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**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 5 November 2018**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 5 November 2018*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Leasehold Charges

1. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to protect existing leaseholders from high leasehold charges. [907431]

4. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to protect existing leaseholders from high leasehold charges. [907435]

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire):** Before I answer these questions, I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in offering our condolences to the family and friends of Sir Jeremy Heywood, who passed away at the weekend. He demonstrated all that is precious in our civil service through the way in which he supported Governments of all colours, and the manner in which he supported four Prime Ministers. He showed leadership, real focus and ingenuity in dealing with challenging issues, as well as calmness and a real sense of humour. I know that he will be missed by everyone on both sides of the House.

Unfair leasehold practices have no place in a modern housing market, and neither do excessive ground rents that exploit consumers. I will be making clear to developers at a roundtable meeting later this week the need for the industry to provide greater support to existing leaseholders.

**Liz McInnes:** I thank the Secretary of State for his response, and I would like to associate myself with his remarks about the sad death of Sir Jeremy Heywood.

Will the Secretary of State explain how the steps he has outlined will help my constituent, Linda Barnes, who owns a flat that is valued at £80,000 and pays an onerous ground rent of £400 a year on it? What help will he give so that such flats can become attractive to buyers again?

**James Brokenshire:** I am conscious of some of the bad practices in the leasehold market, which is why I will be meeting the industry later this week to underline the need for redress and for solutions to be offered to

people who have in some cases been mis-sold. I certainly take this seriously. I have also written to the Competition and Markets Authority and to the Solicitors Regulatory Authority, in the knowledge that there are serious questions about some of the practices involved, in order to ensure that we are taking action on a number of fronts in response to the challenges that the hon. Lady rightly highlights.

**Liz Twist:** Three weeks ago, members of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee held a roundtable for leaseholders at the start of our inquiry. They told us about the problem of escalating ground rents that trap them in homes that they can no longer sell. They made it clear that they wanted existing leaseholds to be ended; does the Secretary of State agree with them?

**James Brokenshire:** We are working with the Law Commission around greater enfranchisement in order to bring leaseholds to an end. I am also conscious that at least one provider in the market has offered some means of redress and of dealing with some of the issues, but the point is that we need to go further, and that is what I shall be challenging representatives of the industry on when I meet them later this week.

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): The House will be grateful to the Secretary of State for saying that he is going to commit to doing all he can for residential leaseholders on existing leases, which are abusive. It is still not too late for the Competition and Markets Authority to declare some of those leases to be so unfair as to be unenforceable.

I hope that, in time, the Secretary of State will meet representatives of the industry, along with the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership and the Leaseholder Association—and perhaps the Chairman of the Select Committee, which is having hearings this afternoon—and that the campaigners and the industry will all meet together so that the Secretary of State is not hearing one thing in one ear and another thing in the other. We have to represent the leaseholders.

**James Brokenshire:** I hear my hon. Friend's message very clearly indeed. We have been provided with a number of examples of egregious practice, and I intend to challenge some of the concerns that have been flagged to me. I am sure that we will continue to have this conversation, but I have noted his points.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): The Law Commission process grinds on, but what advice can be given in the meantime to constituents who present with the most outrageous charges?

**James Brokenshire:** Advice is being given by LEASE and others, but this is about transparency and providing more support, which is where the industry has a key role to play. That is why we will be making these points to the industry later this week, as well as looking at where the regulatory aspects might sit.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Leaseholders in several private blocks in Leeds are being asked to pay huge bills to deal with unsafe cladding. The cost is between £10,000 and £28,000 for each leaseholder at

Skyline Apartments, and the total cost of replacing the cladding in the Saxton development could be as high as £8 million. Given that my constituents are being asked to pay money that they do not have to deal with a problem that they did not create, when will the Government stop urging freeholders not to charge leaseholders and actually prevent them from doing so by law?

**James Brokenshire:** We have taken several steps and put significant pressure on the industry, and that is starting to have an impact as many freeholders take the necessary steps to make buildings safe without passing on the costs to leaseholders, who should not bear them. I am happy to consider the right hon. Gentleman's specific examples, because we are in direct contact with several different agencies, and indeed with local government about taking enforcement action, to see that work is done.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** I thank my right hon. Friend for his answers. I urge the Government to bring in legislation to bar such charges in future, but we would still need to address those who have been unfairly put in this position in the first place. I therefore urge my right hon. Friend to consider not only legislation for the future, but retrospective legislation to address the egregious practices that have taken place.

**James Brokenshire:** As my hon. Friend will know, we are consulting on the implementation of a ban on inappropriate leaseholds on homes, which are the core of what we are discussing. Legislation will come forward once we have seen the responses to our technical consultation, and there will obviously be plenty of opportunity for colleagues to debate the matter further.

**John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab):** I start by formally echoing the Secretary of State's comments about Sir Jeremy Heywood. Many of us were privileged to work with Sir Jeremy, and he was an exceptional civil servant who gave outstanding service to this country. Our deep sympathies are with his wife and family at this time.

As we have heard, many of us have constituents who bought their home but then found that they do not own it and feel ripped off by unfair leasehold contracts. When we hear, repeatedly, that leasehold buyers did not choose their own solicitor, were wrongly told that they could buy their freehold cheaply at any time, or found out later that they had to ask and pay freeholders for permission to own a pet, change their carpets or build a conservatory, the individual cases add up to something bigger. The Government must act, just as with other mis-selling scandals, such as on pensions, mortgages or payment protection insurance. Will the Secretary of State today back an inquiry into this systematic mis-selling to leaseholders?

**James Brokenshire:** I recognise and appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's comments about Sir Jeremy Heywood. I know that that message will have been heard throughout the House.

The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's investigation into leasehold is live, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman recognises the seriousness with which we take the issues that he and

others have flagged, and the troubling matters that pertain to some of the practices within the leasehold market. That is why I am taking action.

**John Healey:** It is not the Select Committee's action that counts, but the Government's action, which has been too weak and too slow and, critically, largely overlooks the plight of existing leaseholders. An industry survey shows that six in 10 leaseholders did not even know what being a leaseholder meant until after they had bought, and that nine in 10 regret having bought a leasehold at all. Those are classic signs of mis-selling—it is a national scandal. I will give the Secretary of State another chance: when will he stand up for leaseholders and launch an inquiry into mis-selling?

**James Brokenshire:** Nobody is ignoring the issue. That is not only why we are legislating to address the inappropriate use of leasehold for new homes, but why I have underlined today the requests that I have made of the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Competition and Markets Authority. We recognise that there are serious issues, which is why we are taking action. We want to ensure that leaseholders' concerns are heard and fully understood, and that redress can be provided.

#### **Homeless Families: Accommodation Outside Home Borough**

2. **Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab):** What guidance he has issued to local authorities on accommodating homeless families outside of their home borough. [907433]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler):** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As usual, I ask people to note my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

In December 2017 we updated the homelessness code of guidance for local authorities, chapter 17 of which makes it clear that, when possible, local authorities should place families as close as possible to where they were previously living.

**Ms Buck:** There has been a 40% rise in London households being moved out of London by their local authority, and my own experience shows that local authorities are also moving families in unprecedented numbers away from their community, their children's schools, their workplaces and their support. The code of guidance is clearly not working, so can the Minister tell us unambiguously that local authorities should, under no circumstances, expect children to commute to school from temporary accommodation for two, three or even four hours every day?

**Mrs Wheeler:** I do understand the particular problem that the hon. Lady is having in Westminster, but it is the London boroughs. We have been clear that placing families out of borough should be a last resort, and we have now committed £40 million to a London collaborative project that will ensure that families are placed in temporary accommodation close to home. We also recently launched the £20 million private rented sector access fund to support those who are homeless, or who are at risk of becoming homeless, to access sustainable accommodation.

Finally, our specialist homelessness advisers are working closely with London boroughs in particular to provide support to limit the number of out-of-borough moves altogether.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): The Housing First initiative has clear potential to prevent homelessness. What is the Department doing to monitor the effectiveness of pilots in Manchester and other cities, and what are its plans for taking the evidence forward?

**Mrs Wheeler:** My hon. Friend is right. The Housing First projects in Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool are backed by the £1.2 billion that we have committed to tackle all forms of homelessness and rough sleeping across the country through to 2020. Housing First and the private rented sector access fund are also providing local authorities with flexible funding to tackle the homelessness pressures they are facing.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The guidance also says that an authority moving a homeless family out to another area should inform the receiving authority within 14 days. I have written to the Minister twice about this issue, and she has replied that Peterborough City Council is systematically dumping homeless families in Travelodges across South Yorkshire without telling the receiving authority. What will she do to ensure that the statutory guidance passed by this House is actually enforced and that authorities do not continue to flout it?

**Mrs Wheeler:** The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous Member and does such a good job of chairing the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee—*[Interruption.]* Do you mind? We are trying to get there; let us have a bit of civility, shall we?

I have written again to the hon. Gentleman, and the important thing is that we have now had frank words with the local authority in Peterborough to say that it should have informed the receiving authorities—it has now done that. The team we have put together to help with homelessness is having a special word with Peterborough and other councils that were thinking of placing homeless people out of borough.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Homelessness has risen in each and every one of the past seven years. In the last year alone, 440 homeless people have died. The Budget pledged nearly £10 billion to a poorly targeted help-to-buy scheme, but it failed to mention homelessness once. Now the Secretary of State has scrimped together a measly £15,000 each for councils to tackle winter pressures. Will that guarantee that we will not see any rough sleepers on the streets this winter?

**Mrs Wheeler:** Sadly I do not have a crystal ball, but what I do have is a team of fantastic advisers who are making sure that councils have put in really good bids to help rough sleepers. Secondly, there is money: £40 million, £30 million, £75 million and, now, another £5 million. This Government take homelessness and rough sleeping extremely seriously, and we are the only Government who have put it in our manifesto that we want to halve homelessness and rough sleeping. We will be looking after the most vulnerable people in 2020, and we will

finish this altogether in 2027. The answer is that the Government and the money that taxpayers are providing are doing their best.

### Local Government: Departmental Support

3. **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's support for local government. [907434]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):** Councils will receive a real-terms increase in financial resources both this year and next. Furthermore, the Department funds the Local Government Association to provide support for local authorities to build leadership capacity, conduct peer reviews and facilitate efficiency initiatives.

**Rebecca Pow:** I thank the Minister for that. What help is being provided specifically for Somerset County Council to cope with the escalating demands of adult social care and children's services? Will he bear in mind that Somerset County Council desperately needs £80 million from the housing infrastructure fund in order to cope with providing much-needed future infrastructure?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is tireless in pressing Somerset's case. We listened carefully to her and others, and the Budget confirmed an additional £650 million for social care next year, and indeed an additional £500 million for the housing infrastructure fund. I am sure that the Minister for Housing will have heard her submission, but given what I have said, and the LGA's specific support for Somerset with its children's services, I hope she feels that we are responding to Somerset's concerns and hers.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I do not know whether the Minister has ever heard the song "Streets of London" by Ralph McTell, but it is worth listening to just to be reminded of what the streets of every town in this country are like: how run down they are; how many rough sleepers there are; how much deterioration there is; how much graffiti there is; and how many broken pavements there are. That is what my constituents see in my town, and it is happening up and down this country because this Government have starved our country's local government service.

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Gentleman may want to talk this country down, but Conservative Members have enormous faith in towns and communities up and down this country, which was why in the Budget we backed Britain's high streets with a £675 million fund. We did that because we believe in local communities taking control of their high streets and developing vibrant communities that we will enjoy for years to come.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that local authorities in rural areas can deliver public services effectively?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend has met me and others to discuss the cost of delivering services in rural areas, particularly in Leicestershire. His local county council has been a vocal proponent of a new fair funding

formula, and I am pleased to tell him that we are engaged with his council and others to take into account those concerns, and we will shortly be issuing the latest round of consultation on those proposals.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): When one of the councils serving my constituency still faces £43 million of cuts over the next four years—more than the combined total it currently spends on recycling, parks, libraries, children’s centres, roads and pavements, and community safety—does the Secretary of State agree with the Prime Minister that austerity is over, or does he share the incredulity of so many of my constituents who wonder how she could possibly be so out of touch?

**Rishi Sunak:** This Government believe in backing local authorities to build strong communities. The hon. Lady mentioned parks and roads. Perhaps she heard in the Budget about £420 million for our councils to fix potholes this winter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced another round of our hugely successful pocket parks programme, and I encourage her local authority to bid as well.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): In Northamptonshire, the borough councils, the district councils and the county council are all working together to set up two new unitary authorities. Is the excellent Minister able to say when he is going to consult on that? Secondly, is he able to say when he will make a decision on whether next year’s borough and district council elections need to go ahead?

**Rishi Sunak:** May I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to all the local councillors in Northamptonshire, who are working very constructively together through a difficult situation to ensure that their residents benefit at the end of the process? I can tell him that reasonably shortly we will be issuing details about the next step of that process. As he rightly points out, as part of that the Government may have the ability to delay the elections next year, should that be requested by the authorities and make sense in the context of the new unitisation proposals.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): This Government’s record on local government is clear: since 2010, the Department’s budget has fallen by at least £13 billion; and, by 2020, the revenue support grant will be cut by 80%—£8 billion—putting more pressure on to council tax, which is an unequal levy. Northamptonshire has, in effect, gone bust, with the media reporting that Surrey, East Sussex and Lancashire are next in line. Services are under pressure—cut, slashed or stopped altogether—and councils are at breaking point. The Public Accounts Committee asked Ministers to publish a definition of “financial sustainability” for councils, methodology for assessing authorities at financial risk, and projections for spending and demand in service areas, so why have they refused? This is common sense; what has the Minister got to hide?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Gentleman has a job to do, and I appreciate that—it is his job to put pressure on us—but I would have thought that this week, after all the question sessions we have had, he would have joined me in welcoming last week’s Budget, which includes £1 billion extra for local government across two years.

## New Homes

5. **Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the time taken to build new homes. [907436]

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire):** The publication of the national planning policy framework provides greater clarity and certainty for the development of homes. We are examining the recommendations of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) on the build-out review and will respond in full in February.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** The Government would see greater progress in their quest to shorten the time it takes to build new homes if people were able to have greater confidence in the design and layout of large housing developments. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the steps he is taking to get that done, but does he agree that what really worries people is not only the housing but the inability to provide adequate social infrastructure to cope with massive amounts of new housing where there simply is not currently the infrastructure to support it?

**James Brokenshire:** I recognise the points that my right hon. Friend highlights and welcome his support for the Building Better, Building Beautiful commission, which will look at that sense of place and the identity between our built environment and how we live our lives. He also rightfully highlights the issues relating to infrastructure. I hope that he will welcome the extra £500 million that the Chancellor committed in last week’s Budget to the housing infrastructure fund to deal with the issues that he rightly points out.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Some 140,000 children are waiting in temporary accommodation for new homes. In the meantime, how long does the Secretary of State think it is acceptable for a child to have to travel to school—two hours? Three hours? Some children are getting home at 9 pm because their school is so far away from where they are placed.

**James Brokenshire:** The point that the hon. Lady makes is about the need to build more homes, which is precisely what we are doing as a Government. We are ensuring that housing associations are building more with the £9 billion fund, and by lifting the borrowing caps we are ensuring that councils can build more, along with what the private sector is doing. That way, people can have strong communities and the services that they need close at hand.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): Does the Secretary of State recognise that one of the best ways to bring forward more new homes quickly is to support my Housing Reform Bill, which has support from Members from all parties, including some of the House’s most distinguished Members? The Bill’s requirement on the Secretary of State to provide serviced plots for sale or for rent to rich people and poor people, social tenants and others, would do a lot to solve our housing crisis.

**James Brokenshire:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his tireless championing of the issues that he has highlighted. The Minister for Housing will meet him shortly to discuss a number of the elements that he has highlighted. I hope that he recognises some of the steps taken through the national planning policy framework that will support his agenda.

### Residential Property Management

6. **Mr Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): What progress he has made on improving standards in the management of residential property in the (a) private rented and (b) social housing sectors. [R] [907439]

**The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):** All tenants deserve a safe and decent place to live. In respect of the private rented sector, Lord Best is chairing a new working group on property agent regulation, and we have extended mandatory licensing. The social housing Green Paper contains proposals to drive up the performance of social landlords in delivering a good service.

**Mr Prisk:** I welcome the reforms, especially the requirement for all residential managers to be trained and qualified. That is the way to raise standards. However, there are concerns about how the requirement may be introduced. Will the Minister agree to a meeting to discuss how existing qualifications will be accredited by the proposed mandatory qualifications, so that we do not end up worsening the current shortage of competent managers?

**Kit Malthouse:** With his usual accuracy, my hon. Friend identifies an issue critical to getting this matter right. As he knows, the working group will be looking at the entire property agent sector to ensure that any new regulatory framework is joined up across letting, property management and estate agents. One of the key issues in making that new regulatory framework land will be the transition from the old to new, and I will be more than happy—indeed it would be foolish of me not to agree—to meet a former Housing Minister of such standing.

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): According to the Government's own figures, there are more than 10,000 rogue landlords operating in England. Will the Minister therefore explain to tenants who are suffering from damp and often unsafe conditions why none of these landlords appears on the Government's new rogue landlord database?

**Kit Malthouse:** As the hon. Lady knows, the database was introduced earlier this year and it will take time to populate in order for landlords to appear on it. There will obviously have to be investigations, prosecutions, and penalties levied so that they can properly be entered on to the database. She will know that the introduction of banning orders and a rogue landlord database will have an enormous impact in future. We just have to make sure that we get the right names on it.

