be an opportunity to expand the debate.

The five year forward view was the result of wide-ranging stakeholder engagement, led by an independent mental health taskforce and chaired by Paul Farmer, chief executive of Mind. It laid the foundations for what we believe to be one of the largest transformation programmes for mental health services anywhere in Europe. The transformation may not be complete, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent said, progress has been made, and continues to be made.

I will just touch on funding, which formed a key part of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington. To support the commitments made in the five year forward view, we have pledged £1 billion for

[Nigel Adams]

adult mental health services between 2016 and 2021. That came on top of the £1.4 billion pledged the previous year in recognition of the need radically to improve children and young people's mental health services.

We have delivered against those funding commitments: last year saw more than ever before spent by the NHS on mental health, with almost £12 billion spent by clinical commissioning groups and on specialised services, such as those for eating disorders. Only yesterday, right hon. and hon. Members will have heard the Chancellor's announcement of a further £2 billion to fund mental health by 2023-24, expanding crisis services and supporting more people with severe mental illness into employment.

Today, 74% of people referred for treatment following a first episode of psychosis receive treatment within two weeks under the early intervention in psychosis programme, compared with 64% only two and a half years ago. Just under 80% of routine eating disorder referrals are seen within four weeks, compared with 65.1 % only two years ago. In 2017-18, the national trajectory of 2,000 more women accessing specialist perinatal care was exceeded and we continue to focus on developing local, integrated pathways in this area.

Things are improving outside NHS settings too. We have heard about the work that should be taking place in colleges—importantly—and workplaces. Our investment in improved facilities for crisis mental health care and changes to legislation have helped to reduce, for example, the number of people detained in police cells following a mental health crisis by more than 95% compared with 2011-12. I am pleased that the report recognised some of those achievements over what has been called a “transformational” period in the history of mental health services in this country.

Referring to what my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent said about core services, we recognise that there is still much unmet need in mental health. That is particularly true for those suffering severe mental illness. Across the country, we are seeing innovative examples of community mental health services working well to provide timely support close to home, to help prevent in-patient admissions.

We also need to look beyond the NHS. Public attitudes towards mental health are improving. That is in part due to the Time to Change campaign, for which this Government provided £1 million of funding. We want to be recognised as a global leader when it comes to mental health, which is why, only three weeks ago, we hosted the global inter-ministerial conference.

I know time is running out, so let me turn quickly to some of the other remarks made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington on workforce. We have committed to 21,000 new posts, which will ideally be filled by 19,000 NHS staff. That has been written into local plans and some local areas are making progress, but it is too early to be able to count the number of people in post. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) mentioned further education, and as part of the Green Paper on children and young people we will incentivise every school and college to identify and train a senior designated lead for mental health issues.

To conclude, given the time available, we recognise that there is still much work to be done. I am proud of the work that this Government are doing to improve mental health, ensuring that many more people can access vital, high-quality mental health support. I hope we get an opportunity to debate the subject in future, but I also hope I have provided reassurance today that we are absolutely committed to delivering against the commitments set out in the five year forward view for mental health.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10 (6)).

Local Government Funding: Merseyside

4.30 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered local government funding in Merseyside.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am happy to welcome several of my Merseyside colleagues to the debate.

The Prime Minister says austerity is over. The Chancellor says austerity is coming to an end. Aside from the clear difference between those two statements, neither is the experience of local government leaders and councillors on Merseyside, nor is it set to be their experience over the next few years. My constituency covers two local authority areas, Liverpool City Council and Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. I see that my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) intends to speak in the debate, so I will focus my remarks on the situation facing Liverpool City Council and he will deal with that facing Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. I confine my remarks in that regard to simply saying that the challenge facing Knowsley is equally difficult to Liverpool's, although it is a smaller authority.

Liverpool City Council has already had to cut £340 million from its budget—some 58% of its total resource—since 2010. This year, it must find a further £41 million of cuts to make up the balance of the £90 million reduction it has been seeking over the city's three-year budgeting period, which comes to an end next March. By 2020, it will have cut £420 million in total, which was 64% of its budget before austerity was unnecessarily and zealously imposed to such a high degree by the Lib Dem-Tory coalition Government in 2010. Those figures show that there is a lot more cutting to come over the next two years, regardless of what the Chancellor said to us yesterday. Austerity is set to continue for Liverpool City Council, no matter the measures in yesterday's Budget.

According to the National Audit Office, local authorities in England have seen a 49% reduction in Government funding since 2010, so the cuts imposed on Liverpool have been far higher than average, despite its people having higher levels of deprivation and poverty than the average. Indeed, Liverpool City Council is ranked as the fourth most deprived local authority in the latest indices of multiple deprivation statistics. In fact, 10 of the city's 30 wards contain a local area within the 1% most deprived nationally, with one—Speke-Garston—in my constituency. Liverpool is ranked as the third most deprived for health and disability and the fifth most for income and employment.

In any fair system, central Government would mandate below-average cuts on Liverpool; that would happen in any system that took any note of the needs of the people of different areas. However, the way the coalition and Tory Governments since 2010 have imposed austerity most emphatically does not take account of the relative needs of the people of different areas who have to deliver the cuts demanded of them. Liverpool has been doubly disadvantaged by facing a larger cut in addition to having more and greater needs to meet.