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): Having man's best friend by one's side can make a massive difference to somebody who is suffering from loneliness, social isolation or mental health issues. I am aware of at least

one local authority that has taken the retrograde step of banning its tenants from keeping a pet. Will my hon. Friend please look at the guidance given to local councils, because, to many people, having a pet is their lifeline?

**Kit Malthouse:** As part of a family who regard their pet cat as an intrinsic and important member of our household—[*Interruption.*] Well, hon. Members may well be amused by that, but it is true what my hon. Friend says: a number of people, particularly those who live alone or those who have children, rely on their pets for comfort and calm and for companionship. I would hope that all local authorities operated a humane and compassionate letting policy where this is concerned, and I would be more than happy to look at the rules around that.

**Mr Speaker:** I empathise very strongly with the Minister, and there should be no levity over this important matter. Our own household cat is very fundamental to our way of life and is suitably named Order.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have no pets to declare to the House.

On behalf of my party, I offer our condolences on the passing of Sir Jeremy Heywood and our thanks for his service in public life.

It was encouraging to hear that the UK Government are to follow the example set in 2015 by the Scottish Government and introduce mandatory five-year electrical safety checks on rental homes. Will the Minister confirm a start date for those checks?

**Kit Malthouse:** I am afraid that I will have to write to the hon. Lady with that answer as I do not have it to hand at the moment, but she is quite right that we have been reviewing standards generally in the private rented sector and considering what more we can do to make sure that private rented homes are as safe as they can possibly be.

**Alison Thewliss:** That is a disappointing response, particularly considering how important safety is to people renting accommodation. Citizens Advice found that renters in England who complain about issues with their home are statistically more likely to get evicted. The Scottish Government abolished no-fault evictions recently. Will the Minister consider doing likewise so that tenants in England do not fear reporting faults with their homes?

**Kit Malthouse:** We certainly want to make sure that the phenomenon of revenge evictions is stamped out and that there is an equality of power between tenants and landlords in both the social and the private rented sectors.

### Local Authority Funding: Allocation

7. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the equitable allocation of funding to local authorities. [907440]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):** We are undertaking a fair funding review of local authorities' relative needs and resources to address concerns about

the fairness of the current system. This will determine the new funding allocations for local authorities through a more up-to-date and fairer funding formula.

**Robert Courts:** Rural areas are historically underfunded and in West Oxfordshire we need more funding for road repairs, upgrades to the A40 and adult social care. How is fairer funding progressing and will this be addressed in the spending review?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am pleased to say that we are making very good progress and are considering many of the topics raised by hon. Members, including rapidly changing demographics affecting social care and the cost of delivering services in rural areas. I look forward to collaborating closely with the sector and with my hon. Friend's county as we look to introduce a simple, accurate and transparent new funding formula.

**Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** If funding is so equitable, why is North Lincolnshire Council giving people on the lowest incomes such a low level of support with their council tax, at only 50%? Why is the council sending nearly all its discretionary housing payments back to the Government?

**Rishi Sunak:** Decisions about local council tax support are rightly for individual local authorities to make themselves; it would not be appropriate for me to dictate to them. The fairer funding formula is designed to determine the equitable nature of funding distributed to all local authorities. The hon. Gentleman will know that the current system dates back to 2013-14, and indeed many elements date back decades before that. We are determined to fix it and bring it up to date.

**Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con):** I thank the Minister for supporting the measures in the Budget exempting public toilets from business rates and providing a commitment to take action regarding second home owners who are avoiding business rates. I very much welcome his words on a fair funding formula, but when the fair funding formula was previously introduced, it was dampened away. Will he make a commitment that rural councils really will see the benefit of a new fairer formula this time?

**Rishi Sunak:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and, indeed, to my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) for successfully placing in the Budget measures on public toilet relief and second homes. With regard to my hon. Friend's second point, I am determined to ensure that the new formula is transparent and that all local authorities—not just those in rural areas—have a clearer idea about their allocation under the new formula, and transition to those new allocations in a relatively short timeframe.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab):** A recent report by the New Policy Institute shows that the majority of local government cuts have fallen on the 10 most deprived councils, despite the fact that they have higher numbers of looked-after children and adults needing social care and other council services. Will the Minister now commit to funding councils properly and according to levels of need, rather than political colour, as the Government appear to be doing at the moment?

**Rishi Sunak:** It is simply not the case that that is how funding is determined. Although out of date, the current funding formulas do contain deprivation measures and funding is distributed on the basis of need. That is also how the new funding for adult social care, announced just last week, will be distributed—according to the relative needs formula.

### Local Authority Funding

8. **Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government funding for local authorities in England. [907441]

10. **Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government funding for local authorities in England. [907443]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):** The Government have listened and responded to the pressures faced by local authorities. The autumn Budget helped to support financial sustainability of local authorities and provided more than £1 billion of additional funding across this year and next year for local authorities to deliver local services, support vulnerable residents and build vibrant communities.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I welcome the short-term support for adult social care promised in last week's Budget, but it is a sticking plaster at best. In Nottingham, it costs an average of £450 a week to care for someone at home, compared to £2,500 in hospital. Our NHS trusts are already raising concerns about winter pressures. Inadequate social care provision adds to those pressures and will inevitably cost the Government more in the long term. I know that the Minister understands the importance and efficacy of early intervention and prevention, so can he provide any assurances that he understands the need to fund adult social care sustainably and tell us what support will be provided from 2020 onwards?

**Rishi Sunak:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to mention the importance of prevention, and of the interaction between the NHS and social care. Later this year, we will see the publication of the Government's Green Paper with a long-term sustainable settlement for social care. That will answer her question as to the settlement for social care beyond next year in the spending review.

**Stephen Timms:** My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) just mentioned Cambridge University research published last month showing that local authority spending cuts have been concentrated on the poorest areas, making disparities with better-off areas much worse. Phasing out central Government grants, as Ministers are proposing, will make that even worse. Are Ministers happy just to let the disparities between different areas rocket?

**Rishi Sunak:** It may be worth pointing out to the right hon. Gentleman that core spending power per household in the most deprived local authority areas in



the country is 23% higher than that in the least deprived. This Government support all communities with the resources that they need.

### New Homes for Social Rent

**9. Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of trends in the level of new homes provided for social rent since 2010. [907442]

**The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):** Since 2010, we have delivered over 378,000 new affordable homes, including 129,000 for social rent. We are investing over £9 billion in the affordable homes programme to deliver more than 250,000 new affordable homes, including at least 12,500 for social rent.

**Ian Austin:** There are thousands of households languishing on Dudley's waiting lists. I meet families every single week who are desperate for a home of their own. Funding for new affordable homes has fallen from over £4 billion in 2009-10 to less than £500 million last year, and the amount of social housing built for rent is actually falling to its lowest level since the war. In that context, what hope do my constituents have of the decent, secure and affordable home that they dream of?

**Kit Malthouse:** As the hon. Gentleman will know, we are throwing literally everything we have got at the housing market at the moment in the hope that we can build the homes that everybody in the country needs. In particular, in the social sector, we have increased the size of the affordable homes programme. We have reintroduced the idea of social rent; removed the housing revenue account borrowing cap for local authorities; and are setting long-term rent deals for councils and housing associations, enabling them to plan. We have also committed funding beyond 2022 for housing deals and partnerships with housing associations, which we think will deliver significant numbers of houses. It must be remembered that the Labour Government the hon. Gentleman supported induced local authorities to get out of house building. I was a councillor at the time. We were offered large amounts of money to get rid of our housing stock. That has to end. We want councils to start building to address exactly the needs he raises.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): In Chelmsford, we are building a new garden community of 10,000 homes, more than one in four of which will be affordable, but the council wants to do more. What measures will there be to allow councils that do not have a housing revenue account also to take advantage of the new schemes that will enable them to borrow and build their own properties?

**Kit Malthouse:** My hon. Friend is right. Quite a number of local authorities, having been induced, as I say, to get out of the house building industry and home-owning function, do not have housing revenue accounts. At the moment, if they construct, build or own more than about 200 council homes they have to open a housing revenue account. We hope that the new freedom we have introduced will enable councils to create innovative partnerships with other social housing providers to build the next generation of council houses.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): The net number of social homes for rent built in the last financial year was 7,000, so we are losing a large number of these homes. We all agree that we need a lot more social homes for rent. In order to build more, will the Minister consider local authorities being given first right of refusal when public land comes up for sale, with a sale price based on current use rather than a speculative development price?

**Kit Malthouse:** I am engaged in an intensive amount of activity on the subject of public land with my ministerial colleagues and those elsewhere. Hon. Members will have seen that we have recently changed the rules so that local authorities can dispose of their own public land at less than market value if they deem there is a social need to do so. Whether or not we can give them first refusal on acquiring that land will depend on their ability to deliver the homes that people need. I am very focused on numbers of homes rather than principles of disposal.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Our policies on affordable homes are almost entirely focused on affordable homes to rent. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should also deliver more affordable homes to purchase?

**Kit Malthouse:** My hon. Friend is one of the most innovative thinkers in housing policy generally, certainly on the Conservative Benches—not that there is much innovation on the Labour Benches, but there we are. He points to an area where there is strong demand. Very large numbers of people who would otherwise be tenants have a strong desire to own, and we would love to see them owning on a discounted basis. Hon. Members will have seen in the Budget the announcement of funding for neighbourhood plans to enable an allocation of discounted homes for sale, particularly in rural areas, and I would be keen to explore the idea further with my hon. Friend.

**Mr Speaker:** I have no reason to think that the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) is anything other than an innovative thinker on this and other matters, but it might be of interest to people to know that he is also a distinguished estate agent.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): You rather took the wind from my sails there, Mr Speaker.

The Minister refers to housing associations, and it will not have escaped his notice that the chief executives of housing associations earn on average comfortably more than the Prime Minister, with the upper decile trousering salaries in the eye-watering range of £250,000 to £400,000. Is the Minister entirely comfortable with that?

**Kit Malthouse:** One issue that we are considering as part of our work on the social housing Green Paper is whether the tenant voice is heard strongly enough at the highest levels of housing associations. We must remember that some of these organisations are extremely large. The largest ones are huge and complex, looking after many hundreds of thousands of people, and the individuals who run them shoulder enormous responsibility and, indeed, risk. It is for those boards, suitably informed by the tenant body, to make decisions about remuneration.

**Midlands Engine**

11. **Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to deliver economic growth through the midlands engine. [907444]

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire):** My recent visit to India provided an important opportunity to promote the midlands engine in that significant market. This month, we announced funding to support the creation of a new locally led development body for Toton, as well as £70 million for the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre, and we will refresh the midlands engine strategy.

**Lee Rowley:** A great example of the potential economic development in the midlands is the shortlisting of Barrow Hill in my constituency as the next potential site for the Spanish train manufacturer Talgo. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming that shortlisting and—fingers crossed—hoping that we get it?

**James Brokenshire:** I note my hon. Friend's fingers are crossed. I am delighted to hear that Talgo is considering investing in the UK. I hope he will understand that as there are still a number of locations under consideration, it would be wrong for me to comment further—although, having visited the potential site in his constituency this summer, I can say that it is clearly an excellent site for investment.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The midlands engine is working with Stoke-on-Trent City Council as part of the transforming cities fund and making bids for significant investment. It was heartening to hear the Chancellor refer to that in his speech last Monday. Could the Secretary of State put us out of our misery and announce from the Dispatch Box today that Stoke will receive that funding, which would save a further round of hoop-jumping?

**Mrs Wheeler:** Good try!

**James Brokenshire:** As my hon. Friend says, that is a good try. I recognise the way in which the hon. Gentleman has championed Stoke, this initiative and the funding. All I can say is that we will look at that carefully, but I hope he gets a sense of the attention and focus we are giving to the midlands engine.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): The midlands engine covers approximately two thirds of Lincolnshire—the county council area—but my constituency is served by the two unitary authorities in the north. Co-ordination of economic policies falls to both the Greater Lincolnshire local enterprise partnership and the Humber local enterprise partnership. Both the local authorities and LEPs would like to maintain the status quo. Could the Secretary of State bear that in mind in the upcoming review?

**James Brokenshire:** My hon. Friend will note the conclusions of the review, particularly in relation to governance and overlapping geographies. It is important that we have reform and work with the LEPs to take this forward, and I look forward to having discussions with the LEP chairs in the coming days.

**Homelessness**

12. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce homelessness. [907445]

17. **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce homelessness. [907452]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler):** I thank my hon. Friends for their questions. We are spending more than £1.2 billion through to 2020, and we have implemented the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, published our £100 million rough sleeping strategy and taken immediate action to begin to reduce the number of people on the streets.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the Minister for her reply, and it is great to see her back in her place. As she will know, Torbay is very keen to take forward a Housing First pilot for our bay, to end the scourge of rough sleeping. Can she update us on what plans the Government have for that approach to be adopted?

**Mrs Wheeler:** We are delighted to be piloting Housing First at scale across England for the first time. The impact of that approach will be measured by a rigorous evaluation, which will ensure that we have the robust evidence base needed to demonstrate its effectiveness and inform future spending decisions.

**Will Quince:** Does my hon. Friend agree with me and the more than 20 homelessness and health charities, including St Mungo's, which today published a joint open letter to Sir Simon Stevens of NHS England, that to tackle homelessness, we need to ensure that the NHS works with others and local authorities to provide better support for those tackling mental health, alcohol and drug addiction and sleeping rough on our streets?

**Mrs Wheeler:** My hon. Friend is an assiduous campaigner on this matter. We appreciate that this is a very high priority for all local constituency MPs on both sides of the Chamber. I certainly agree that wraparound support is crucial to help people who have been sleeping rough to access and sustain accommodation. In our recent rough sleeping strategy, we announced a range of measures, including asking NHS England to spend up to £30 million over five years on health services for rough sleepers.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): Street homelessness is a growing problem in my city of Leeds, reflecting inadequate social housing and mental health provision, and cuts to benefits. Big Change Leeds, launched last month, is bringing together everyone trying to help those who are street homeless in our city by giving their time or money. Will the Government welcome this initiative, but more importantly, will they commit their support by giving Leeds City Council the money it needs to address this growing problem in our city?

**Mrs Wheeler:** Again, I reiterate how very important this question is to everybody on both sides of the Chamber. I had the great pleasure of talking last week to the chief executive of the council in Leeds about the strategy and about the money and the help we are

giving to the city. It was a really useful conversation to find a chief executive who is so committed to the project.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Will the Minister say how much money to deal with homelessness she has given to the local authority in Coventry and the charities in Coventry, which tell me that their allocations have been cut? That is no way to deal with homelessness.

**Mrs Wheeler:** I am very sorry that the charities are telling the local Member that, because overall we are putting in place a £1.2 billion fund for homelessness. I would certainly be very happy to write to the hon. Gentleman. His area is part of the greater west midlands project, and the greater west midlands Mayor, Andy Street, has many millions of pounds to help with homelessness—going to Coventry as well as the other parts of the greater west midlands.

**Mr Speaker:** I want to get through two more questions very quickly.

### Leasehold Changes

13. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to ensure that changes to existing leaseholds are more (a) accessible and (b) affordable. [907446]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler):** It is right that developers who sold leaseholds with onerous terms should support their customers to amend them. Some developers have introduced assistance schemes, which is welcome, but these must go further and faster. We are meeting developers shortly to discuss progress, and we will take further action as necessary.

**Chi Onwurah:** The St Mary Magdalene and Holy Jesus Trust in my constituency is a charity that is refusing to allow its leaseholders to extend their leases, in a wholly uncharitable way. The Secretary of State talks about roundtables and reviews, but when will my constituents get some sort of justice and the ability to extend their leases?

**Mrs Wheeler:** The hon. Lady has a particular problem with a particular trust. The good news is that, following last year's discussions, the trust has now made an offer to some of her constituents to enable them to purchase their freeholds. I am aware that her constituents have found the freehold purchase price of the leasehold properties to be prohibitive. We are also aware that different formulas are in use to establish the cost of enfranchisement. The Government are looking to standardise enfranchisement processes and have asked the Law Commission to review current arrangements, including the valuation methodology. This will support existing leaseholders by making buying the freehold or extending the leasehold easier, faster and cheaper.

### First-time Buyers: Help to Buy and Stamp Duty

14. **Sir Robert Syms** (Poole) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the effect on first-time buyers of (a) Help to Buy and (b) the reduction in stamp duty. [907447]

**The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):** In the interests of providing a good service, Mr Speaker, I hope you will indulge me if I refer to my answer to the hon. Lady from north of the border, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). I just want to say that there is no fixed date at the moment for bringing in the affirmative statutory instrument that will make it mandatory to have five-year electrical checks in the private rented centre, but we are searching for a slot as soon as possible in a crowded and exciting legislative timetable.

In answer to Question 14, the Government are working together to help more people on to the housing ladder. Help to Buy equity loans have helped over 169,000 households to March 2018, 81% were to first-time buyers and 121,500 people have benefited from first-time buyers relief from stamp duty since June 2018.

**Sir Robert Syms** (Poole) (Con): I am grateful for the cuts in stamp duty for those at the lower end and the help for home ownership, but the higher rates of stamp duty may be having an adverse effect on the housing market. It could cost the Treasury £300 million, so a cut leading to more income, leaving more resources for those at the lower end could be in prospect. Has the Housing Minister raised that with the Treasury?

**Kit Malthouse:** My hon. Friend is a political toxophile of the highest order and has fired his arrows into a subject that is the cause of constant discussion between us and the Treasury. He knows that we all acknowledge the effect that stamp duty can have on the market; that is why he may have seen changes in the Budget to stamp duty on shared ownership, which we hope will benefit first-time buyers. However, I will keep him apprised of conversations as we have them.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the tribute framed. It would be very disappointing if he did not.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment has the Minister made of the number of people who have used Help to Buy who are now in negative equity because of leasehold reform? They cannot sell the properties and the price has fallen, so the taxpayer and the individual are hit.

**Kit Malthouse:** At this stage, there is no indication from the early returns on Help to Buy that the situation that the right hon. Gentleman raises is occurring. Indeed, early numbers show a higher level of successful redemption than we expected and we hope that that will continue.

### Topical Questions

T1. [907456] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire):** This week, I am meeting developers at a leasehold roundtable to press them to tackle onerous ground rents, and I will attend the Locality Convention in Bristol to acknowledge the hard work of our community organisations and set out our ambition for increased localism.

Wednesday's celebration of Diwali will be a special moment to reflect and celebrate the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. As we mourn the tragic events in Pittsburgh, especially in the context of this week's 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht, we are clear that racism and xenophobia in whatever form have no place in our society and will be confronted in the strongest terms.

**Peter Aldous:** It was great that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Local Government were able to attend last Wednesday's launch of the county all-party parliamentary group's report on social mobility in county areas. Will my right hon. Friend work with the APPG to implement the report's 11 recommendations, which will do so much to ensure that young people across the country have the opportunity to realise their full potential?

**James Brokenshire:** That sense of social justice to which my hon. Friend alludes and which was in the report profoundly reflects the Government's aspirations and intent to see a country that works for everyone. I look forward to continuing to work with him and the APPG in considering the fair funding review and other steps to ensure that we realise that aspiration.

**Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab):** Trading standards are the foot soldiers in keeping the public from falling victim to unsafe goods, yet cuts to local authorities mean that trading standards budgets have fallen by more than 50% between 2009 and 2019, with a 56% reduction in the number of offices. The Chartered Trading Standards Institute is warning that, as we approach Brexit, the role of those dedicated professionals will be even more crucial. How can they keep the public safe from dodgy and dangerous goods without sustainable funding?

**James Brokenshire:** We are providing a real terms increase in funding for local government this year and next year, recognising some of the pressures that exist. We continue to support local government and, in the context of Brexit, we are working with it to ensure effective preparations for protecting our communities.

T3. [907458] **Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** Like the Minister, I welcome the Budget's announcements of £650 million extra for social care and £84 million for children's social care programmes over five years. Will he confirm when local authorities, including Torbay Council, will be told what their share of this new money will be?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):** I can tell my hon. Friend that £240 million of the £650 million will be distributed in the same way as the budget for the current year and he should have received those figures already. We will shortly write to local authorities and colleagues about the distribution of the second tranche of £410 million.

T2. [907457] **Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op):** Last week, Southern Landlords Association filed for judicial review—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I can scarcely hear the hon. Gentleman. I want to hear his question. I do not know what all this baa-ing is about—something may have

been said that has escaped my attention—but that does not remotely concern me at this moment. What does concern me at this moment is that the hon. Gentleman must be heard and he will be heard, however long it takes.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Last week, Southern Landlords Association filed for judicial review on selective licensing in Brighton. The Government's response was to revoke the licence to regulate the private sector. This is not the first judicial review to derail selective licensing. Irrespective of the particular issue I am working on with the Minister, is it now not time to review the way selective licensing works and to stop judicial reviews, particularly vexatious ones like those from Southern Landlords Association, derailing the ability of councils to regulate the private sector and rogue landlords?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman might like to secure an Adjournment debate on the subject.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler):** What a very good idea, Mr Speaker. I will not talk about the judicial review in detailed terms—obviously, it is ongoing—but I have been proud to sign off selective licensing in other parts of the country where the council has done a good job. I ask the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in Brighton to urge the local council to review its paperwork. If it comes back with detailed arrangements that I can sign off, I certainly will.

T6. [907462] **Damien Moore (Southport) (Con):** The money announced in last week's Budget to help to revitalise our high streets was warmly welcomed in my constituency of Southport. Will the Minister confirm when that money will be available?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry):** Mr Speaker, if you ever take the opportunity to visit Southport, like Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, you will find out that its famous high street, Lord Street, inspired the wide boulevards of Paris. The £675 million future high street fund, which that historic high street will hope to access, will be subject to a prospectus published by my Department by the end of the year.

T4. [907459] **Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** When I was a local authority executive member back in 2012, we were often warned about the "graph of doom", which showed that by about 2018 local authorities would be running out of money for everything but statutory services. At the time, the Government accused the Local Government Association and the National Audit Office of scaremongering, but given what has happened in Northamptonshire and elsewhere, those warnings were accurate, were they not?

**James Brokenshire:** We recognise the pressures on social care, which is why this year an extra £240 million has been committed and £650 million is being committed through the Budget to deal with those pressures. We are looking to long-term sustainability and valuing our local government sector, which is what we do.

T7. [907463] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I am delighted to say that Solihull has one of the highest proportions of home ownership in the country. However, there is still real pent-up demand, particularly among the young. Will the Minister tell me what progress the Department has made on the midlands voluntary right-to-buy pilot?

**The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):** My hon. Friend is a doughty champion for his constituents, including those who are tenants. He is right. We have had an enthusiastic response to the midlands right-to-buy pilot, with over 9,000 people applying for a code in the ballot. Over 6,000 of them have been given a code, and we hope that a significant number will come forward to seek the ownership they desire, funded by the £200 million being put towards the pilot.

T5. [907460] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): As Brexit approaches, what is the Secretary of State's Department doing to ensure that, when buying food, vehicles, furniture or any other goods and services, local councils follow Government guidelines to take local value into account and back British business and British workers by buying British first?

**James Brokenshire:** I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's positive outlook as we leave the European Union. We will deliver a positive Brexit, looking outwards into the world and at how we have trade deals in the future. We continue to engage with local councils to ensure that we deliver a smooth and effective Brexit.

T8. [907464] **Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): Has my hon. Friend reviewed the better streets proposal from YIMBY and the Adam Smith Institute, which would allow residents of a single street to vote on giving themselves permitted development rights to build upwards to a maximum of six storeys and thereby address the housing crisis?

**Kit Malthouse:** I have done better than that—I have met them. I did so just two weeks ago to discuss their fascinating ideas, not least on how we can make the principle of neighbourhood planning work in urban areas, an issue that I know is of great importance to my hon. Friend.

T9. [907465] **Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that the establishment of the new all-party group on the national holocaust memorial, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and me, is very much to be welcomed? Is it not fantastic that so many Members from both sides of the House came together, at a time when antisemitism is on the increase, to establish this group and that we want to commemorate here in Parliament history's greatest crime and support the establishment of this memorial, right here in Westminster, at the centre of not just our political life but our national life?

**James Brokenshire:** I absolutely recognise and commend what the hon. Gentleman said on how collectively we challenge antisemitism and stand up for the values of this country. I pay tribute to him for the personal contribution that he has made on this issue, and equally, I reflect on the statue of Frank Foley, which the hon. Gentleman was instrumental in bringing into effect.

It recognises Frank Foley's contribution in saving the lives of thousands of Jews fleeing from persecution in Germany, and we must never forget the contribution that he and others have made.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Many of my constituents are suffering from severe stress following the purchase of their homes on unfair leasehold terms. Does the Minister agree that tackling leasehold abuse is a matter of urgency, and will she comment on a timetable for action?

**Mrs Wheeler:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. The Government are very clear that unjust leasehold practices must come to an end. We have committed to banning new leasehold houses and restricting ground rents on future leases to a peppercorn. We launched our consultation on the details of these proposals on 15 October. I agree that this is an urgent matter, having read many of the stories of leaseholders facing high or doubling ground rents or struggling to sell their homes, especially in my hon. Friend's part of the north-west. We will bring forward legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the most effective ways to deal with rising housing costs and rising eviction rates is for councils to follow the lead of my council—Sutton Council—and build council homes, over 90 of which are about to come on-stream very soon?

**Mrs Wheeler:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, and I commend his council for doing that. My council is going to build 175 next year.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Will the Department work with the Department of Health and Social Care to use the local reorganisation of local government in Northamptonshire as an opportunity to receive local proposals to develop a pilot for a new integrated social care and health system in the county?

**James Brokenshire:** We are already taking such steps. On 18 October, we convened a meeting between leaders and chief executives of the Northamptonshire councils and representatives of the local health services to start discussions on how, in future, adult social care may be best provided and integrated with health.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The ill-fated regional fire control centre in Cambridgeshire continues to stand empty, costing £2 million a year. We keep being told that it has been let or that it is about to be sold. When is the Minister going to get a grip?

**James Brokenshire:** Fire control now resides within the responsibilities of the Home Office, but I will certainly look into the hon. Gentleman's points in relation to ensuring good value for money.

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on the establishment of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission and the inspired choice of Sir Roger Scruton as the chairman, but, first, does my right hon. Friend not

agree that this will only have any teeth if we can get the volume house builders to buy into it? Secondly, I think that the commission should be extended to look at the quality and the variable advice often given by local planning officers and at a full accreditation scheme for those planning officers on an annual basis to refresh them.

**James Brokenshire:** I certainly want the new commission to drive quality in the built environment, which is at the heart of what my right hon. Friend said. If we do that, we can speed up this process and get greater support and consent from the public in building the homes that our country needs. I therefore think that the house builders should very much embrace this.

**Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab):** The Secretary of State says that local councils will see real-terms increases in their budgets. If so, why is Derbyshire County Council planning for £70 million of cuts, on top of the £260 million of cuts already made, and cutting the terms and conditions of its lowest-paid workers in school catering as well as services for the most vulnerable?

**James Brokenshire:** I recognise the challenges that local government has faced over the past few years and how councils have played their part in dealing with the public finance challenges brought about by the Labour party; let us not forget that when discussing the investment we are making to create that sustainable position for local government.

**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** As the Minister will know, we are taking thousands of new homes in Corby and east Northamptonshire, and it is imperative that the infrastructure keep pace. Last week, the Chancellor very welcome announced a new generation of enterprise zones. May I make an early pitch for Corby, because I would argue that we qualify given the housing growth we are taking?

**James Brokenshire:** I have just been told that it is my hon. Friend's birthday today. I wish him a happy birthday and note his pitch for perhaps a birthday present. We will note it down.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** A constituent of mine has been a faithful council tenant for 30 years. Over this time, she has invested much in her home. Her ex-partner served notice when he moved out, and now City of York Council is moving to evict her next week. This is having a serious impact on her mental health—among other things, it has led to her feeling suicidal—yet the council still plans to move her. Will the Minister urgently meet me to discuss this case and the mental health assessments of tenants that should take place?

**Mrs Wheeler:** What a very sad case. Of course, I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady.

**Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con):** Following the Office for National Statistics household projection figures being revised downwards by nearly a quarter,

will my hon. Friend the Minister ensure that regional housing targets reflect the easing of pressure to build on the green belt, with particular reference to the Greater Manchester spatial framework?

**Kit Malthouse:** My hon. Friend may know that we have already issued a technical consultation on the latest household projection numbers and the impact on projected housing need in local authority areas. We really do not want local authorities to take their foot of the accelerator, however, not least because we believe that there is pent-up demand for housing in this country. We are working with authorities across the country to get the formula right in the longer term, while we seek a short-term fix to keep numbers up, but I would be more than happy to meet him and his colleagues to discuss the Manchester spatial framework further.

**Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab):** Tyne and Wear fire service is facing £3 million of cuts, which could mean the closure of my local fire station. Will the Secretary of State look at the special problems with funding fire services that are facing local government in the north-east?

**James Brokenshire:** I will certainly raise the hon. Gentleman's point with colleagues who lead on fire within the Home Office.

**Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con):** The Labour cabinet in Nuneaton and Bedworth is imposing a £40 garden tax on green waste collection, despite pledging not to do so in May's local election. Does my hon. Friend agree that such a fundamental change to how people's waste is collected should not be made without full and proper consultation with the public and buy-in from local people?

**Rishi Sunak:** My predecessor in this job well knows that such decisions are rightly for local areas to make themselves, but I would say that local authorities should look to tighten their own belts and curb any wasteful spending before increasing the bills of hard-working taxpayers.

**Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab):** Further to the Secretary of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) about Derbyshire County Council's cuts, the cuts in question are worth more than £200 million, and they were made not by the Labour Government, as he stated, but by the Tory Government in alliance with the Liberal Democrats. To refresh his memory further, I should remind him that we also trebled the amount of money going into the hospital. Now a Tory county council at Matlock has decided to close 20 libraries in the county. That's politics.

**James Brokenshire:** I will take no lectures from the hon. Gentleman about the steps the Government have had to take to put the public finances back on an even keel as a consequence of the Labour party's actions, and he should well know our commitment to investing in the health service in a way the Labour party would not have done.

## Leaving the EU: Rights of EU Citizens

3.44 pm

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the arrangements for EU citizens in the event of no deal being agreed in the Article 50 negotiations.

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes)**: While we are confident about agreeing a good deal for both sides, as a responsible Government we will continue to prepare for all scenarios, including the unlikely outcome that we leave the EU without any deal in March 2019. We have reached an agreement with the EU on citizens' rights that will protect EU citizens and their family members who are resident in the UK until the end of the planned implementation period on 31 December 2020.

We are introducing the EU settlement scheme under UK immigration law for resident EU citizens and their family members covered by the draft withdrawal agreement. That will enable those who are resident in the UK before the end of the planned implementation period to confirm their status under the settlement scheme. Anyone who already has five years' continuous residence in the UK when they apply under the scheme will be eligible to apply for settled status. Those who have not yet reached the point of five years' continuous residence will be eligible to be granted pre-settled status, and will be able to apply for settled status once they have reached that point.

The Prime Minister has already confirmed that, in the unlikely event of no deal, all EU citizens who are resident here by 29 March 2019 will be welcome to stay. They are part of our community and part of our country, and we welcome the contribution that they make. Last week the Prime Minister extended that commitment to citizens of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and we are close to reaching an agreement with Switzerland. We will set out further details shortly, so that those affected can have the clarity and certainty that they need.

**Yvette Cooper**: Unfortunately, the Minister did not give us the clarity that we need. Nor did she clear up the confusion from last week, which I had hoped she would do, especially at a time when there is considerable concern for EU citizens, as well as practical concerns for employers about what arrangements will apply in April, May and June next year if no deal takes place.

I welcome the Government's commitment to respect the rights of those currently living here, who will be able to stay and work as now, but I am still none the wiser about what checks will apply to those EU citizens in the event of no deal. The Minister and the Home Office officials suggested to us that there would be additional employer checks, and also that free movement would be turned off in March. However, the Home Secretary has told the media that in fact there will be a transition period, and that there will be no additional checks for employers if there is no deal.

Will the Minister tell us whether there will be additional employer checks on EU citizens immediately after no deal—yes or no? Will she confirm that EU citizens will not have to provide anything other than a passport or an identity card in order to be able to work? Will she

also tell us whether that will then apply until the completion of the roll-out of the EU settlement scheme, which is due to be completed in June 2021? If not, what on earth are EU citizens supposed to provide as proof of their right to work before June 2021 if the settlement scheme has not been completed?

The Minister and the Home Office have now said that there is no way of differentiating between EU citizens arriving here for the first time and those who have been here for many years. Will the Minister confirm that newly arriving EU citizens will also not have to provide anything other than a passport or an ID card, and that they will continue to be able to work under the same arrangements, also until June 2021?

Those are basic questions that the Home Office really should be able to answer. If the facts are not as I have put them to the Minister, she should be able to tell us what the alternative facts are, what alternative information and proof EU citizens are supposed to provide, and what alternative questions employers are supposed to ask. The clock is ticking, and there are only five months left. Surely the Home Office has a grip of those basic questions.

**Caroline Nokes**: I thank the right hon. Lady for affording me the opportunity to clarify this point. Employers will of course continue to need to check passports or ID cards—as they do now for EU citizens, and indeed for British citizens, when making a new job offer. We will not be asking employers to differentiate even if there is no deal, and the right hon. Lady will of course be conscious that we are working hard to secure a deal. The Prime Minister has been very clear, as indeed has the Brexit Secretary, that we will honour our commitment to EU citizens and their family members, and more information will be set out in due course, with a specific statement on citizens from the Brexit Secretary, who of course wishes to make clear that people are incredibly important and should not simply be reliant on a technical notice.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): My question is twofold. First, can the Minister give us the timelines under which she expects to be setting out further details? Secondly—this is important for London constituencies like mine, which have a high number of EU workers and businesses that rely on EU workers—can she confirm that this step will be taken in a spirit of understanding that recruitment will be made in good faith by employers and should the rules then be set in a different way to what they had anticipated, that will be borne in mind in relation to fines and any other action that can be currently taken against employers employing people illegally?

**Caroline Nokes**: My right hon. Friend is right to point out the high numbers of EU citizens in her constituency and indeed employers' reliance upon them. That is why it is important that we have a reasonable and sensible transition period that gives us time to make sure that any new immigration system sets out the requirements very clearly so that there can be certainty for individuals, and indeed for employers.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of the very real distress that this confusion over policy, which the Home Office had to correct, has caused to over 3.5 million EU citizens

[Ms Diane Abbott]

resident in this country—and not just to them, but to their families, dependents and employers? On a related matter, does the Minister remember her reply to a written question in June when she said that providing DNA evidence would be entirely voluntary? Yet the Home Secretary recently had to come before the House and correct that and apologise for the immigration and nationality department imposing mandatory DNA testing. So does the Minister accept that as we move towards leaving the EU this type of confusion over policy is simply not acceptable? It is not just the good faith of Government that she is calling into question, but it is people's lives that we are playing with. Finally, does the Minister accept that it is simply not good enough to come before this House and talk about further information being provided in due course? There are five months to go and the clock is ticking, and we want no further confusions of this nature.