Take social care as an example. In 2010, Liverpool City Council spent £222 million supporting adults who need help in the community, either because of age,

infirmity or disability. That has been reduced to £152 million, despite our ageing population and our population having higher levels of ill health than in many other areas—as set out in the indices of multiple deprivation—meaning more people need the help provided by adult social care services.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate and for the leadership she gives to Merseyside MPs on these issues. To put this in context, central Government cuts to St Helens Council's budget are the equivalent of two years of its social care budgets. Similar to Liverpool, we have an ageing population and an expected increase in people suffering from conditions such as dementia. Does she agree that that is completely unsustainable, and that austerity certainly has not ended, for my constituents or hers?

Maria Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is impossible to see how anybody looking at these facts could assert that austerity is either over or is even coming to an end. We obviously do not know what the Government think between those two poles, but it is one or the other, depending on where they are. From where we are, it does not seem that either assertion comes near to explaining the truth.

In Liverpool, £70 million less is being spent on adult social care alone due to the cuts caused by austerity—this political choice that Governments since 2010 have made. Thresholds for eligibility for that help have therefore clearly had to increase, so fewer people get it despite more people needing it. The lack of that support, which should be there and would have been in the past, creates extra burdens on individuals and their families. That is the direct consequence of these cuts in Government funding.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): This is a timely debate. Coventry has experienced exactly the same sort of local government cuts as Liverpool, and through the loss of grants—that is what caused all this—well over 50% of its budget is really not there anymore. One big problem in Coventry—I am sure my hon. Friend will touch on it—is the funding of children taken into care. She just touched on social care. Lots of families now have to find money for social care that they can ill afford, driving them into the hands of money lenders.

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend will know the figures for Coventry very well. He set some out, and they sound similar to some of the figures we have seen on Merseyside. Any application for Coventry to join Merseyside will of course be considered by the appropriate authorities, if my hon. Friend wants to take that back to Coventry.

Nationally, £7 billion has been cut from social care budgets, so the £650 million announced by the Chancellor yesterday—to much fanfare—will make little impact on the size of the problem created by the Governments he has been a member of since 2010. I saw today that that figure will cover not only adult social care but children's, and it also apparently includes money for NHS winter pressures next year, so perhaps that figure is not quite all it was cracked up to be in the Budget statement. However, even if it were, it would not be enough to deal with many of the problems created by the cuts to Liverpool's social care that have had to be made in the last eight years and are still ongoing.

[Maria Eagle]

What about reserves? Tory Ministers frequently answer questions about the scale of the cuts faced by suggesting that authorities should spend their reserves; we often hear that cry. Liverpool has spent £146 million of its reserves to support social care spending, even at the reduced levels it now provides. Its reserves are down to £17 million, so I hope that the Minister was not planning to tell me that Liverpool City Council should spend its reserves. It is clear that that is not a long-term solution. In fact, it is not a solution that will work for much longer at all. Indeed, the NAO says that one in 10 authorities nationally will have nothing left in three years' time if they continue to use their reserves to pay for social care, as Liverpool has done. Even if those remaining reserves were spent only on social care and nothing else, local authority reserves would be completely used up by 2022.

What about new money? The Mayor of the city of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, has adopted—quite entrepreneurially, I think—an invest to earn strategy, for which he has been criticised but which has yielded so far an extra £13 million a year in new revenue. His original idea was to use that money to support growth in the local economy. However, because of the extent of the cuts in Government funding and the damage they have done—the dire impact that they have had on some of the poorest and most vulnerable members of society in Liverpool—he has had to use the money to support services that would otherwise have been cut even further. For example, all our Sure Start centres have been kept open, even though some of the services they provide have gone. However, the tide of extra need being caused by ongoing cuts in Government support and social security benefits is likely to overwhelm the extra funding that the Mayor has brought in via invest to earn, and to do so soon. In that regard, the roll-out of universal credit will mean 55,000 people in the city being transferred on to it.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend recognise the experience in Wirral with the roll-out of universal credit? That has led to a need for 30 extra tonnes of food and created a 32% increase in the use of food banks because of the hardship that it has caused.

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend, perhaps unsurprisingly, has anticipated my next point—we tend to be on the same wavelength. The Trussell Trust says that in areas where universal credit has been rolled out, it sees a disproportionate increase—my hon. Friend reports a big increase in Wirral—in food bank referrals, as opposed to a lower increase in other areas. The Chancellor is putting some money back in for universal credit, to ameliorate the cuts made by George Osborne in Department for Work and Pensions budgets, but that will not prevent millions of poor and vulnerable people from losing money. They will just lose a little less—and that is without the administrative chaos and design features of this benefit that cause poverty and destitution in Liverpool. Only the Liverpool citizens support scheme, the mayoral hardship fund and the discretionary housing payments, on which the Mayor spends more than central Government provide in moneys, stand between many families and destitution.

The Mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, has repeatedly invited Ministers to Liverpool to inspect the books and tell him just what else he is supposed to try in order to

deal with the funding crisis that austerity has created, but not one has taken up the challenge. Indeed, he even sent train tickets to Eric Pickles, when he was Secretary of State, to facilitate a visit, but he did not use them. Perhaps this Minister can take up the offer to inspect the books and see what else he can suggest that Liverpool City Council do; we would be most happy to welcome him. If not, perhaps he could indicate that the Mayor of Liverpool's suggestion of a royal commission on the funding formula will be seriously considered. After all, with things going as they are, soon there will be no consideration of levels of deprivation or need in any of the ways that funding is allocated to local authorities, nor will any account be taken of the ability of the people of a local area to pay for all that is needed themselves; there will be no elements of redistribution. That is a recipe for entrenching disadvantage and ending social solidarity.