**Caroline Nokes:** The right hon. Lady will of course know that the full Alcock report is in the House of Commons Library and it sets out very clearly the information regarding the parliamentary question to which she has referred. She also referred to the 3.5 million citizens already in this country: the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Brexit Secretary and indeed myself have been very clear that we want those people to stay, and by opening the EU settled status scheme, which we have done now in private beta testing phase 2, we are already putting in place steps that have enabled in the region of 1,000 people to confirm their status.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): It is very important that the Government are generous and treat properly everybody who has come here lawfully up until the day that we leave, but does my right hon. Friend agree that it is also extremely important that, once we have left, we take back control of our borders?

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend will have heard the Prime Minister's very clear statements on this. As part of Brexit we will end free movement, giving us back control of our borders, which is what I believe people voted for in 2016 and which I know my hon. Friend wants.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Citizens need clarity, and many are here in Parliament today precisely because they have not had it—and, I regret to say, still do not have it. Unilateral guarantees are welcome, but do not provide a complete answer. Do the Government support a ring-fencing of the citizens' rights provisions in the withdrawal agreement, so that they can be enforced under international law even after a no deal? Is that not the most obvious and best solution to pursue? Has that been discussed at all in negotiations so far? If not, would those unilateral rights be totally unprotected from unilateral change via the immigration rules, and how would pension rights be protected, and rights to access healthcare, or mutual recognition of professional qualifications? Finally, if there is a no-deal Brexit, will the scope and the rights set out for the settled status scheme be just as they are now, or would there be changes—for example, will those short of five years still be able to obtain pre-settled status, and how will people be able to challenge Home Office decisions?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman is right. Citizens need clarity, and that is why this Government have set it out, not only in the citizens' rights agreement but in the settled status scheme, which, as I have said, is now open in one of its private beta testing phases. Phase 1 went very well, and phase 2 is now under way. After a firebreak over Christmas, we will be opening it up in phase 3. To me, it is obvious that the best solution is to ensure that these rights are enshrined in UK immigration law, which is what we are going to do.

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that around one in seven of my constituents are EU nationals. That is possibly the highest proportion in the country. In my experience, most of them are very appreciative of the guarantees given by the Government so far. Nevertheless, most of them had no reasonable expectation that they would ever have to clarify their immigration status. Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that we will treat those cases sensitively and individually? I have quite a few cases involving people who have been here for perhaps 20 years and have strong roots in this country, but who have spent some time abroad during the past five years, for example.

**Caroline Nokes:** UK Visas and Immigration is already on-boarding significantly increased numbers of caseworkers for the European Economic Area casework that will flow through from the settled status scheme. It is important that individuals are given as easy a journey as possible through the process and, to date, 95% of those who have completed the settled status process have found it easy to do so. My right hon. Friend makes an important point, however. We want to be in a position to support individuals through the process, and to have a “computer says yes” attitude rather than a “computer says no” attitude. People will only have to demonstrate that they have been in the UK, which will in many cases be done best by sharing HMRC records with the Home Office.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): If the UK leaves the EU in March with no deal, and if, as the Minister has told the House this afternoon, employers will not be required to make any additional checks other than asking for an EU passport, she has in effect told the House that free movement will continue after we have left the European Union. Will she now address the question that the Chair of the Select Committee asked her: how long will that situation continue? To many of us, it seems that it will have to continue until such time as an application process for settled status is completed, because only at that point will an employer be able to distinguish between someone who has settled status and someone who arrived the previous day carrying an EU passport.

**Caroline Nokes:** As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary indicated, we are seeking a sensible transition period that will enable the Home Office to ensure that these cases can be caseworked. The Prime Minister has been very clear that free movement will end—[*Interruption.*] We will in due course set out the future immigration system, which will enable there to be further clarity.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Government legislate, before our departure from the EU on 30 March, for a comprehensive system for immigration, migration



and citizenship that is fair to all concerned? That is what we voted for. Does the Minister also understand that a lot of us will not be voting for a withdrawal agreement to pay £39 billion that we do not owe when we need to spend that money here at home?

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. As I have said, free movement will end, and over the next few weeks we will set out the parliamentary timetable for the immigration Bill.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): How will free movement end at the end of March if EU citizens, including people arriving here after March, do not have to do anything different, other than produce their EU passport as they do now?

**Caroline Nokes:** The immigration Bill will be coming forward—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This is rather unseemly. Members must not harangue the Minister. She is addressing the House with great courtesy; let us hear her answer.

**Caroline Nokes:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think “unseemly” is a perfect description.

As I said, we will be bringing forward the parliamentary timetable for the immigration Bill shortly, and further details will be set out in due course, which I am sure will give the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) satisfaction.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What reciprocal announcements have been made by EU states following the Prime Minister’s generous offer in respect of leaving with no deal?

**Caroline Nokes:** My right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour makes an important point. At every opportunity, Ministers raise both with the EU and our counterparts in the EU27 the important factor of UK citizens lawfully residing in other EU member states. There is of course huge concern that we have made a generous offer to EU citizens, and let me be clear that we want them to stay here and that we regard them as part of our community. It is time for the EU to step up to the plate and say what it is doing for British citizens.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): How will the Minister tell an EU citizen wanting to come here in the next few years whether and when free movement of labour has finished?

**Caroline Nokes:** As I have said, the parliamentary timetable for the immigration Bill will be coming forward in the next few weeks. Our White Paper will set out the future skills-based immigration system, as the Prime Minister indicated at the recent Conservative party conference, which will be based on people’s ability and what they can offer to our country, not on where they come from.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the good doctor, Dr Julian Lewis.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Minister share my surprise at recent press reports suggesting that EU citizens living in the United Kingdom after

Brexit would be offered full voting rights in Westminster parliamentary elections? Will she confirm that that is not going to happen?

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. Deciding who can vote in UK elections is a Cabinet Office competence. EU citizens currently have the right to vote in local elections and that will prevail until there is a change in primary legislation. However, such matters are for future discussion and negotiation, and I cannot set them out today.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Before I ask the Minister a question, Mr Speaker, I want to bring something to your attention. There are many EU citizens in Parliament today who were keen to hear this urgent question, but they are being told that the Gallery is full and that they cannot get in to watch proceedings. The Gallery is obviously not full, so I wanted to make you aware of that to see whether we can get a message to the Doorkeepers.

**Mr Speaker:** The Gallery is manifestly not full, and it would be much better if it were full. I hope that it will speedily become full in conformity with the wishes expressed by the hon. Gentleman, which I think would be endorsed across the House.

**Stephen Doughty:** Indeed, many of those EU citizens are here today because of the complete chaos and their worry about their futures, many of them having contributed to our society for decades. They are concerned about their immigration status, their right to work and their families here. Will the Minister admit that she gave incorrect evidence to the Home Affairs Committee the other day? Will she tell us how many EU citizens have already left the UK due to uncertainty around their status?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman is clearly a huge box-office draw if there are people outside still wanting to get in. He makes an important point—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue, it is important to say, as set out by the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and, indeed, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union in his appearance at the House of Lords EU Select Committee on 29 August, that we want EU citizens to stay. We have already started the process of enabling them to go through the settled status scheme, and in the region of 1,000 people have already been granted such status.

**Stephen Doughty:** How many have left?

**Caroline Nokes:** I am just coming to the second part of the hon. Gentleman’s question. We still know that more EU citizens are coming than leaving—*[Interruption.]* As the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Stephen Barclay), just indicated, more EU citizens are working in the NHS today than at the time of referendum.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): I thank the Minister for clarifying that EU citizens’ rights will be protected in the event of both a deal and no deal. Some people have made the UK their permanent home but have to come and go either for their job or because they have caring responsibilities. Will those people be cared for?

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. There will be individuals who come and go. Through the settled status scheme, we are seeking to give people every opportunity to evidence their time in the UK by working with other Departments to cross-reference HMRC or Department for Work and Pensions records, for example. It is important to make a scheme that is easy for people to go through and that encourages those EU citizens who have contributed so much to our country to stay here. We want them to stay.

**Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** What assessment has the Minister made of the commentary about the rights of the parents or elderly relatives on both sides of the equation? Will she give us her enlightened view on the next steps? Lots of people are very worried.

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Lady makes an important point, and the family reunion rights that have been set out in the withdrawal agreement are very important. We know that many EU citizens may have caring responsibilities or, indeed, children in a home country who might yet seek to come over. Those rights are enshrined in the offer we have made, and it is important that we continue to honour that offer and, indeed, work with those individuals so that they find going through the process as easy as possible.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** Will the European partners of British citizens have to apply for settled status?

**Caroline Nokes:** I wonder whether my hon. Friend should declare an interest. Of course, EU nationals who are living here will need to go through the settled status scheme to make sure they have access to pension rights and settled status rights, as I have set out. Of course it is important that anyone who has been here for five years can apply for settled status straightaway, and those who have been here for less than five years will be able to apply for pre-settled status and can then apply for settled status once they have been here for five years.

**Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab):** Telling people that they are welcome just sounds hollow, given the terrible treatment meted out to Commonwealth citizens who were also once told that they were welcome but who did not have documents that they did not know they were supposed to have. What does the Minister think I should say to my EU constituents in Bristol West who, frankly, have no confidence at all in the Government's proposals?

**Caroline Nokes:** People who go through the settled status scheme will be given a digital status so they can evidence that they have been through the scheme. I am very conscious—I believe I said this to the Home Affairs Committee last week—that there will be children born between now and 29 March 2019 who may well live to 120 and beyond, so we have to ensure that the settled scheme is enduring so that, potentially, for the next 100-plus years people will still be able to evidence their status.

**Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that EU citizens who have made their lives in the UK continue to make a great contribution to our country? I sincerely hope that she agrees with me, because my father is one of them.

He came here as an economic migrant just over 50 years ago, and he is not in any way unduly concerned about his status when we leave the EU.

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank my hon. Friend for drawing on his family experience. One of the most important things we can do to demonstrate our commitment is to open a settled status scheme, and we have done that. The scheme opened in August for the first private beta testing phase, and we are now in phase 2. There will be a third phase in January after a firebreak so that we can check that the scheme is working as we would want. I am delighted that we have already seen in the region of 1,000 people granted settled status.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** My constituent Robin Adams is a British citizen and an EU citizen, as we all are at the moment. He is working as a lecturer in Sweden, and does not know whether he will be able to continue his work in Sweden or, if he returns, whether his wife, a US citizen, would be able to come back with him. He faces losing his home, his job and his family. What reassurance can the Minister offer him?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Lady will have heard my answer earlier, and there continues to be ongoing work with European counterparts and the EU to make sure that they offer the same clarity and simple status that we have offered for EU citizens who are living here.

The hon. Lady refers to her constituent's US wife and, of course, under the Surinder Singh rules she will already be eligible to come here with him if they have been living in an EU state for a significant period of time.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** If there is no deal, what will happen on 30 March 2019, when free movement will have ended, if an EU citizen presents himself at our borders?

**Caroline Nokes:** It is an important principle, as has been set out repeatedly, that we wish to be an outward-looking trading nation post Brexit. It is important, in my view, that we continue to allow EU citizens to use e-passport gates. Many hon. Members will have heard the Chancellor's commitment in last week's Budget to open up e-passport gates to further cohorts of nationalities. Of course, on day one of Brexit people will still be able to use their passport at e-passport gates as they travel into the UK.

**Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab):** I wonder whether the Minister can answer for me the question already put by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) about the charges for EU citizens who have been trafficked here. What assessment has the Home Office made of the number of women trafficked for sex from Romania and whether we will now be charging them for the fact that they have been abused?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Lady raises an important and serious point about victims of trafficking or modern slavery, and the issue has been raised with me. We have already made an offer that children in care should not have to pay the fee, we are looking very closely at this issue and I thank her for raising it.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will the Minister reassure me that she intends to take control of our borders—that was so important to so many in the referendum—while continuing to attract the brightest, the best and the needed? That is so important to employers in my constituency, especially agriculturalists, the tourism trade and the care industry.

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend points out the importance of controlling our own borders and being able to bring forward, for the first time in more than a generation, an immigration policy that will enable us to determine who comes here based on their skills, not on their nationality. It is a really important point that we should continue to be able to attract the brightest and the best, and we will be setting out full details of the future immigration policy in a White Paper, and indeed an immigration Bill, coming very soon.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): At the moment, many, many British people living in EU countries are very apprehensive about their future. They currently have EU citizenship rights, which they will lose if there is a no deal in March next year. What can the Minister say to reassure them? Is it not absurd that EU citizens in this country will have some protection, under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, but British people in the EU will have no protection whatsoever in the event of no deal?

**Caroline Nokes:** I would like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are working hard to ensure that there is a deal, but he raises an important point, which I think I have addressed a couple of times already. This country has made an offer to EU citizens and we have made it very clear that we want them to stay, but the same cannot be said of some of our European counterparts. This matter is pressed with Ministers at every available opportunity, and indeed with ambassadors and the EU, because it is important that British citizens living in the EU27, the majority of whom are in France and Spain, are afforded the protections to which we believe they are entitled under the withdrawal agreement.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): About a third of my constituents came from eastern Europe over the past 10 to 15 years. They should take heart from the settled status scheme, but they deserve clarity as soon as possible and they often look to their own embassies rather than to the UK state. Will the Minister work with those embassies to get information to these people as quickly as possible from those sources and, crucially, in their own languages?

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. I have already met a number of ambassadors, particularly those from central and eastern European countries, impressing upon them the importance of communicating with the diaspora populations—and they do that. As I have travelled the country over the past few months and talked to EU citizens, particularly those employed in agriculture, I have been interested to find that many of them have already received communications on this subject and that they are very confident about how they should go through the settled status process.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her statement so far. She will understand the uncertainty in the agri-food sector in Northern Ireland, particularly in my constituency. The sector depends on and functions greatly because of EU citizens who have been here for years—they have worked, married and bought their homes here, and their children go to school here. Will she give the EU workers and the employers much-needed assurance?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that back in the summer the Home Office issued the employers' toolkit, which gives them the ability to disseminate information to their employees and explains the process of the settled status scheme to them. As he will have heard, we have already opened the scheme to some small cohorts of EU citizens who are already living here. In the past few days, we have opened it up much more widely, so that EU citizens employed in NHS trusts and within the universities sector will be going through phase 2. It is important to us that we get the settled status scheme right and in putting people through it—those 1,000 people who have already gained status—we can provide evidence of the commitment we have made and demonstrate to others that it was a simple and straightforward process.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Is the Immigration Minister seriously saying that with just five months to go until we leave the European Union, the EU has not made clear what the rights of UK nationals will be in the EU on Brexit day? Given the huge contribution that UK citizens make to European countries, does she share my outrage at this callous disregard for the lives and futures of UK citizens who live in the EU?

**Caroline Nokes:** I am conscious that in the time I have been the Immigration Minister we have got the settled status scheme up and running, having designed completely from scratch a whole new digital system. I wish that I could see a similar commitment made among the EU27 or in the EU Commission as a whole, because it is important that there should be confidence for those British citizens who live in EU27 countries.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Minister has said several times that free movement will end; will she tell us the month and the year it will end?

**Caroline Nokes:** The Government will bring forward their plans to end free movement as soon as possible.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Many EU citizens in Torbay will be listening to this debate and wondering what the future is for them. Does the Minister agree that they should be reassured that although the Government's goal is to get a deal, if they do not, EU citizens' rights will be protected, so they should dismiss some of the scaremongering that we have heard?

**Caroline Nokes:** One of the most important parts of that guarantee is to demonstrate that we are already putting EU citizens through the settled status scheme. We have opened it up to a much larger cohort and, between now and the end of the year, in the region of 250,000 to 350,000 people will be eligible to go through the scheme. I should say that I do not anticipate our

[*Caroline Nokes*]

hitting that level of numbers, but we will be able to test the scheme at an enormous scale. It is important that we have made that commitment and we want EU citizens to stay.

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Home Secretary said yesterday that even in the event of no deal, employers will not be expected to differentiate between resident EU citizens and those who arrive after Brexit. Will the Minister therefore confirm that free movement will not end on 30 March next year?

**Caroline Nokes:** As I have said previously, right-to-work checks have to be carried out now for EU citizens and, indeed, for British nationals when they move to a new job. It is important that we set out the timetable for ending free movement, and the Prime Minister has been clear that we are going to do just that.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Many of the EU citizens who live in my constituency live in rural and even remote areas. They may not be aware of the support and advice that is available, or they may have difficulty accessing it. What steps will the Home Office take to make sure that EU residents in rural communities are made aware of the support available?

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about rural communities and remote areas. I referred earlier to the employers' toolkit, and I am conscious that many EU citizens may get information from their employer. I reassure my hon. Friend that a large-scale communication plan will indeed come into play when the settled status scheme is opened more widely.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): In the event of no deal, will free movement end on 29 March next year? If so, how will employers and others know what checks to make?

**Caroline Nokes:** As the Home Secretary explained, employers will have to continue to make the same right-to-work checks that they currently make. As I have now said several times, we will bring forward our plans to end free movement shortly.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The lives of hundreds of thousands of EU citizens in the UK have been blighted by this shambolic Brexit. Does the Minister agree that by ring-fencing EU citizens' rights now and paying for their settled status applications, we might go some way towards healing the hurt that has been inflicted on them as a result of Brexit and by this Government?

**Caroline Nokes:** I gently remind the right hon. Gentleman of the outcome of the referendum, when the British people voted for Brexit. The Government have a duty to uphold the British people's wishes. As I have said this afternoon, the settled status scheme is already open in its testing mode and has already conferred on more than 1,000 people their settled status.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): The Minister's answers today have revealed a shambles at the Home Office. Given that and given the state of policy, what

reassurance can she really give to the thousands of EU residents in my constituency, to their families, many of whom are UK citizens as well, and to thousands of local employers?

**Caroline Nokes:** I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was listening earlier when I said that the Home Office has delivered a settled status scheme that is up and running. Telling EU citizens that there is now a process for them to go through where they can confirm their status is exactly the sort of reassurance that we must give to them. Sadly, that is something that we have not seen across the rest of the EU.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): According to UK Music's recent Measuring Music report, the UK music industry exports rose by 7% to a record £2.6 billion last year. With 29 March fast approaching, it is more important than ever that we know how musicians and performers can continue working in the EU once the UK leaves, and how EU citizens can work in the UK. Will the Minister tell me what steps she has taken to achieve that?

**Caroline Nokes:** I am delighted to celebrate the increased exports of UK music and the phenomenal work that our artists, their producers, their tour companies and so on have managed to achieve over the past few years. It is important, as I have previously said, that we have a future immigration system. We are setting out the parliamentary timetable in due course and a White Paper will be published very shortly, which will clarify these matters.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): There are 1,500 EU nationals doing essential work for the Imperial College Healthcare Trust. In addition to having to go through the bureaucracy to get what they regard as second-class settled status, they would normally be charged a fee for that. The hospital trust itself will now pay at least £100,000 of that, which they have to do in order to retain these essential staff. Why should a trust, which is having real revenue and capital problems, have to pay that money? Why will the Government not pay that money?

**Caroline Nokes:** I do hope that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the fee for settled status was agreed with the EU.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): I do not know whether the Minister is aware just how ludicrous it sounds to keep talking about bringing forward clarification "in due course" when we have just 20 weeks to go. She keeps repeating the fact that 1,000 EU citizens have so far gone through the settled status scheme, which I calculate is 0.03%. Will she tell us exactly how many people she expects to have achieved settled status before the end of March 2019?

**Caroline Nokes:** I hope to be able to explain to the hon. Lady that, of course, the settled status scheme opened in private beta testing. When we introduce a new large-scale scheme of this type, it is really important that we do so in a controlled way, which is why it has been only small numbers to date. As she will have heard me say, we are opening it up currently to in the region of 250,000 to 350,000 individuals employed by NHS trusts

or indeed by the university sector. We know that there are 3.5 million people whom we wish to go through this scheme, and it is therefore really important that we get the testing right, and, of course, the scheme will be open until December 2020.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): As well as “in due course”, the Minister has also used the phrases, “as soon as possible”, “shortly”, “very shortly”, and “in the next few weeks”. Does she understand that those phrases are meaningless and just further undermine the confidence of people who are affected by our leaving the EU on 29 March? Will she now please provide to the House and to those 3 million EU citizens a bit more certainty about the timetable that is in her mind to provide some certainty for those people?

**Caroline Nokes:** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary indicated that the White Paper will be coming forward in the autumn. The hon. Gentleman will be able to work out that we are in the autumn now, so perhaps he can have greater confidence that, when I say soon, I mean soon. However, he raises the 3.5 million EU citizens that we want to go through the settled status scheme to confirm the rights that we have offered to them. Of course, they have those rights, and that is not dependent on the future immigration system. We have opened the settled status scheme now to the testing cohorts and will be opening it more widely in the new year.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): The Immigration Minister has confirmed that there will be transitional arrangements for EU citizens even in the event of no deal. How long will those transitional arrangements last? Last week, I was treated by a nurse from Romania

who had been here for many, many years, but she has asked her landlord to reduce her tenancy to a six-month rolling contract because she is terrified—in her words—that she will be “kicked out”.

**Caroline Nokes:** The Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union have all made it very clear that there will be no removals of EU citizens; we want them to stay. They are welcome here and they play an important role not just in our communities, but in our health service, as the hon. Lady pointed out. The settled status scheme is open in its testing phase and we will open it fully in the new year, but it is really important that we convey a message to everyone that we want EU citizens to stay. Seeking to sow seeds of uncertainty and division is actually really unhelpful to them.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): If Brexit happens and a British citizen marries an EU citizen in the future, will they be subject to income tests as non-EEA citizens are currently?

**Caroline Nokes:** The right hon. Gentleman started his question with, “If Brexit happens”. Let me reassure him that Brexit is happening. Of course, the matters to which he refers will be set out in the future immigration system.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): May I push the Minister for a simple yes or no answer? After March, in the event of a no deal, will EU nationals arriving in the UK for the first time be able to live and work without any additional checks in exactly the same way as EU nationals living here are now?

**Caroline Nokes:** To quote the Prime Minister, their expectations will be different.

## Universal Credit

4.26 pm

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the changes announced to universal credit in the Budget last week and on the draft Universal Credit (Managed Migration) Regulations 2018, which we are laying in the House today.

The Chancellor announced a substantial package at the Budget to ensure that millions of people keep more of what they earn, and vulnerable claimants are supported when they move to universal credit. In total, this package will be worth an extra £4.5 billion across the next five years. I pay special thanks to all the colleagues, charities, third-sector organisations, Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants who fed back to me in order to build this package of support to ensure that universal credit is a fair system, supporting thousands who cannot work as well as thousands who can. I also thank my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor for their support to deliver these measures.

Make no mistake: this is a Department that listens and a Department that will continue to listen, adapt, change and deliver. We will put an extra £1.7 billion a year into work allowances, increasing the amount that hard-working families can earn by £1,000 before universal credit is tapered away, providing extra support for 2.4 working families—I mean, 2.4 million working families. *[Laughter.]* Of course, the Opposition do not like helping 2.4 million working families, and they are laughing because we help and support people into work.

The work allowance increase was welcomed not only in this House, but among charities. The Child Poverty Action Group said:

“The work allowance increase is unequivocally good news for families receiving universal credit”.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation said that this extra investment

“will help make universal credit a tool for tackling poverty”.

And we have gone further, recognising the genuine concerns raised about the support we were offering people, especially the most vulnerable, when they moved to universal credit.

We have made a further £1 billion package of changes, providing two additional weeks of Department for Work and Pensions legacy benefits for those moved on to universal credit—a one-off non-repayable sum that will provide claimants with extra money during the period before they receive their first universal credit payment. This is on top of the two additional weeks of housing benefit announced at autumn Budget 2017 and put into place this year.

We will also support the self-employed in moving to universal credit. We will open up a 12-month grace period before the minimum income floor is applied, supporting 130,000 self-employed claimants—because we are the party of business; the party of aspiration. We will support those in debt by reducing the normal maximum rate at which debts are deducted from universal credit awards from 40% to 30% of standard allowances. This will help over 600,000 families to manage their debts at any one point when roll-out is complete, providing them with, on average, £295 extra a year as their debts are repaid over a longer period.

This is targeted support to help work pay and support the vulnerable, which is why today I lay regulations to deliver the next phase of universal credit—managed migration, through which people will be moved on to universal credit. That is a move from a system that trapped people on benefits and created cliff edges at 16, 24 and 30 hours with punitive effective tax rates of over 90% for some. Under Labour, between 1997 and 2010, benefit spend went up by 65%. In 1997, households were paying £5,500 in taxes to fund the benefits system—and by 2010, the figure had risen to £8,350. The Conservative party was voted into office to manage the country’s finances and get them under control, and also to make sure that the benefits bill was affordable and sustainable for the future. While Labour Members may hanker for the dark old days of trapping people on benefits, excluding them from the opportunity of work and getting on in life, and at the same time delivering a big bill to the taxpayer, we do not. Under this Government, 3.4 million more people are in work, and the vast majority of those jobs are full-time permanent roles. This means that we have created more new jobs in the UK since 2010 than France, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria and Norway combined, alongside creating a welfare system that supports those who need it.

Through universal credit, about 1 million disabled households will receive about £100 extra, on average, per month through more generous support. The Universal Credit (Managed Migration) Regulations 2018 will, in addition, protect 500,000 people’s severe disability premium at the point of migration, and deliver transitional protection for those we move to ensure that, at the point of moving, those managed-migrated have their entitlements protected. We will take a measured approach to delivering managed migration, taking our time to get it right and working with claimants to co-design it.

We have taken on board, and will continue to do so, the advice of experts and charities such as the Social Security Advisory Committee, whose report on the regulations we have published, along with our response, today. We have accepted, in full or in part, all but one of its recommendations—and the one we did not accept is because we want to make it more generous. I pay tribute to the hard work of the SSAC in scrutinising our regulations.

We have changed a key part of the regulations, as charities have asked me, MPs and the Department, relating to the minimum statutory notice period for people moving from their legacy award to universal credit. We have extended this period from a minimum of one month to a minimum of three months to allow claimants maximum time to prepare and make their claim before their legacy award expires. Alongside this, we have unlimited flexibility to extend claim periods for people who need it. We will backdate any claimant who has missed the deadline date but has made a claim within a month of the deadline day passing. We will test a variety of communication methods, including advertising campaigns, face-to-face communication, letters, texts, telephone calls and home visits, to provide support for claimants during managed migration. We will constantly review our approaches, engaging fully with charities, experts, claimants and all Members of the House. I commend this statement to the House.

4.33 pm

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. I would like to pay tribute to all the individuals, charities and Members of the House who have been holding the Government to account over their chaotic and damaging universal credit programme, which is pushing families into poverty.

In June, the National Audit Office published a damning report on universal credit. We know that the roll-out of the benefit is leading to people building up debt and rent arrears or being forced to turn to food banks for help. The Budget last week did little to address the very long wait for payments, which is causing significant hardship. Despite that, the Government are now planning to start the next phase of the introduction of universal credit, which they call managed migration, involving the transfer of 2.87 million people on to it.

Under the draft regulations, existing claimants will be sent a letter saying that their benefits will stop and they will need to make a new universal credit claim by a specific deadline. It is wholly unacceptable that the Government are shifting responsibility for ensuring that people get the help they need away from the Government and on to the shoulders of nearly 3 million claimants. It is no wonder that 80 organisations representing disabled people are calling for the Government to change tack. Learning disability charity Mencap has said that the proposals leave disabled people

“vulnerable to having their benefits stopped before they have made a successful claim”.

More than 400 organisations have responded to the Social Security Advisory Committee’s consultation on the managed migration regulations—a record number for the committee, which demonstrates the strength of concern about this issue.

Parliament is being asked to approve regulations that it may have very little chance at all to scrutinise and debate, even though the details of how the process will take place are not yet settled. When asked by the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee on 18 October whether the regulations would be debated, the Minister for Employment answered:

“We need to have a debate in the House.”

It was clear from the context that the Chair meant a debate in the main Chamber. However, the shadow Leader of the House raised the issue at business questions on 11, 18 and 25 October without receiving a clear assurance that that would be the case. That is all the more important since Government Members make up a majority of the MPs in Committees, even though they do not have an overall majority in Parliament.

Let us step back and get a broad view of the Government’s supposed flagship social security programme. Universal credit was supposed to lift 350,000 children out of poverty. Instead, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, an extra 1.2 million children may be growing up in poverty by the end of this Parliament. Universal credit was supposed to deliver work incentives and help more people into employment, yet the NAO says that the Department for Work and Pensions will never know whether universal credit leads to more people in work. Universal credit was supposed to simplify the social security system, but instead, around three in 10 claims of universal credit are closed and not paid,

within a system that is complex and that people find difficult to navigate. This statement does nothing to address that.

The Government claim that 1 million disabled households will receive an extra £100 a month as a result of universal credit. What the Secretary of State has failed to tell the House is that the same report by the Office for Budget Responsibility reveals that around 1 million sick and disabled households will lose an average of £2,608 a year, or £217 a month.

Universal credit is failing. The Opposition have consistently called on the Government to stop the roll-out, but the Government are pressing ahead, despite the terrible hardship it is causing. We have a right to ask questions on behalf of our constituents, including whether the universal credit managed migration regulations will be debated in full on the Floor of the House so that all MPs get a chance to scrutinise and debate this critical draft legislation.

The Secretary of State says that the Government have accepted all but one of the Social Security Advisory Committee’s recommendations. That is highly questionable. For example, what new action will the Government take to support people who struggle to make and manage a claim online? Will the Department publish the more than 400 responses to the Social Security Advisory Committee’s consultation, to ensure maximum transparency? The Secretary of State must assure the House that there are sufficient safeguards in place to ensure that no existing legacy benefit claimants end up falling into destitution and that none falls out of the social security system altogether.

Given the potential impact of the draft regulations on claimants’ incomes, the large number of people affected and the strength of opposition to the proposals in their current form, it is a matter of real concern that they will receive such little scrutiny by Members. Members are extremely concerned about the impact that universal credit is having on people living in their constituencies. They must be given the opportunity to debate and vote on these regulations on the Floor of the House.

**Ms McVey:** While the Opposition cannot bring themselves to commend the extra £4.5 billion going into universal credit, let me read out what some independent charities have been saying. The Resolution Foundation has hailed this a “very welcome” £1.7 billion commitment. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said that this extra investment is

“a tool for tackling poverty”.

The Trussell Trust has talked about

“significant improvements that will make a real difference to many people supported by universal credit”.

The Child Poverty Action Group called this

“unequivocally good news for families receiving universal credit”.

Other charities have been saying that the Department is now listening to what claimants, charities and MPs are saying. The Trussell Trust has said that. Gingerbread has said that. Mind has said that. Mencap has said that.

I would also point out that an extra 1 million disabled people will be getting an extra £100 a month, and that 700,000 people who did not get all they should under the legacy benefits will get nearly an extra £300 a month. There are now 3.4 million more people in work. That is what we do: we help people into work. Youth

[Ms McVey]

unemployment has gone down by 50% since 2010—that gives young people a future, it gives them hope and it gives them a job—and that is happening under this Government.

I came into politics for social mobility. Social mobility is about moving forward and getting a job. There is no social mobility on benefits—there is no mobility on benefits. That is what this party believes in. It is the way to get out of poverty. That is why we welcome the extra £4.5 billion. The Opposition have asked for a debate on the Floor of the House, and, of course, there will be a debate on the Floor of the House. We believe in transparency. We are open and straight talking. We say it as it is.

We will be co-designing what happens with claimants. In the words of the publication that the OBR has put out on the Budget, by 2023-24 we will be spending an extra £2 billion on universal credit than on the system it replaces. I want to say a final word on debt under Labour: between 1997 and 2010, benefit claimants' debt to local authorities increased by £1.8 billion through overpayments and errors in the legacy system, and £5.86 billion of debt was accrued on tax credits. That is a shameful record for the Opposition of putting claimants into debt on benefits and tax credits.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is much interest in this subject, but I remind the House that there is a further statement to follow and then two important debates. There is therefore a premium on brevity, which will be characteristically and brilliantly exemplified by the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening).

**Justine Greening (Putney) (Con):** I very much welcome the additional investment in universal credit in the Budget. Like many Members, I have met the DWP, Jobcentre Plus and citizens advice bureaux locally to talk about the roll-out of universal credit. It is obviously hugely important that people avoid going into debt unnecessarily, and I very much welcome the co-design approach to managed migration that the Secretary of State has set out. Will she say which groups are likely to be migrated first, and on what basis?

**Ms McVey:** I thank my right hon. Friend. For a year from next July we will be having a trial period or test period, working with 10,000 claimants to see exactly the way in which it should be done—for example, should it be done for the most vulnerable groups or should it be done geographically?—and to make sure that we get it right. That is how we work: we make sure that it works; we do not just go forward with an idea—[*Interruption.*] There is chuntering from the Opposition Front Bench. We will work with claimants to make sure it works for them.

**Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of the statement. The work allowance boost that we are being told we should welcome only undoes or reverses half the cut that was made in 2015. It is like taking £100 away from somebody, giving them 50 quid back and saying, “You should be grateful that I’ve given you 50 quid back.” The reality is that people are still worse off. The benefit freeze is still in place.

The sanctions regime is also still in place. I am particularly concerned about the methods of communication for universal credit. I have seen a number of people who come to my surgeries with mental health problems particularly—they cannot open letters or deal with having to jump through the hoops that are put in their way—who are then sanctioned because they are literally unable to jump through those hoops. I hope that the Secretary of State will look at all these issues. She has mentioned communication methods, and I very much hope she will put that at the centre of the decision-making process for communication.

On the exact amount of money that has been allocated for universal credit, it seems to me that nothing has been done on the basis of how much people actually need to live on. If it had, there would not be a huge increase in the number of people going to food banks and there would not be the incredible number of sanctions that we see. Rather than the Treasury deciding how much money should go to universal credit and the Department for Work and Pensions then divvying it up, it would be better to make decisions on the basis of how much people need to live on and what amount of money would encourage people to get into work.

We need to ensure that people are not going to food banks, that families are not in poverty and that young people are not starving as a result of the Government's policies.

**Ms McVey:** As I said previously, when we came into office, we had to take an overview of Government spending, full stop. We were voted into office to get this country's finances under control. One of the decisions that we had to make was on the size of the benefit bill because it had grown by 65% under the previous Labour Government. We took hold of that, and decisions were made across the board—I have never shied away from that. Again, in 2015, further decisions were made after a general election. The Opposition did not vote against the changes and cuts. Their Whips' advice on that day was to abstain. Some broke ranks, but generally they did not.

Those changes are now coming through, but I said that I would go out, meet people, listen, learn and see what we could do and afford, and that is why an extra £4.5 billion has gone into universal credit. I look at what people are saying and why they have welcomed the increase. I reiterate that there are 3.4 million extra people in work and that we are targeting the money at the most vulnerable.