According to the Local Government Association, 168 councils will soon receive no revenue support grant at all and will rely only on business rates and council tax for their income. That disadvantages Liverpool again, because the council tax mix and base is so low. For example, Liverpool has more people than Bristol, but raises £38 million less in council tax, because almost 60% of Liverpool properties are in band A, compared with an average of 24% across the country, and 90% are in bands A to C, compared with 66% nationally. In addition, almost 36% of council tax payers are eligible for a discount because of their circumstances, whereas the national average is 16%. However, Government funding takes no account of these issues. That makes a big difference. If Liverpool was at the national average for these things, that would have meant an additional £97.7 million in council tax available to be collected every year. As it is, Liverpool can raise only £167 million in council tax. Similarly, less is raised in business rates in Liverpool than in many other places, because of the density and mix of local businesses.

Forcing the people of the city to rely, for meeting higher levels of local need, on weaker business rate and council tax yields is not a fair way to fund local services. I therefore finish by asking the Minister to have the courage that his predecessors lacked and visit Liverpool to inspect our books and make some suggestions as to what else, if anything, can be done. I also ask him to address the question of establishing a royal commission on local Government funding to ensure that the Government of which he is a member do not entrench existing deprivation and remove elements of redistribution that have in the past ensured social solidarity and improved life chances, and equality between different areas of the country. We need that now more than ever.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate can last until 5.30 pm. I am obliged to call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman no later than 5.13, and the guideline limit is five minutes for the Opposition, 10 minutes for the Minister and then time for the mover of the motion to sum up the debate at the end. That means that the Back-Bench contributions can run till 5.13. Five Members are seeking to catch my eye. Three of them have written to Mr Speaker, but I am a generous soul, so I want to get everybody in. If contributions are

longer than five minutes, those at the end will get less. The first Member who has applied to Mr Speaker is Dame Louise Ellman.

4.46 pm

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) on securing this important debate and on the excellent way in which she opened it.

Local government is vital. It is responsible for essential services such as education, social care and road safety. It is a lifeline for people in need. It drives regeneration and civic pride. In Liverpool, the City Council, with Mayor Joe Anderson, has protected people from the brunt of ongoing and severe Government cuts. It has displayed innovation and civic leadership. By 2020, more than 64% of central Government funding will have been removed from Liverpool. That is a real-terms loss of £444 million. For the fourth poorest local authority in the country, that is a great injustice.

The Chancellor's statement that austerity is ending rings hollow in Liverpool. Government cuts continue as the council struggles to care for people who need social care and children who just want a chance in life. Nurseries remain underfunded and schools still struggle. The impact of the Government's cumulative cuts in benefits, often affecting working people, takes its toll. Universal credit threatens to make people poorer. We do not know what the Chancellor's reassurances in the Budget will mean to people on the ground—not very much, I suspect. Rhetoric needs to be matched with positive action.

Despite increasingly vociferous warnings, fire and police services are denied the essential cash that they need to protect the community. Cuts in fire services are causing increasing public concern, and in Liverpool and Merseyside as a whole gun crime is now increasing. Over the city hangs the threat of Brexit—threats to the economy, to EU-funded initiatives and to the European collaborative research that is so important to our universities and to the city of Liverpool.

I call on the Government to change course and match their words with positive change. They must revisit their plans to put an even tighter squeeze on local services by changing local government funding after 2020 to eliminate central Government support for Liverpool. That is grossly unjust in a city where there is a low council tax base and a 1% rise in council tax raises only £1.4 million; a 1% increase in a place such as Surrey raises £6 million.

Liverpool has a responsible and innovative council protecting Liverpool people from a Government intent on cutting back. I call on Ministers to match their rhetoric with deeds, stop the cuts and give Liverpool a fair deal.

4.49 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Hollobone. I would like to add to the congratulations to my sister, my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), on securing this debate at such an important time. As she has pointed out, local authorities in general have seen a cut of nearly 50% to their budgets, but local authorities in Merseyside have suffered even greater cuts.

My local authority, Wirral, has suffered a 53% cut in real terms since 2010, which is above average. That means that it has lost well over half its 2010 budget, which is £635 less in resource every household in Wirral. Wirral's local authority is expected to continue to cut £130 million more between now and 2021, despite the Chancellor and his jocular toilet jokes in the Budget yesterday.

How do these cuts affect my constituents? Behind all the cuts and the many service reductions we have been forced to experience in the past few years are people who are often very vulnerable, not being looked after or being left to fend for themselves when circumstances make it impossible for them to survive independently. The social safety net has been deliberately destroyed by this Government in pursuit of their ideological obsessions with a smaller state. Not only do they pursue those obsessions and hit the poorest hardest, but when we have debates such as this they smirk and laugh, and do not believe the tales that we bring to the House about the real results their cuts have had. The Minister looks to me to be doing the same again today.