The hon. Lady is right about communication, which is key. That is why we will work with charities to get it right.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** In easing the passage to universal credit, there is a great role for jobcentre staff. The problem is that I do not have a jobcentre in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend bring forward the idea of mobile jobcentres to help the transition and manage the process?

**Ms McVey:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point—he has probably been reading my mind. Outreach work is key: how do we get to the most vulnerable, whether people in isolated parts of the country or those with learning difficulties or transport difficulties? We will



look at outreach work and perhaps a mobile bus. We should look at new, good ideas for connecting with our claimants.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): I thank the Secretary of State for the money she managed to claw back from the Treasury—I advise her for her own safety not to take routes home in the dark that pass the Treasury. A crucial element of her statement was the one-off, non-repayable sum for claimants who have been transferred to universal credit. Will she give the House an assurance that the sum—non-repayable, therefore incurring no debt—will be equivalent to the sorts of sums people would get if they were already on universal credit?

**Ms McVey:** We have made sure that that will be people's benefit going forward. As I said, it is the sum that they need when they adjust from two to four weeks and it is, as the right hon. Gentleman said, non-returnable. That is to ensure that people can balance the money when moving from a two-week to a four-week payment. It is extra money.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I know better than most how hard the Secretary of State worked to get support from the Chancellor in the Budget. I commend her for doing that. Will she assure my constituents that the welfare bill will not once again spiral out of control, as it did under the previous Labour Government, taking money away from hard-working taxpayers?

**Ms McVey:** The Conservative party is always about balancing fairness for everybody: fairness to the taxpayers paying the bill as well fairness to those getting benefits and those going into work. I thank my hon. Friend because when I met his Trussell Trust team in Shipley, one of their first requests was that the maximum rate at which deductions can be made should reduce from 40% to 30%. I am glad that I can deliver that today.

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I strongly disagree with the Secretary of State. Universal credit is not getting residents out of poverty. I say that because a constituent of mine, who has mental health problems, contacted me this morning. He was moved over to universal credit and fell into housing arrears, which is exacerbating his mental health condition. It is very distressing for him. For those people unable to self-identify for managed migration, how will they acquire additional support? I do not think it is good enough that people are being tested out and then this is failing them.

**Ms McVey:** If the hon. Lady would like to meet to discuss what has happened to her constituent and how we can support him, I am more than happy to do so. Equally, I know that a lot of people are coming to universal credit with debt—it is not due to universal credit, but what they come with. Maybe together we can work to support that person.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on securing additional funding. In the detail for transitional provisions, she said that there would be two additional weeks of legacy benefits for those moved on to universal credit, which is a one-off, non-refundable payment. That may take time to sink in on both sides of the House, but can

she confirm that this is additional money? Does she, like me, look forward to hon. Members on both sides of the House welcoming it and supporting it?

**Ms McVey:** I am glad my hon. Friend understands that this is additional money. My concern was how people, who are used to getting paid not monthly but fortnightly, would manage to cope with the change. That is why we have brought in the measure. Hopefully that money can help them if they have debt, because it is additional money to their household.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): When cuts to universal credit were voted through by the House, MPs were promised that everyone would receive transitional protection, but the delay to managed migration means that less than half the 7 million families affected will receive it and 3.2 million families will still be over £2,000 a year worse off. Will the Secretary of State look again at the very wide criteria for changes of circumstances that are being used to transfer people from legacy benefits on to universal credit at an ever-increasing pace?

**Ms McVey:** If the hon. Lady had been here for the statement, she may have been able to follow this through. *[Interruption.]* A bit late coming in, as my hon. Friends have confirmed to me. *[Interruption.]*

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Universal credit rolled out a couple of weeks ago in my constituency. Does the Secretary of State agree that the money she announced today will make a particular difference to people in my constituency who are often paid weekly or fortnightly, rather than monthly? It is often they who are the most vulnerable and who need the most help.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before the Secretary of State responds to her hon. Friend, I am sure that what she said she said in all sincerity, but I am 99.9% recurring certain in my own mind that the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George) was here at the start of—*[Interruption.]* Order. I am not debating the point with the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare). *[Interruption.]* Order. No facial expressions are required. I am just telling him and the House the situation. The hon. Lady was here—end of.

**Ms McVey:** It seems a moot point on both sides of the House whether or not the hon. Lady was here, but that being the case she will know that we have put an extra £4.5 billion into the system to support transitional protection. That is exactly what a fair Government would do: provide the correct transitional protection.

**Mr Speaker:** I would quite like to lighten the tension on this matter. May I just say to hon. Members, for the avoidance of doubt, that perambulation in the Chamber from one row to another is not an entirely novel phenomenon? May I say to the hon. Member for North Dorset, who is an old friend in the House of Commons, that it is not uncommon? The fact that a Member perambulates from one Bench to another does not mean that that Member has exited the Chamber. As far as I am concerned, the hon. Lady did not exit the Chamber.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): The Secretary of State quoted the Child Poverty Action Group a couple of times, but she failed to mention that in the same press release, it also said that

“unless there is a further fundamental re-think of how universal credit works—and robust safeguards in place before it is scaled-up—people will continue to be pushed into debt and driven to food banks as part of their claim.”

Why did she omit that bit?

**Ms McVey:** Having met this charity group, too, I have said that I will work with it so that when we can, we listen, change and adapt what we need to do, which we have done so far since I have been in office, and we have the extra money through the Budget. That is what I am prepared to do.

**Mr Speaker:** I call a Member not given to perambulation—Dr Julian Lewis.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I am not certain what the attitude towards gambling is in the Secretary of State’s household, but would she care to place a bet that if the universal credit system is up and running and if, heaven forbid, the Labour party comes into government, it will be most unlikely to replace it with a mish-mash of different cross-cutting benefits such as existed previously?

**Ms McVey:** That is a very good question, because it seems that Opposition Members do not really know what they are going to do. It seems that the shadow Chancellor is going to get rid of it and the shadow Secretary of State is not really sure, but I know that in the Lords, they want to keep it. Perhaps when the next person stands up, they will tell us exactly what the Opposition Front Benchers are going to do with universal credit.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Universal credit is due to start in my constituency in just a few weeks’ time. Local families and local advice services and food bank volunteers are all deeply concerned about what this will mean and about their ability to provide support for people in the run-up to Christmas. Given that the Secretary of State has had to admit that there are a whole series of problems with the policy, which is why she had to bring forward a whole series of changes—even though they do not go far enough—will she please recognise the risks to families in my constituency at Christmas and halt this introduction now, so that we can make sure that more families are not pushed into debt and poverty at such an important family time?

**Ms McVey:** I wonder whether I could invite the right hon. Lady to go to see the work that Jobcentre Plus and the work coaches are doing and how they are helping an extra 1,000 people each and every day into work and, equally, how they are working with the most vulnerable to sort them. If I did what she said and stopped the roll-out, it would mean that 1 million disabled people who would possibly be getting an extra £100 would not be getting it, and that those 700,000 people who have not got the right amount of benefit—nearly £300 a month—would not be getting it.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Can I just get this right? Is it correct that our country gives more family benefits to our people who need them than any other developed country? [*Interruption.*]

**Ms McVey:** Actually, for family benefits, my hon. Friend is correct—it is more than any advanced nation. We give more in benefits to families; he is correct.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): The full service roll-out of universal credit began in my constituency in July last year. People who are moving from legacy benefits on to universal credit are being made worse off. How on earth can a system incentivise work if it is making people in work poorer?

**Ms McVey:** What it is doing is supporting more people into work—3.4 million. By bringing in the work allowance—£1.7 billion a year—we are now able to focus extra support on families with children and supporting disabled people. Therefore, it will be even more beneficial to them going forward. That is positive support that we are giving through the Budget changes.

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): Universal credit came to Willenhall two weeks ago. Of the 157 cases we have had so far, only three are awaiting processing for payment. Can the Secretary of State explain why it seems to be going so smoothly, given that Opposition Members assure us it is a disaster?

**Ms McVey:** My hon. Friend, who has actually visited his jobcentre plus to find out what is happening on the ground, gives a truer reflection of what is happening on the ground. I have spent most of this year travelling from Brighton up to Angus in Scotland and meeting jobcentre coaches, and most of them are telling me that universal credit is working for the vast majority of people, but I wanted to make sure we got extra money from the Chancellor in the Budget to help the vulnerable people it maybe was not helping.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Secretary of State will be aware that her Department has agreed with the Social Security Advisory Committee’s recommendations about telephone claims for universal credit, but we know that DWP contact centre staff are concerned that having to deal with such high call volumes might mean they cannot process claims. How many additional staff will be required in DWP contact centres to deal with telephone claims for universal credit?

**Ms McVey:** The hon. Gentleman raises a good point. That is another thing we will be looking at during the managed migration, as we expand the system and more people come on to universal credit—how many more people do we need in call centres; how many more work coaches?—because we will need the right number to give a good service.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I appeal to the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) now to republish his brevity textbook in the hope that others will follow.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** “The Government has listened to the frontline. These are significant improvements that will make a real difference.” Who said that?

**Ms McVey:** My right hon. Friend has just said it. I have heard many charities saying that this is positive news. The Department is listening and bringing in significant support for claimants.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Everybody claiming universal credit has to wait at least five weeks before being entitled to payments, including those being moved across from previous benefits. The Secretary of State referred to the additional two weeks of previous benefits announced by the Chancellor in the Budget. How can Ministers justify stopping all benefits for a period of at least three weeks for people migrating from previous benefits on to universal credit?

**Ms McVey:** It will be a continuum. The payment cycle will be going from two weeks to four weeks, and this is actually extra money. They will be getting two weeks' extra money because they will be getting the full period they are entitled to when it comes along after four weeks. This is not giving them less money, or even part of their money; this is two weeks' extra benefit.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Some of the most vulnerable in our communities will always look to their citizens advice bureau for help and assistance on these matters. The announcements by our right hon. Friend the Chancellor last week, and confirmed by the Secretary of State today, are incredibly welcome. What plans do she and her Department have to explain to our local CABs the nature of the changes and the benefits that will accrue from them to ensure that some of the most vulnerable people in our communities have a happy experience of universal credit, not one like the Opposition describe?

**Ms McVey:** My hon. Friend raises a good point, and that is why we worked in partnership with Citizens Advice across the country—so it could help people get on to universal credit. We felt it was the correct thing to do. It works with the most vulnerable people—it knows them—and is a trusted independent group. That is why we chose it to work with.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I welcome the announcement on reducing the deduction rate for the repayment of debt, but 30% of someone's benefit is still quite a lot to be paying back on debt repayment. Will the Secretary of State take seriously the suggestion in the report of the Work and Pensions Committee last week that debt advice becomes a core part of the universal support offer?

**Ms McVey:** The hon. Lady, who knows a lot about this subject, is correct about the debt advice and the support that is available. We are building in measures to help more people to obtain debt advice. They often do not like asking for it as such, so we are going to change the term to "money advice". Many people do not like to admit that they are in debt, even if they are.

Let me clear up one point. We are not talking about 30% of the entire benefit; we are talking about 30% of the standard allowance. Obviously, that does not include housing or childcare. It is a significant reduction in the rate, led by calls from the Trussell Trust.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Universal credit has already been fully rolled out in my constituency, and for the majority of people it is working; but, more important, more people are working too. Does my right

hon. Friend agree that universal credit can also empower people to work more hours, which has got to be good for their self-esteem?

**Ms McVey:** My hon. Friend is right. This benefit is about empowering people. It is about helping them to take on work, or extra work. Under the legacy systems, people were locked out of work even if they wanted to do it. We know that there are about 113 million extra hours of work out there. We also know that there is a record number of vacancies in the economy. We can help people, get them a career, get them on the jobs ladder, and get them doing what they want to do in this world.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Analysis of the universal credit measures in the Budget shows that more than 3 million households will still be worse off, especially disabled people and the self-employed. Following the High Court judgment compelling the Secretary of State to provide transitional protections for disabled people migrating on to universal credit, what is her response to the comment on page 76 of the Social Security Advisory Committee's report that her proposals leave disabled people worse off and need "further consideration"?

**Ms McVey:** I hope that the hon. Lady will be voting for the changes that may give 1 million more disabled people an extra £100 a month, and the extra protection for the severe disability premium for 500,000 people, which is key. As I have always said, should we need to give any more support for vulnerable groups, we will work—and I will work with the Chancellor—to ensure that that happens. However, I commend to the hon. Lady the managed migration regulations, which, as she will see, provide for significantly more support.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The Opposition love to talk about benefit cuts. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, as a result of the measures in the Budget, spending on universal credit, when it is fully rolled out, will be £2 billion a year more than spending on the equivalent legacy benefits, and that this will be worth £300 a year to each universal credit family?

**Ms McVey:** My hon. Friend is right. That was in the forecast for 2023-24 in the Office for Budget Responsibility's Budget report. We are a party that is fair to the most vulnerable and supports the rest into work. To be honest, I do not know why Opposition Members are voting against helping the most vulnerable and giving them more support than they would be given by the legacy benefits.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is very little chance now that everyone will be able to get in, but there is a flicker of a chance if people ask one-sentence questions.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): It is a miracle that someone who has had no social mobility and has lived on benefits can be called in the House, but I managed to make it here on those legacy benefits, and managed to get the same fancy job as the Members over there, so I am not sure what they are talking about.

[Jess Phillips]

I want to ask the Secretary of State about my constituent who was raped by the man with whom she lived and who therefore had to move. She was forced on to universal credit because of a change in her circumstances. She works—she has always worked—and she is £200 worse off. She is a single mother. What is being offered to her today—and this is why we are not supporting it—will still leave her £160 a month worse off. This is a rape victim, a single mother who is in work. What will the Secretary of State do for her?

**Ms McVey:** I would like to meet the hon. Lady to discuss the matter, and to meet this person to see what we can do to support and help her. She has obviously been through a lot.

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): I welcome the progress that my right hon. Friend has made in securing changes that support people in a better way. There will have to be a number of votes on the measures that she is proposing. What does she think people will not be getting if Members decide not to back the changes that she is advocating?

**Ms McVey:** That is a crucial question. If people do not vote for these changes, it will mean the most vulnerable not being helped, it will mean 1 million disabled people not getting £100 a month, it will mean disabled people not getting severe disability premium, and it will mean 700,000 people not getting their full benefit and being supported as well, in addition to the other measures I mentioned. I thank my hon. Friend for asking that question.

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): I commend the Secretary of State for making her statement to the House. I also note with approval the list of organisations that the Secretary of State said had come out and supported the Government putting back in the £1.7 billion for UC from the £3 billion cut in 2015. I note that I and my party were not in that list, but I am sure the Secretary of State will remember that since the election I have been saying again and again that to make work pay we have to bring back the full £3 billion. Will the Secretary of State commit to the further £1.3 billion that will really make work pay?

**Ms McVey:** We are making work pay. That is why more people are going into work. We are also changing the system significantly so that people are not trapped on benefits. We are making the system as fair as we can for those on benefits and those paying for it, and we are also protecting the most vulnerable; that is what we are doing.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for showing once again that she is listening and is prepared to change and improve things as we go along, because these changes have been hugely welcomed by DWP staff in my constituency and constituents on UC, and indeed by many charities who work with the most vulnerable. Does the Secretary of State share my surprise that the one group of people who seem unable to welcome these changes are the Opposition?

**Ms McVey:** My hon. Friend makes a great point. They have also been unable to welcome the extra 3.4 million people in work, a reduction of youth unemployment by 50%, and the record numbers of women into work and of BME—black and minority ethnic—people into work. I do not know what they would welcome.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The reason why we have these concerns is because of cases like this: a constituent of mine—a single mother of a terminally ill child aged 2—had her application for income support lost by the DWP, was then forced to claim UC, and while that was being considered all her benefits were stopped and she was forced to live on her son's DLA and her carer's allowance for her terminally ill son. Does the Secretary of State think that sort of case is acceptable and why is she pushing ahead given that cases like this have arisen?

**Ms McVey:** We have always said that we will deal with such cases. When fully rolled out, we will have up to about 8 million people here and we get it right most of the time for most of the people, but should something go wrong—and obviously something has gone wrong there—people come to their MP, which is only right, and then they bring the case to me and the Department and we get it right. But no system in the world is 100% right for 100% of people, and I apologise when it goes wrong, and then we will fight to get it right.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I have been interested to hear the Secretary of State's responses to a number of questions. How many recommendations from the Social Security Advisory Committee has her Department accepted?

**Ms McVey:** We have accepted all but one of them, and in the one we did not accept we have been more generous, if you can believe it. So we have accepted nearly all of them, except one, and that one we have been more generous towards.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): A constituent of mine recovering from cancer came to see me. She had literally no money for food because at the moment UC is so badly designed that those whose pay date coincides with their claim date get no money at all in two months of the year. Before the roll-out, will the Secretary of State correct this design fault?

**Ms McVey:** In those instances we are working with the individual and then helping them with a manual workaround to make sure they are back on benefit and we are supporting those people. As I have said, it is never going to be a system that is right 100% of the time for 100% of people, but it is working the vast majority of the time for the vast majority of people. That is why people are saying up and down the country, "This is working; I'm getting into work." In fact, this is the one single thing that claimants say to me who have been unemployed before—eight years ago—and are now coming back to the job centre. They say that because of the scare stories from the Opposition, they have been frightened to go into—

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Points of order come after statements.

**Ms McVey:** They have been frightened to go into the jobcentre. I have many letters from people saying thank goodness we did this, because it is so much better than the legacy system it replaces.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): The full service was rolled out in Greenwich on 3 October and I am extremely concerned about the number of people locally who appear to be claiming universal credit when it is not necessary for them to do so and who are worse off as a result. What more can the Secretary of State's Department do, particularly in terms of training and information sharing among organisations on the ground, to ensure that only those who need to claim universal credit are doing so?

**Ms McVey:** This is the new system, and people will be claiming universal credit as it rolls out to their jobcentre. This is a modern system that helps people into work and helps the most vulnerable. Probably the best thing that the hon. Gentleman could do is to work with them to ensure that they are on the system and that it is working for them.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): I wrote to the Secretary of State more than a month ago about an anomaly drawn to my attention by my local citizens advice bureau—namely, the difference for women on maternity allowance as opposed to maternity pay. Has she managed to resolve that issue, because many women are worse off as a result of this policy?

**Ms McVey:** I will go back to the Department now and ensure that the right hon. Gentleman gets a reply to that letter.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Chester was an early roll-out area for universal credit, so let me tell the Secretary of State how the migration has been going. A constituent of mine lost her husband; he died suddenly leaving her with a primary school-aged child. She was on a widow's pension and tax credits, and was just about managing, but she was then told to go on to universal credit. She is now £250 a month

worse off and she is going to lose her house. My question to the Secretary of State is this: can she have her money back?

**Ms McVey:** No, but as the hon. Gentleman and I live only up the road from each other, let us meet and see this person and see what we can do.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): Child poverty and street homelessness are both going up, so I would like the Secretary of State to put on record her prediction for the future under the new universal credit system. Will child poverty and street homelessness fall or rise?

**Ms McVey:** At the moment, there are 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty and, under this Government, nearly 1 million fewer children are growing up in workless households. We believe that work is the best way out of poverty, and having a role model in the house who is working is the best way to get out of poverty too.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab) *rose*—

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Ah! Two distinguished ornaments of the Opposition Whips Office—what a difficult choice! I call Mr Chris Elmore.

**Chris Elmore:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Further to the shadow Secretary of State's question about the managed migration regulations, will the Secretary of State confirm—yes or no will do—that this will be debated on the Floor of the House and not in Committee?

**Ms McVey:** Yes.

**Nic Dakin:** Waiting to get their universal credit is causing people huge problems. Will the Secretary of State do everything she can to address that problem, because it is the main thing that comes up when people come to see me every week—almost every day—with their problems about the universal credit roll-out?

**Ms McVey:** Absolutely, yes. Obviously, the Secretary of State before me brought in advances.

## Prevention of Ill Health: Government Vision

5.18 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** Last week, the Chancellor confirmed that the NHS budget would rise by £20.5 billion over the next five years, because we care about the NHS being there for everyone. As well as money, however, reform is crucial. Before Christmas, we will bring forward a long-term plan for the NHS. We know that so much of what contributes to good health comes not just from what happens when someone is in hospital but from what we do to stay out of hospital. Prevention is better than cure. Today I have laid before the House our vision for the prevention of ill health. It covers what the NHS needs to do, including more funding for community and primary care and the better use of technology. The plan also outlines what we need to see more broadly; everyone has a part to play.

As well as the rights we have as citizens to access NHS services free at the point of use, we all have responsibilities, too. Individuals have responsibilities, and we want to empower people to make the right choices. For instance, smoking costs the NHS £2.5 billion each year and contributes to 4% of hospital admissions. That is despite the massive reduction in smoking over the past 30 years. The next step to a smoke-free society is targeted anti-smoking interventions, especially in hospitals.

As well as stopping smoking, we must tackle excess salt. Salt intake has fallen 11% over just under a decade, but if it fell by a third, that would prevent 8,000 premature deaths and save the NHS over £500 million annually. We are working on new solutions to tackle salt, and we will set out more details by Easter and deliver on chapter 2 of our obesity plan, too.

Next, prevention can save money and eliminate waste. At the moment, it takes too long, with too many invasive tests, to diagnose some illnesses. Doctors often have to try several different treatments before they alight on what is right for a patient. However, two new technologies—artificial intelligence and genomics—have the potential to change that. I want predictive prevention to help prevent people from becoming patients and to deliver more targeted interventions, with better results, when people do fall ill. Instead of simply broadcasting messages to the nation, technology allows us to support much more targeted advice, messages and interventions for those most at risk.

Turning to environmental factors, our health is not determined only by what happens in hospitals. In fact, only a minority of the impact on anyone's healthy lifespan is delivered by what hospitals do. The other factors include the air we breathe, whether someone has a job and the quality of our housing. That means our GP surgeries, our hospitals and our care homes all working more closely with local authorities, schools, businesses, charities and other parts of our communities. Of course, the record number of people in work is good news on that front, and employers have a big role in helping their staff to stay healthy and to return to health after illness. That is where we can learn from the excellent record of our brave armed services, which have an 85% return-to-work rate after serious injury, while the equivalent rate for civilians is only 35%.

Building on all that, the Government will next year publish a Green Paper on prevention, which will set out the plans in greater detail. This is all part of our long-term plan for the future of the NHS.

If I may, Mr Speaker, I will now address two separate issues that I know are of interest across the House today: the treatment of those with learning difficulties and autism, and the medical use of cannabis. Since becoming Health and Social Care Secretary, I have been shocked by some of the care received by those with autism and learning difficulties. Where people deserve compassion and dignity, they have been treated like criminals, and that must stop. Like everyone across the House, I have been moved by the cases of Bethany, Stephen and so many others, whose stories have laid bare what is wrong with our system and what needs to change. I have instituted a serious incident review, but this is not just about individual cases; it is about the system.

Three years ago, the Government committed to reducing the number of people with learning disabilities or autism in secure mental health hospitals by at least a third. Currently, it is down by a fifth, but that still leaves 2,315 people with learning disabilities or autism in mental health hospitals. I want to see that number drastically reduce. I have asked the NHS to address that in the long-term plan, and I know that its leadership shares my determination to get this right. I have also instigated a Care Quality Commission review into the inappropriate use of prolonged seclusion and segregation. The long-term use of seclusion is unacceptable both medically and ethically. It must stop. The review will recommend how to protect vulnerable people better and how to ensure that everyone is cared for with the compassion, respect and dignity they deserve.

On the prescription of medicinal cannabis, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) and the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) for their campaigning on this issue. We have changed the law to make it possible to prescribe medicinal cannabis where clinically appropriate. Urgent cases have been brought to my attention, including concerns that those who have received treatment on an exceptional basis are now being denied that treatment. There is no reason for that to happen. The treatment of each individual patient is and must be down to the decision of the specialist doctor, working with patients and their family to determine the best course of treatment for them.

I met the head of the NHS on that this morning, and I have immediately instigated a system of second opinions. We have put out a call for research to develop the evidence, and we have also commissioned the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to produce further clinical guidance on this issue. No one who currently gets medicinal cannabis should be denied it, and there is a system in place now for those who need to get it in future.

We want to deliver the best possible care to the most vulnerable, and we want to help build a more sustainable health and care system for all. Today's announcements will help to do that, and I commend this statement to the House.

5.25 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. We welcome his remarks on the use of medicinal cannabis and on the appalling, barbaric abuses of those with learning disabilities and autism, by which we have all been shocked. I understand his point about the review and about asking NHS England to carry out some work, but is it not time that these institutions were closed down and proper support provided in the community instead?

Of course we welcome the emphasis and focus on prevention, but these promises are not worth a candle if they are not backed up with real, substantive action. They come on the back of £700 million-worth of cuts to public health services, with more cuts to public health services pencilled in for next year, including £17 million-worth of cuts to sexual health services, £34 million-worth of cuts to drug and alcohol services, £3 million-worth of cuts to smoking cessation services and £1 million-worth of cuts to obesity services.

The Secretary of State did not mention childhood obesity in his remarks.

**Matt Hancock** *indicated dissent.*

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I apologise if I missed it. Could the Secretary of State tell us when he plans to outlaw or ban the advertising of junk food on family television and when the consultation will end?

Immunisation rates for children have fallen for the fourth year in a row, so a big part of prevention should surely be a focus on investment in children's and early years health services, yet Government cuts to those budgets and, indeed, the privatisation of many of those services in our communities have seen health visitor numbers fall by more than 2,000, school nurse numbers go down by 700 and 11% of babies miss out on mandated health checks. What is the Secretary of State's plan to reverse those cuts to health visitors and school nurses?

All in all, alongside wider Department of Health and Social Care budgets, there will be £1 billion-worth of cuts to health services next year, with public health budgets taking considerable strain. Those £1 billion-worth of cuts should have been abandoned today, and it is a missed opportunity that the Secretary of State has not abandoned them. When he was asked about this in the Budget debate, he said it was a matter for the spending review. Well, today the Association of Directors of Public Health has said that the spending review should allocate an extra £3.2 billion for the public health grant next year. Does he accept that figure?

Of course prevention is about more than just public health; it is also about primary care. But GP numbers are down by 1,000 since 2015, and since 2010 district nurses have been cut by more than 3,000, so can the Secretary of State tell us what his plan is to increase the primary care workforce to support his wider ambitions on prevention? We know he wants a higher proportion of NHS spending to go to general practice, so does he agree with GPs that general practice should again receive around 11% of the overall NHS budget? If not, why not?

Of course, prevention is also about mental health services, but 30% of patients referred to IAPT—improving

access to psychological therapies—services never receive treatment. What is his plan to ensure that everyone who needs IAPT services next year gets them?

Finally, on the wider social determinants of ill health, the shameful reality is that people in poorer areas die earlier and get sick quicker. Life expectancy has begun to stall, and has actually gone backwards in some of the poorest parts of the country. Rates of premature mortality are twice as high in the most deprived areas of England compared with the most affluent, and mortality rates for the very sickest of babies are increasing. As laudable as many of the aims that the Secretary of State has announced today are, this document does not even mention poverty or deprivation. It does not even recognise that some of the deepest cuts to public health grants have been in the areas of highest need and highest deprivation.

Yes, we welcome a focus on prevention—we have long called for such a focus—but a genuine commitment to prevention would go hand in hand with a genuine commitment to ending austerity. That must start with reversing the public health cuts and blocking the £1 billion of further cuts to health services to come next year. On that test, the Secretary of State has failed today.

**Matt Hancock:** Great, well I take that as a broadly positive response from the hon. Gentleman, and I will address the points he makes. He asked about money, and we are putting £20.5 billion extra into the NHS—this is the largest and longest financial commitment any Government have made to any public service ever. Of course, as well as the NHS budget, local authorities have budgets for public health; as he said, that will be addressed in the spending review. The increase in funding must ensure that we do more on prevention, which means more going into community services and into primary care, as well as making sure we get the appropriate level of spending into public health.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the consultation on advertising as part of the obesity plan. As he knows, that will be published before Christmas. He also asked about rates of immunisation. I want to see immunisation used right across the country. There is a campaign all of us can take part in to persuade people and ensure that immunisation takes place. We do not have compulsory immunisation in this country. I believe that is right, on civil liberties grounds, but by goodness it means it is incumbent on all of us to persuade everybody of the health benefits of immunisation.

The hon. Gentleman asked about GP numbers. We want 5,000 more GPs, and I am glad to report that we have got record numbers of GPs in training, thanks to action by this Government. Finally, he asked about the economic causes of ill health. The No. 1 economic cause of ill health is not having a job, and there are record numbers of jobs in this country. If he says that inequality has an impact on ill health, he should probably welcome the fall in inequality that we have seen under this Government.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for what he has just said. A lot of Members wish to take part in this exchange, but I remind the House that there are two debates to follow. The Government have chosen to put on two ministerial statements, which is entirely their prerogative. Naturally, people do then tend to

[*Mr Speaker*]

stand to ask questions, as that is what we do here, but I have also to protect the subsequent business. I therefore politely say to colleagues: if you have a long question in mind, cut it or do not bother. That would be really helpful. Let us start with the Chair of the Select Committee, Dr Sarah Wollaston.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): In the Secretary of State's vision for prevention he rightly points out that £14 of social benefit accrues from every £1 spent in public health. Therefore it is going to be much more challenging for him to deliver on his objectives if there is a further transfer from the public health budgets into NHS England budgets. However, I recognise that this requires action across all Departments, so will he set out what he is going to do to encourage cross-government action on physical activity, because we all know that that is a vital part of public health and prevention?

**Matt Hancock:** I agree with my hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee on that. Of course, the public health budgets for local authorities and Public Health England will be settled as part of the spending review, and there was no change to them in the Budget last week. There are also much wider responsibilities on activity—on cycling and walking—on which I am working with the Department for Transport. The document is all about the cross-government action, and the NHS will come forward with its long-term plan for the NHS-specific action. If there are aspects of cross-departmental working that she suggests we have not yet taken up, I will be looking forward to listening to her on that.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement and, in particular, I welcome his determination to reduce the inappropriate and sometimes disgraceful treatment of vulnerable people with autism and learning disabilities. He says that prevention is infinitely better than cure—nobody is going to disagree with that—and that the Government are encouraging people to make better choices, which is fine. However, that will ring hollow if the Government themselves duck difficult decisions that could help citizens to make better choices; we have heard about the example of junk food advertising already, but let me touch on the issue of alcohol. If he is serious about supporting healthy choices, surely he must bring to an end the free-for-all that sees supermarkets encouraging alcohol consumption by selling it at ludicrously discounted prices. Some estimate that in the first five years a 50p minimum unit price in England could save more than 1,000 lives, reduce hospital admissions by 75,000 and cut healthcare costs by £326 million. If the Secretary of State is serious about prevention, will he support minimum pricing?

Finally, I welcome the moves in respect of the prescription of medicinal cannabis, but too few are benefiting. My constituent Caroline was given months to live after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. Those treating her link her ongoing good standard of living with her use of cannabis oil from Canada, which comes at an enormous financial cost to her and her family. However, those treating her will not prescribe cannabis oil because there is no suitable medical research on which to base

such a prescription. Why not let Caroline become part of that research by prescribing medicinal cannabis to her? We can then all learn from her experience.

**Matt Hancock:** On medicinal cannabis, I announced more research today and there is now a route in England. The hon. Gentleman will of course have to talk to the Scottish health service to ensure that a constituent in Scotland gets access, but I am very happy to look into specific English cases.

On the broader point about alcohol, it is important that we tackle alcohol abuse and it is vital that we do it in the right way. I do not want to punish people who drink responsibly at responsible levels, including myself. I occasionally drink at a responsible level, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does—certainly his colleagues enjoy a wee dram. Nevertheless, 5% of people in this country drink 30% of the alcohol. It is the small minority who present significant problems for the NHS and we need significant, targeted action.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): We have cut salt dramatically and the Secretary of State now wants to cut it further; life will certainly seem longer, will it not?

**Matt Hancock:** There are many ways to make one's food taste good and make it healthy, too.

**Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): It is astonishing that there was no mention in the statement of poverty as a cause of ill health. Is the Secretary of State really so out of touch with communities in this country that he does not see how austerity is making people ill?

**Matt Hancock:** The statement talks all about the wider determinants of health. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to talk about poverty specifically, it is absolute poverty, not relative poverty, that has a link to ill health, and that has fallen.

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware that experts have warned that a million patients are getting useless drugs and injections for back pain, but his Department makes very little use of statutorily regulated osteopaths and chiropractors? Is he also aware that there is a Faculty of Homeopathy here and that the doctors are not employed enough, despite the fact that there are a quarter of a million homeopathic doctors in India?

**Matt Hancock:** I respect my hon. Friend's understanding of these issues, not least because I am married to an osteopath, so my back is feeling okay and I hope that other people can access such services, too.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I very much welcome what the Secretary of State said about people on the autism and special educational needs spectrum. I also welcome his enthusiasm for the use of new technology, big data, data analytics and all that. Across party lines many of us see some real opportunities for delivering real public education in the health sector. When the Secretary of State makes good decisions and puts in the resources, he will have our support.



**Matt Hancock:** I am grateful for that. We put significant resources into the NHS last Monday. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the use of data. Instead of just targeting the average, it is about making sure that we get the public health messages to the people who really need to hear them. There is an argument that just broadly targeting public health messages actually exacerbates health inequalities, because people who are likely to listen to the messages tend to be people who are more likely to take responsibility for their own health in the first place. We need to be much more targeted and work is under way to make that happen.

**Justine Greening (Putney) (Con):** I very much welcome the Secretary of State's statement today. It is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do for the NHS, and also a healthy economy needs healthy people. Communities such as my own have very many young people, who are often renting, do not necessarily stay very long and therefore do not register with a GP. Will he take that into account when he is looking at where investment in primary care flows to in the detailed strategy?

**Matt Hancock:** My right hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. The way that money for primary care is allocated is being looked at right now, taking that and other things into account.

**Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op):** To really make a difference to keep our nation well, prevention has to be the preserve of both local and central Government. I note that the conclusion of the Secretary of State's report says that he will be considering what a health-in-all-policies approach to policymaking could look like next year. Will he signal his support for the health-in-all-policies principle by supporting the Second Reading of my Health Impacts (Public Sector Duty) Bill on Friday 23 November?

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Lady makes a great plea, which I will look into in some detail.

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con):** We have a duty of care to support all our citizens to maintain good health by empowering employers in the private and the public sectors to motivate staff to invest time and commitment into their diet, fitness, and long-term health. How will the Secretary of State create that new ethos?