We have seen an increase in food bank use, homelessness and destitution, as well as anxiety and insecurity, which has led to increases in mental health breakdowns. A lot of these cuts are actually false economies. In Wirral, the adult social care budget has been cut by over a quarter since 2010, but because of our low council tax base the capacity to raise tax locally is severely constrained. A council tax increase of nearly 6% this year raised only £8 million, half of which is ring-fenced for social care, but because Wirral has an above average number of older people, that increase does not even cover the extra demand being generated by our ageing local population. It is not acceptable for the national Government to wash their hands of the different levels of demand for social care in different areas and leave council tax payers to pick up the bill when council tax bases vary so dramatically—my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood said of Liverpool's case—between different areas, because of different property prices.

In my constituency, over 11,000 people are providing unpaid care to their loved ones, many for 50 hours a week with little and diminishing help. We have seen real-terms cuts in spending on youth services. When Labour was in government, spending on youth services doubled, but since 2010 it has gone down by 7% nationally. Spending on young people's services, such as counselling and youth centres, has fallen by over half. Some 1,000 Sure Start centres have closed and many preventive, proactive services have been wiped out. In Wirral, that has led to a huge increase in the number of children taken into care, which is up from 650 two years ago to 810 this year.

These cuts are a false economy, because as less is spent on preventive work, more has to be spent on much more profound and costly interventions later. How is it moral to wait until a young life is ruined, rather than spend less to prevent it from happening in the first place?

In Wallasey, 20 out of 26 schools face budget cuts. With nearly £3 million cut between 2015 and 2020, per-pupil funding has fallen by 8%. Since 2010, 50% of the Merseyside fire authority's grant has been taken away. Instead of having 42 fire engines, we now have 22, with only 14 available for immediate response. The number of firefighters has reduced by nearly 40% from 927 to a

[Ms Angela Eagle]

mere 580. After years of decline, fire deaths have increased by 10%. The Merseyside police budget cuts have led to the loss of over 1,000 officers and crime is rising. As the recent Home Affairs Committee report demonstrated, the police are becoming less and less able to cope. As crime rises, we see the number of arrests and charges falling.

Once more, the emergency services are so stretched that they can barely cope with emergencies, and they certainly cannot do preventive work, so lives are put at risk as public sector workers face relentless pressure, being expected to do more for less. This is not my definition of fairness and it is not my definition of the end of austerity. It is an ongoing, rolling scandal, which is placed at the door of this Government.

4.55 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) on securing this debate and leading it so powerfully. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), she set out fully the impact of austerity on Liverpool City Council.

Last week in this Chamber, we had a debate led by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) in which we shared the horrific stories from our constituents about the increased use of food banks, and the impacts of austerity and the changes to social security benefits. I strongly echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood said about the efforts of Liverpool City Council, under the leadership of Mayor Joe Anderson, despite the scale of cuts in the support from central Government, still to deliver for the people, and in particular to deliver for some of the most vulnerable communities in our city. I second the idea of a royal commission to really address the issue of the fairness of local government funding. I also pay tribute to those who work in our public services who, despite austerity, do their utmost to deliver the very best services at local level.

I want to focus first on education, and secondly on crime and policing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood rightly said, Liverpool City Council has done its utmost to protect its children's centres, because we know how powerful the evidence is that investing in the early years of children's lives makes the biggest difference. If we are serious about seeking a more equal and just society, investment in those early years is crucial. I ask the Minister to speak to his colleagues in the Department for Education about the importance of those early years.

Last week, I raised the issue of the important role that nursery schools play in our communities—I make no apology for raising it again. I have two brilliant nursery schools in my constituency, Ellergreen and East Prescott Road, both of which are rated outstanding by Ofsted. They are very concerned about their long-term funding, because of some of the considerations that the Department for Education is undertaking. We are all concerned that the adoption of a national funding formula poses a threat to our schools' funding. Schools

in my constituency and around the country will not be comforted by getting some money for the “little extras” as the Chancellor set out in his speech yesterday—that is frankly insulting. We need a serious, long-term settlement for schools funding.

I will finish by saying something about crime and policing, because that is an issue of massive concern to my constituents. I ask the Minister to share the issues that have been raised during the debate with his colleagues in the Home Office. Again, this speaks to the question of injustice in funding, which all three of my colleagues have spoken about. Funding cuts have hit all parts of the country, but they have hit some parts much harder than others, and it tends to be the areas with the greatest social and economic need, such as Merseyside, that have been hit the hardest. Merseyside police relies on central Government to provide 75% of its funding. In contrast, Surrey can raise most of its funding for its police locally. Therefore, an equivalent cut to both forces does not hit the two areas the same—it hits Merseyside much harder than it hits Surrey.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) has just pointed out, since 2010 in Merseyside we have lost 1,700 staff and police officers—1,700 gone—and had a cut in the number of police community support officers of around 35%. Last year, the chief constable of Merseyside, Andy Cooke, warned that Merseyside police was reaching breaking point, as budgets are stretched to the limit.

Crime is going up, but officer numbers are at their lowest in years. Office for National Statistics figures show a 14% rise in crime in Merseyside in the year to September 2018. Of particular concern in my constituency are the 18% rise in robbery and the 16% rise in violent crime. I say to the Minister, who speaks for communities and who can lobby his Home Office colleagues, that that has to change. Surely dealing with crime and protecting the public are the most basic responsibilities of any Government.

I ask the Minister please to listen to our chief constable and our police and crime commissioner, Jane Kennedy. We need a fair deal for policing in Merseyside, alongside a fair deal for local authorities, about which my hon. Friends have spoken so eloquently.

5 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) on the typically thorough way in which she introduced this important subject. I will confine my remarks to the effects of the cuts in grant to Knowsley specifically, but before I do, I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) and other hon. Friends have said about the impact of cuts on policing and on fire and rescue services.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood indicated, Knowsley Council is the council in the country hardest hit by funding cuts, which amount to £100 million less to spend on vital local services. To bring that down to a human scale, that equates to a cut of £485 in grant support for every person in the borough, compared with a national figure of £188. To bring that down to an even more human scale, Windsor and

Maidenhead Council has had a £49 cut in grant per head and Wokingham Borough Council has had a £43 cut in grant per head. I began to wonder whether something in the grant formula was weighted towards local authorities that begin with the letter w, but if that had been the case, it would have applied to the Wirral too. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) eloquently described, however, it does not.

Knowsley Council has told me that its biggest challenges are funding children's social care, which my hon. Friends have mentioned; the need for a permanent funding solution for adult care; and the impact of moving the cost of funding services provision on to council tax payers. Funding social care is not just a problem for Knowsley. In the north-west as a whole, the number of looked-after children has increased by 12% since 2003. In Knowsley, the additional pressures on the budget for children's social care are expected to exceed £3 million as a result of a combination of increased costs for all placements, even higher increased costs for specialised placements and the scarcity of suitable residential placements.

The Government's response, however, has been wholly inadequate and falls well short of providing the funding and certainty needed to keep up with growing demands. The Minister will say that there was an announcement in the Budget yesterday. We have not seen how that will be distributed, and we do not know what it will mean for any given local authority, but if the total sum mentioned is distributed evenly, it will hardly make a dent in the difficulties that areas such as Knowsley are experiencing.

Some additional funding for adult social care has been announced in the past few years, but it does not reflect the resources needed to offer adequate and sustainable services and, moreover, it was a one-off. In March 2017, £9 million of additional resources was announced from the better care fund to help to fund increasing demand and rising costs. So far, however, the Government have not confirmed whether that support will continue beyond 2019-20. Can the Minister commit to continuing that funding? If he cannot, the council's budget will inevitably mean that services suffer still further. Moving the cost of service provision on to local council tax payers is, frankly, nothing short of disgraceful. The move away from a grant distribution formula that provided a weighted recognition of the needs of an area is entirely regressive in how poorer, more deprived areas such as Knowsley end up as the biggest losers. How can that be fair?

The Government argue that need should be replaced by a funding system that rewards councils based on the level of economic growth and prosperity. Knowsley has some important and successful local companies such as QVC in my constituency and Jaguar Land Rover in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood, but their success and that of other companies locally, though important and welcome, can have only a limited impact on the revenue generated for Knowsley Council and falls short of the area's needs.

We have already seen the effect on services. Anything that is not a statutory requirement has inevitably had to bear the brunt of the cuts. As we have seen elsewhere, we are at the point at which local councils cannot meet even those statutory requirements. As need is increasingly sidelined, that trend will sadly continue. The grim conclusion has to be that unless the Government acknowledge the need for a fair funding system that properly reflects

local need and deprivation, areas such as Knowsley face a bleak future in which the consequences of the Government's austerity programme are visited on the communities least able to bear them.

5.6 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) for securing the debate and for the manner in which she opened it. I am honoured to be among my hon. Friends representing constituencies on Merseyside, especially in the face of a Tory Government who have chosen to impose unfair and disproportionate cuts on our constituents. I use the word "chosen" carefully because, as we know, austerity is a choice, which makes the damage done to our constituents' lives so much worse. It is not just what is in the pot but how the Government have chosen to cut it up that has hit the most deprived the hardest, because the Government have removed the weighting for deprivation from many of their funding formulas. As we saw in the Budget yesterday, those cuts are not going away anytime soon, despite the Prime Minister's promise that "austerity is over" earlier this month.

Tory cuts have hit Merseyside so hard that there has been a £440 million reduction in Liverpool City Council's Government support since 2010-11, which is a cut of 64% to the council's overall budget. We are at the point at which our most basic services are in crisis, and many hon. Friends have articulated examples of where that is the case.

The revenue budget of Merseyside fire and rescue service has been reduced from £73 million to £59.9 million. These cuts might be just figures on a spreadsheet to some, but they have real-life consequences. Our fire and rescue authority has been forced to reduce the number of firefighters it employs from 923 to 620, and to reduce the number of fire engines from 42 to just 24. In turn, the response time for life-risk incidents is on average 35 seconds slower than in 2010-11. What if there were a major incident in Merseyside?

Similarly, Merseyside police has faced startling cuts from central Government, as my hon. Friends have said. Many hon. Friends have articulated the connection between local authority funding and our police, and how we have been disproportionately hit. Our police workforce has been cut by nearly a quarter, so we have 1,600 fewer police staff than in 2010-11. I ask the Minister to reflect on that and I hope he is listening carefully.

Ultimately, the combination of all the cuts to our local authority, our fire service and our police force has led to a reduction in service for many different community services throughout the course of life—from our children's centres to our youth services, to our leisure and recreation service, to what happens on our roads, to our community services and to services for the elderly and social care.

We have an incredibly stretched council, fire service and police workforce who do so much in such challenging circumstances, and what we are seeing is an impact on real life for too many of our constituents. We are seeing an increase in people in crisis. We are here today because we think it is socially and morally illiterate to see so many people in crisis. It is also financially illiterate. We are sitting here in front of a Minister from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, but this situation has wider, far-reaching consequences for

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all Departments. We have heard about the impact on our national health service and that we are going to see £20 billion extra spent on our NHS, but again this disproportionate focus on crisis is so much more expensive. It does not make any economic sense.

Other colleagues have clearly articulated the impact of cuts, including the increase in crime. I will just reflect on the fact that we are now seeing the most brutal run of gun violence in Liverpool in recent years. In just a 10-day period at the beginning of this month, there were two fatal shootings, one of which was in my constituency, and four non-fatal shootings. This increase in serious crime has far-reaching and serious consequences for our constituents.

However, it is not until we compare the cuts that we have sustained on Merseyside with those elsewhere that we truly see the disproportionate level of austerity with which our constituents have been burdened. Whereas each household in Merseyside has experienced a cut of £712.57, the average reduction per household across England is just £320.99. That is still an unwarranted reduction, but of course it is nowhere near the cuts that the people of Merseyside have to cope with in one of the most deprived areas of the country. It is nothing short of a tragedy that the Government's own figures have shown that if Liverpool City Council had been subject to that same average reduction, it would have been £71.6 million better off in 2019-20 than it is expected to be. What is worse and most galling is that some authorities have seen an increase in their spending power—colleagues have mentioned Surrey.

Neglect by a Tory Government is nothing new to the people of Merseyside, whose independence and resilience make our region proudly what it is, and our city, under the leadership of Joe Anderson, is doing so much in spite of this Government. Can the Minister tell us when our constituents will be given an equal chance and some relief from this disproportionate burden?

5.12 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I would say that it is also a pleasure to respond to the debate, but it is not a pleasure at all; it is heartbreaking, when we consider the human stories that sit behind the numbers that we have heard today. However, I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), for how they have stood up to represent their communities in the face of absolutely devastating cuts to vital public services.

I should declare an interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association and I will use some of the LGA's information in my speech. The truth is that austerity is not over, but it was never going to be over, because as things stand the Government do not believe in strong local public services. We have heard talk today about how the Government do not like a big state. The truth is that the Government actually do not mind a big

state, provided that it is a big national state, because the workforce data today says that the national Government workforce is the biggest since comparable records began, compared with local government, which is now at its smallest since comparable records began. The disproportionate cut has not only been to local government; within England the most deprived communities have been the hardest hit. The most deprived communities have seen cuts of about £220 per person, compared with about £40 per person in the least deprived, so austerity has been targeted on local government and then within local government it has been targeted on the areas that could least afford to take the hit, in the way that we have seen.

The Government have completely ignored pleas from the cross-party LGA to do two things: first, stop the in-year cut of £1.3 billion; and, secondly, fund forward the £5.8 billion that would have addressed homelessness, adult social care and children's services. Let us be honest—when it comes to the £410 million that is being put forward, the majority of people who work in social care are paid the minimum wage. When the national minimum wage goes up in April, those people will rightly be uplifted, but there is a cost to that for the providers. Much of the money announced in the Budget will go not to additional care for over-65s who need it, but to pay people who are being paid the lowest possible rate for providing an essential community service. I do not believe that is fair, the LGA does not believe that is fair and councils across the country do not believe that is fair, but again we see the Government turning a blind eye to it.

We all know where the real impact has been felt; we know the numbers on adult social care and the fact that 1.2 million people who would have had care in 2010 do not get that care today. We know that there are more young people who have been taken into care because they are at risk if they are kept at home, and the cost of that to local authorities. We also know, because the Government have walked away from their responsibilities, that the only way that councils can fund that care is to reduce eligibility and take the money from vital neighbourhood services.

The services that council tax payers see and value that come from the council tax that they pay have been the very services that have been taken away to fund the pressures on people's services in every community in the country. The public say, "I'm paying more council tax, but the bins are being emptied less often, the local library has closed and the park doesn't get maintained in the way that it used to." All those really important services have been affected.

I hoped that when we had a change in Secretary of State that the new Secretary of State would finally have the ear of the Treasury, so that they could finally get a fair hearing and make the case for these vital community services, but it strikes me that one or two things have happened. Either the Ministry did not bother making the case in the first place, or—it could be both these things—the Treasury just does not care about the human impact of austerity and how we have seen it distributed across the country.

What I want to know, what people in the Chamber want to know and what people in England want to know is, what will the Minister do to address such chronic underfunding? It will be on his watch that an older person will die because they do not get the social

care they need, or a child will be made to feel vulnerable because they are not getting the protection they need. Where will the money come from?

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) on securing this debate and it is good to see a strong turnout from Merseyside colleagues as well.

It did not sound like the hon. Lady was aware that in fact my very first visit as Minister for Local Government was indeed to Liverpool, both to see the City Council and to work with the troubled families programme, and I was delighted to accept an invitation from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) shortly after being appointed to this particular role.

Being relatively new to this role, I am the first to say that local authorities have done a commendable job over the past few years, maintaining a strong level of services in the face of rising demand. In responding to the specific points that the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood made, I will first outline my broad vision for the role of local government, which consists of three particular areas: first, to drive economic growth; secondly, to help the most vulnerable in our society; and, lastly, to build strong communities. I will take each of these areas in turn, specifically in relation to the points that have been made by hon. Members about Merseyside.

I will start with the economics. In this financial year, councils on Merseyside—including Sefton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Wirral, Halton and St Helens—had an aggregated core spending power of around £1.3 billion. Core spending power is the standard measure of a local authority's key financial resources. It includes money from the central Government grant, which is typically known as the revenue support grant, but also the money raised locally from council tax, the money raised through the business rates system, and further specific grants from central Government for things such as adult social care, the better care programme and, indeed, the new homes bonus.

Across Merseyside, core spending power is up every single year in this four-year spending period and up 2% this year as well.

Maria Eagle: I received a parliamentary answer from a colleague of the Minister about police spending, which said that over the last year £5.1 million of extra money had been given to enable the police to tackle the very serious crime that my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) referred to. In fact, that money came from the Government simply allowing a precept increase; it all came from hard-pressed council tax payers in Liverpool and not one penny piece came from the Government. How can the Minister justify the ridiculous figures that he is using, which hide the Government's contribution by referring to everything else that can be raised in any other way? That is a way of abdicating responsibility.

Rishi Sunak: I totally reject the suggestion of hiding. It would be ridiculous to look at any local authority's financial resources without considering the various ways in which such an authority funds itself. I am delighted

that the hon. Lady is focused on keeping council tax low. Indeed, the Government have ensured that council tax today is lower in real terms, across the country, than it was in 2010. We have heard various suggestions from Labour Members about doubling council tax, which is something I assume the hon. Lady, being on the side of hard-working taxpayers like us, would reject.

The idea that the funding formulas do not take account of deprivation or the differing ability of areas to raise council tax is totally erroneous. For example, when the adult social care precept was introduced, it was understood that different areas would raise different amounts from it, which is why in the incremental billions of pounds that the Government have injected into the social care system directly through the better care fund there is an equalising measure to take that into account. That is exactly why, today, the most deprived authorities have a core spending power per household—taking into account all those things, council tax included—that is 23% higher than that of richer authorities. Indeed, that is why areas with larger council tax bases provide more of their area's resources from council tax; Merseyside provides less than half of the amount those areas do, because the council tax base in Liverpool is that much lower. It is totally wrong to suggest that that is not taken into account.

I think it was alleged that I, or the Government, had removed deprivation from funding formulas. I can categorically say that I have not removed it from any funding formula. We are in a root and branch review of how local government is funded. We are in the midst of various consultations and I would be delighted to have hon. Members' suggestions.

Mr Howarth: If that is the case, will the Minister explain why Knowsley, which is one of the most socially deprived parts of the UK, has had a £100 million cut in its grant? His figures just do not add up.

Rishi Sunak: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that Knowsley's core spending power per household is about 20-something per cent. higher than the average for a similar metropolitan authority, which takes into account exactly his point. He talked about the fair funding review and, as I said, that is exactly where all the issues will be considered, ensuring that deprivation or, indeed, multiple other factors, are taken into account in the new funding formula.

Ms Angela Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Rishi Sunak: No. I will try to make some progress.

When it comes to that point, I am convinced and confident that those factors are taken into account. Indeed, as we restructure the fair funding formula, they will continue to be taken into account fairly and accurately.

Beyond Government grants, driving economic growth locally is the only sustainable way to ensure that we can raise the money we need to fund our services, and business rates retention is one such opportunity. I am delighted, and I am sure hon. Members here will join me in recognising, that Merseyside is in the fortunate position of being a 100% business rates retention area, which means that the local councils keep all the growth they generate from those rates. That is not something that is enjoyed by every local authority—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. We do not really want sledging in the Chamber. The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) is sitting opposite the Minister and he must be heard with courtesy. Her side of the House was heard with courtesy during all its contributions. I know that the hon. Lady's attempt to intervene was not accepted by the Minister, but she could have another go. However, she is more likely to be successful if she does not keep shouting across the Chamber.

Rishi Sunak: Thank you, Mr Hollobone. I think the hon. Lady was being snide about the fact that Merseyside is a business rates retention pilot. I am sure that the £54 million that Merseyside will keep this year in additional funding as a result of the pilot is nothing to be snide about, and will make an enormous difference on the ground, helping the people I know she cares about. Many other local authorities across the country would be happy to be one of the pilot areas, so if she thinks that Merseyside would rather not be one and would give up the opportunity to others, I would be happy to talk to her afterwards.

Jim McMahon: Will the Minister give way?

Rishi Sunak: I will try to make some progress.

Business rates retention is not the only incentive for local growth, as it sits alongside the other support the Government give to local authorities' wider ambitions through local growth deals. For example, £2 million has been invested to create the first dedicated digital skills academy in the UK, at the City of Liverpool College, and more than £13 million has been invested in a highway infrastructure scheme comprising a series of essential and integrated improvements along the A565 corridor. In sum, the Government strongly support Merseyside's economic growth, whether through direct investment or business rates retention, and thus enable it to fund services over the years to come.

Dame Louise Ellman: Will the Minister give way?

Rishi Sunak: I will make some progress.

The second vision I outlined, which is undeniably one of the most crucial roles for local government, is to continue to help the most vulnerable in our society. It is local authorities, as we have heard, that support the elderly, the disabled and our children in need, and we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to councils for their incredible work. I am delighted that the Government back local authorities to carry out those vital duties. Last year, the Budget provided an additional £2 billion for social care. Earlier this year, another £240 million was announced for social care winter funding, and in the Budget yesterday the Chancellor announced that a further £650 million will be provided for care services next year.

In contrast to what we have heard, the flexibility to use the funding for things such as children's services is something that local authorities have specifically asked for. They will have the flexibility in each local area to use the funding for different care services, rather than its use being dictated by central Government. I would have thought that all Members appreciated their local areas having such flexibility to make the best use of the money, in the way they see fit.

I am pleased to say that that increased investment and better working between the NHS and local government is paying dividends on the ground. We have seen social care free up 949 beds a day since the peak two years ago—a 39% reduction in social care delayed transfers of care. In Merseyside, progress has been seen particularly in St Helens, and I commend the local authority on reducing such transfers by 72% since the February 2017 peak.

I have mentioned the troubled families programme, which is making amazing strides to support our society's most vulnerable families. When I visited the Clubmoor children's centre in Liverpool, it was a privilege to talk to several of the families participating and to see the life-changing work at first hand. I am proud to say that the Government have invested £1 billion in the programme over this spending cycle, with 130,000 families nationally achieving significant and sustained progress against the goals they have been set. In almost 17,000 of the families, one or more of the adults has moved into work, and the families I spoke to told me that that was central to their ambitions.

Across Merseyside, 10,000 families are being helped with more than £20 million of funding, and I pay tribute to Liverpool City Council in particular for doing a very good job, working with early help assessments. We heard from the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) about the importance of early intervention. Referrals to children's services in Liverpool were down 3% in the most recent year—

Mr Howarth: On a point of order Mr Hollobone. I want to place it on record that, had he been here, my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) would have made a significant contribution, but he is, in fact, not here.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Thank you for that point of clarification. It will be on the record.

Rishi Sunak: I apologise to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who mentioned the importance of early intervention. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the point of order. That great work in the last year builds on three successive years of reductions in referrals to children's services.

We talked about the importance of local authorities in building strong communities and the Government back that, whether through the funds for Liverpool City Council from the controlling migration fund, ensuring that communities are connected through the roads fund that was announced yesterday, or bringing high streets together and creating pocket parks—something that Liverpool has benefited from. Whether through building economic growth, supporting communities or helping the vulnerable, the Government are determined to recognise the role that local government plays and to back it with what it needs.

5.28 pm

Maria Eagle: I am disappointed that the Minister chose to take away half of my time to respond. I am afraid he did not deal with the points that were made in the debate, and that is a shame. It is ridiculous for him to suggest in the way he did that the Government take account of deprivation. I would like to see how he came up with the figures in his speech. Liverpool's local

authority has lost 64% of its money, and Knowsley 58%. Our police have had the worst cut in the country, losing 31% of their money, with the fire authority losing 50% of theirs. Liverpool Community College has lost £5 million over the past four years. If that is strongly supporting Merseyside, I hope that the Minister and his Government will stop supporting us, because it is terrible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered local government funding in Merseyside.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 30 October 2018

TREASURY

Banking Act 2009 Reporting

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The Treasury has laid before the House of Commons a report required under section 231 of the Banking Act 2009 covering the period from 1 October 2017 to 31 March 2018. Copies of the document are available in the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office.

[HCWS1049]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Istanbul Convention Ratification: 2018 Report on Progress

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I have today laid before Parliament and published the second annual report on progress toward ratification of the Council of Europe convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul convention). The UK signed the Istanbul convention in 2012 to reaffirm the UK's strong commitment to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) and this Government remain fully committed to ratifying the convention.

The report is structured in line with the Istanbul convention's key objectives and sets out the steps taken by the Government and the devolved Administrations toward ratification of convention, and measures taken forward since the 2017 report on progress.

We are continuing to step up our efforts to combat VAWG. We will refresh the cross-Government VAWG strategy later this Session to ensure that we are doing all that we can to tackle those crimes that disproportionately affect women. The refresh will reaffirm the Government's commitment to addressing VAWG in all its forms, capture new programmes of work, including the forthcoming draft Domestic Abuse Bill, and provide an update on the delivery of existing actions.

In most respects the UK already complies with or goes further than the convention requires. As the 2017 report on progress set out, since signing the convention in 2012 we have strengthened the law, introduced new protective tools, and issued a range of guidance and support for frontline professionals. But we know there is more to do. That is why in March this year, we launched our "transforming the response to domestic abuse" consultation on what more we can do to protect and support victims, recognise the lifelong impact domestic abuse can have on children and make sure agencies effectively respond to domestic abuse. As part of this, we have consulted widely with partners on the legislative and non-legislative steps we can take to ensure victims are afforded the greatest possible protection.

We will be publishing a Government response and the landmark draft Domestic Abuse Bill in due course. The draft Bill will include the provisions on extraterritorial jurisdiction over the specific offences necessarily for compliance with the convention in England and Wales.

The publication of this report fulfils the requirement of section 2 of the Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Act 2017. I will be updating Parliament on progress in due course.

Copies of the report will be available in the Vote Office and it will be published on the Government's website at gov.uk.

[HCWS1048]

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