**Matt Hancock:** There is such an important role here for employers. It is not part of the culture of the UK, except in some excellent examples, that employers take a proactive view of the health of their employees. Other countries around Europe do that much, much more systematically. I am attracted to the Dutch model, but there are others, too, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her support in doing that.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** Breastfeeding has a significant preventive effect, and babies who are not breastfed are at greater risk of eczema, asthma, obesity, diabetes and sudden infant death syndrome, among other conditions. Scotland has invested in breastfeeding support and seen rates at six to eight weeks rise, whereas in England the rates have fallen for the second year running. Will the Secretary of State invest to bring all maternity and community services up

to UNICEF's baby-friendly standard, and will he act to make sure that women who wish to breastfeed are not being failed by the cuts in England?

**Matt Hancock:** The earlier that we can start with this sort of strategy of preventing ill health the better, and there is a lot of merit in a lot of what the hon. Lady said.

**John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con):** I very much welcome the statement today. I also welcome the Government's commitment to the daily mile in primary schools—I am a particular fan of it because it was invented by a Scottish headteacher in Stirlingshire. Does the Secretary of State agree that young people being fit and active is good for their mental, social and physical wellbeing?

**Matt Hancock:** Absolutely. I strongly support the daily mile and I try to do it myself. The key is that this is about activity. It is not necessarily about competitive sport, but about healthy activity that can help to prevent all manner of ills.

**Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD):** I welcome the Secretary of State's focus on learning disability and autism. He will have seen the report in *The Times* today, which highlights the outrageous profiteering of a number of people in providing the wrong model of care—long-term institutional care—which frequently breaches people's human rights. Will he commit to bringing an end to this profiteering and will he also look at including the endemic use of force—restraint—in these facilities along with seclusion in the Care Quality Commission's investigation?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I will. I pay tribute to the work that the right hon. Gentleman did in the Department and the fact that he continues to champion this issue.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Chair will be keen to move on to the main business at 6 o'clock, or very close thereto, so if people have questions in mind, will they think about how they can shave them?

**Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con):** I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Will he outline what his views are for community pharmacy as part of the strategy of prevention?

**Matt Hancock:** Community pharmacies have a hugely important role to play in keeping people out of hospital and in supporting GP surgeries by doing more. Here, it is the French model that I look to for inspiration, but we should look all across the world to improve our health service.

**Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab):** Tooth decay is entirely preventable, so will the Secretary of State act now to address the concerns of the British Dental Association and others that the new dental contract will not go far enough in prioritising prevention?

**Matt Hancock:** We are trialling the new contract to get it right. We want to get it right, and I look forward to listening to the hon. Lady's concerns in more detail.

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): As my right hon. Friend is aware, I am a very part-time dentist and I am also a supporter of the British Fluoridation Society. Probably the very biggest reason for children attending hospital for general anaesthetic is to extract decayed, rotten, abscessing teeth caused by dental caries. Fluoridation of the water supplies is a very effective means of prevention. Does he support fluoridation of the water supplies, and what can he do to actively promote it, because, at the moment, it is in only 10% of our supplies?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is of course a dentist, and I would love to listen to him speak in more detail about what we can do to get this right.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): If the Secretary of State does not think that poverty and deprivation are key factors in health inequality, can he explain why life expectancy for women in Sheffield has fallen by four years since 2009?

**Matt Hancock:** I said the opposite actually. There are environmental and economic factors, and they are very important. My point was that having a record level of jobs in this country is a benefit.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): In my constituency of Mid Derbyshire, there is an amazing group of community pharmacies that are saving people going into hospital and getting them out quicker. I invite my right hon. Friend to come and see them. He does not need to go to France; he can come to Mid Derbyshire instead.

**Matt Hancock:** I will actually be in Derbyshire later this month visiting a neighbouring constituency, but it looks like I have just put another stop on the itinerary.

**Mr Speaker:** I am quite certain that the Secretary of State will want to visit the hon. Lady's constituency.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): I welcome the focus on prevention. Of course, the next best thing is early diagnosis. Will the Secretary of State look again and remove the arbitrary age limit of 25 for women's smear tests?

**Matt Hancock:** We are reviewing questions around that issue, because we want to ensure the best possible prevention and early diagnosis.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I welcome the focus on physical activity in the new prevention strategy. First, how will the Secretary of State work with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on this? Secondly, would not travelling to work provide a great opportunity? Activities such as walking, cycling, tennis before work, Mr Speaker, and my eight minutes of pilates are all cheap or free. What does the Secretary of State have to say about that?

**Matt Hancock:** Well, I wish I had time for eight minutes of pilates with my hon. Friend. I cannot think of a better way to start the day. I am delighted that the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was here for the statement. We have been working with his Department on the strategy because it is so important to work across Government.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): There is lots that we can agree on in this strategy but, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS, I am genuinely disappointed to see that there is no mention of sexual health, HIV or crucial preventive measures such as PrEP. We have made huge progress in reducing new HIV infections in this country. Surely, we cannot risk the reversal of that progress now. Local services have been cut and the Health Foundation estimates that sexual health services in England will have been cut by a quarter by 2020. That means huge consequences for the individual and costs for the NHS. What is the Secretary of State going to do?

**Matt Hancock:** Public Health England is trialling PrEP, and I am willing to work with the hon. Gentleman and others to ensure that we do everything we can in this space. The truth is that outcomes are improving in many areas of sexual health, and we have to ensure that we get the right treatment to the right people at the right time.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): The Secretary of State's focus on clean air and reducing childhood obesity is massively welcome. In the Netherlands, half of all children cycle to school. In the UK, it is 3%. What more will he do across Government to up that figure?

**Matt Hancock:** I am working with the Department for Transport. Transport Ministers feel very strongly about this question. The document details some of the things that we are going to do, but I am sure that there are a lot more.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): May I suggest that the Secretary of State has a look at the report, "Fair Society, Health Lives", by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, particularly at his recommendation about a minimum income for healthy living? With this in mind, what assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact of universal credit and cuts to that scheme on poverty and healthy life expectancy?

**Matt Hancock:** I have of course looked at that report. It is important, and it is important that we get the answers to it right.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Will the Secretary of State agree that more education should be spent on understanding the total role of sugars in combating diabetes, to go with the success that he has had with regards to the direct focus on sugars in drinks and food?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I strongly agree. Reformulation is critical. However, it is crucial to look not just at sugar, but at calorie count. Replacing sugars with higher calorie products is not necessarily the right way forward.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Current average waiting times for eating disorders are 27 weeks, during which time the condition can become much worse. Will the prevention strategy look into concrete proposals to reduce waiting times, with, specifically, targets for waiting times for adult sufferers from eating disorders?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, we are considering this as part of the long-term plan. We have already announced that more than £2 billion extra will be going into mental health services and services to tackle eating disorders, and there will be more to come on this very shortly.

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Whitestone surgery and its patient participation group, who have brought forward a social prescribing model that has reduced the prevalence of early-onset dementia and reduced the number of anti-depressant drugs being prescribed at that surgery?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I absolutely will. I am a huge fan of social prescribing. I essentially think that because drugs companies have a big budget to try to market their drugs—and of course many drugs do wonders—there is not the equivalent level of organisation to drive up the use of social prescribing. Examples like the one that my hon. Friend mentions are incredibly important.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The half-a-million-pound cut in public health in York has had very serious consequences, while nationally, with regard to the Government's flagship project of health visiting—the crucial profession in improving outcomes—the number of health visitors has plummeted by 23% from the previous figure of 10,309. Why?

**Matt Hancock:** We are increasing the budget in future and making sure that we target it more on community services and making sure that we get more prevention rather than cure. I can look at the case of York; I can look right across the country at what we need to do. Making sure that we get better prevention is all part of that.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Children's dental health is shocking and child obesity levels are too high. Will the two words, "parental responsibility", appear in the Secretary of State's forthcoming Green Paper?

**Matt Hancock:** They will now. I believe very strongly in parental responsibility as well as personal responsibility and the responsibilities of employers. We all have a part to play. As parents, we have a very big responsibility to bring up our children in a healthy way, too.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): As my right hon. Friend may be aware, one of the benefits of turning 40 is that we become entitled to an NHS MOT every five years. Has he, as part of his very welcome shift towards prevention, considered extending both the age range and frequency of these very important tests?

**Matt Hancock:** Well, you learn new things every day, Madam Deputy Speaker—as someone who only just turned 40, I had no idea. I think we should send

everybody a 40th birthday card from the NHS saying, "You can now have these MOTs every five years." *[Interruption.]* The shadow Secretary of State would like one, too. We will make sure that that is arranged right away.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As it is my 40th birthday next month, I will look forward to getting a card. The Croft Hall medical practice in Torquay has taken a bold step to use what was once just a derelict backyard as a community garden as part of its wellbeing hub. What role does my right hon. Friend see that type of work by local GP surgeries playing in this strategy?

**Matt Hancock:** That sort of work is absolutely brilliant. At one level, it is common sense, but it also needs to be a bigger part of the system. I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this to the House's attention. Perhaps he should be the first recipient of one of the NHS's 40th birthday cards.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Are there any other international models inspiring the Secretary of State—in relation to prevention, of course?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes. *[Laughter.]*

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): The Secretary of State is obviously too young for it, but will he endorse the mile walk aimed at the over-50s that leaves the Stan Ball centre in my constituency at half-past 10 every Monday morning?

**Matt Hancock:** The daily mile—or, in this case, the mile walk once a week—is not just for children but for all of us who can make it. The example that my hon. Friend mentions is valuable to the community, and I am absolutely delighted that it is happening.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I have a couple of years to go until I am 40, but one in four of my constituents is over 65. Lincolnshire has done great work on frailty and assessing the whole person. Does the Secretary of State agree that actually we need to look at the whole person in the round, and that, for older people, technology can also play a huge role?

**Matt Hancock:** Perhaps by the time my hon. Friend becomes 40 it will be a birthday text rather than a birthday card, thus saving on postage costs within the NHS and moving on from the fax machines of old. In all seriousness, the point that he raises is incredibly important. The role of technology in this whole agenda is transforming what we can achieve for the over-65s and for the whole population, as in every other area of life. I know that he is a huge champion of technology, and I would like to think that I am, too. We have yet more to learn about what more we can do to improve people's lives through technology within the prevention agenda.

## Points of Order

5.55 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The treatment of autistic people and people with learning disabilities in assessment and treatment units is nothing short of a national scandal. Seven years after the Winterbourne View scandal, the Government still have not got rid of these units or substantially cut their use. Now we get, with no notice, the whole issue rolled into another oral statement on public health. The shameful treatment of 2,300 people in Bedlam-like conditions is too important to be dealt with in this way. Can you advise on how to get the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to take this issue more seriously in the way that he communicates to the House?

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock)**: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have come to the House at the first available opportunity to explain very clearly, and with some force, I hope, how strongly I feel about people with learning difficulties and autism being held in seclusion units. It is unacceptable morally and unacceptable medically. It has to stop, and it is going to stop.

**Barbara Keeley**: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. What I was complaining about was that this was done with no notice—no notice to the shadow Secretary of State, no notice to me or the team, and no notice to Members of this House who were not here to ask questions. We should have had notice that this important issue was being dealt with.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton)**: I thank the hon. Lady and the Secretary of State for their points of order. Obviously, the Secretary of State will have heard the point that the hon. Lady has made. I am sure that she will wish to pursue this further. The Secretary of State and the Leader of the House are here

on the Treasury Bench, so I am sure that if there is further information forthcoming, that will be the way to proceed.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance as I am a relatively new Member of this House. It came to my attention on Friday that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) was visiting my constituency at the weekend. I did not receive advance notice of his visit. I understand that the purpose of the visit was to hold a rally to do a number of things, but particularly to try to get rid of the Scottish Conservatives. Reassuringly, only a handful of people attended the event. I have given the hon. Gentleman notice of this point of order. Am I correct in thinking that it was appropriate for him to give me advance notice of visiting my constituency?

**Madam Deputy Speaker**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he wished to raise this matter. I am glad that he has confirmed that he also warned the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) that he was going to raise the point of order. The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that there is a well-established convention that if Members plan to visit other Members' constituencies for political—not for personal—reasons, they should give them advance notice. It is important that we maintain this courtesy to one another.

## BILL PRESENTED

### SCHOOL UNIFORMS BILL

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

Frank Field, supported by Tim Loughton, presented a Bill to require school governing bodies to implement affordability policies when setting school uniform requirements; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November and to be printed (Bill 283).*

## Bullying and Harassment: Cox Report

5.59 pm

### **The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):**

I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Dame Laura Cox report on the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff.

Most people who work here in Parliament fully realise what a privilege it is to do so and that whether we are MPs, peers or senior management of the House, we should all carry out our work to the highest possible standards, both professionally and morally. We should behave in the way set out for us by the Nolan principles, and we should lead by example. Most of us fully accept that when we fall short of the high standards rightfully expected of us, we should be held accountable for our actions and that, as part of playing a role in public life, we should also challenge poor standards and poor behaviour when we see them.

As I said in response to the urgent question on 16 October, I welcome Dame Laura Cox's report, "The Bullying and Harassment of House of Commons Staff", and I would like to thank her for her important work. As her hard-hitting report recognises, the House of Commons has fallen woefully short in supporting and protecting its staff. It has failed the people who work here. The fact that some of those in positions of power or authority have bullied, intimidated and harassed those who work alongside them and perpetuated a culture where that behaviour is not only tolerated but comes to be expected by members of staff as "the norm" is outrageous. There is no place for abuse or harassment in Parliament. That applies to everyone, without exception.

Today's debate is undoubtedly an important one, but it must form part of a bigger picture. We need to continue to hear the views of every person who works in or for Parliament, especially those who have struck up the courage to speak out about the unacceptable behaviour that they know must be challenged. It is to those people that I especially want to speak directly today. Thank you for your courage in speaking out. I know how difficult the decision to do so will have been, and I am absolutely determined to make your working lives and the working lives of everyone in this place as fulfilling and as dignified as they unquestionably should be. I am so sorry to hear of your experiences. You should never have been treated unjustly.

This is an amazing place to work in many different ways—something that the report brings out—but Dame Laura's report also shows a dark side and makes clear that we must not rest until all people working here are treated with dignity and respect. I give my personal commitment to the House that I will not stop until that is the case. Anything that falls short of that goal is not acceptable.

Today, we are debating this important report, how its recommendations will be taken forward and what more we can do. Before we turn to that in earnest, I want to outline briefly the action that has been taken so far to change Parliament for the better—and make no mistake, we are taking action. As Members are aware, the Prime Minister convened a working group a year ago to establish a new independent complaints and grievance procedure for Parliament. A first-rate programme team made up of senior House staff, for whose work I am

very grateful, took forward the implementation of the working group's recommendations. That was overseen by a cross-party steering group made up of representatives from all parties, trade unions and staff.

A new Parliament-wide independent grievance scheme was launched by a vote of the House in July. The scheme, now known as the ICGS, has a number of key features. First, the House has agreed a shared behaviour code that applies to everyone in the House, with no exceptions, and holds all of us here, unequivocally, to the same high standards of behaviour.

Secondly, there are two new independent helplines and investigative services, with corresponding policies in place—one to deal with bullying and harassment, and a separate one to deal with sexual misconduct. Those policies underpin the behaviour code and ensure that everyone in this House now has access to an independent scheme that will handle their complaint or grievance. The number for those helplines can be found on the parliamentary intranet.

Thirdly, it was very important to ensure that Members' staff had access to independent human resources support, which has never until this point been available, so a human resources support service has now been established for Members' staff. Lastly, there is a significant programme of work under way to develop better training, both mandatory and optional, to equip all those who work in this place to manage staff appropriately and promote the culture change we all want to see.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): This is an important report. I have three daughters and four granddaughters, and we want people to be treated the way that members of our family would be treated. It is all very well calling for a change in culture, but we need good management to deliver that. I welcome most of the report, but that was one of the disappointing bits. What management steps are being taken to ensure that this works positively for anyone who is at risk?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point about changing the management of the House and not just the processes. I will come on to that, if he will bear with me, but I want to first finish talking about what is currently available, because it is incredibly important for all those who want to come forward with a complaint.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): The point raised by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) is a very salient one. We spend an awful lot of time looking at processes and procedures, writing down codes and adjusting rules, and very little time thinking about how we change the culture. It is not about the management of this place; it is about every single right hon. and hon. Member in this House. We lead this place, and we set the example and the tone. The question is how we want the governance of this place to change the culture, and that falls on us, not on some obscure committee elsewhere to take that responsibility away from us.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point. I will come on to governance issues, but I would like to finish talking about the processes that we have put in place since July this summer.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): Dame Laura Cox refers in her report to the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service helping staff who have been subject to bullying and harassment, and she comments that the service is

“overworked, under resourced, under promoted and undervalued by the senior administration.”

Will my right hon. Friend meet Dr Madan, who heads up the service as the leading occupational physician? She has a unique insight into the culture and sees staff who might not feel confident to come forward.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I would be delighted to meet the head of the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service. My hon. Friend is right to point out that the service has been overworked. As part of the new complaints and grievance procedure, resources will be made available, but nevertheless I would be very happy to meet the lady she mentions.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I bring the House’s attention to paragraph 418 of Dame Laura’s report, which says:

“In relation to allegations made against Members of Parliament, it is readily acknowledged and should be emphasised that the overwhelming majority of Members behave entirely appropriately and courteously towards members of House staff. However, their collective reputation is being damaged by the allegations of unacceptable behaviour made against some of their number and by the inadequacy of the procedures in place to deal with complaints. I have no doubt that they will regard this as intolerable.”

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a relatively small number of rotten apples, but the problem with our particular barrel is that those rotten apples are quite near the top?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Again, my hon. Friend makes a really important point. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, most of us here absolutely accept that we need to behave with the greatest of professionalism and moral authority. It is only a few who let us down, but nevertheless, when they do so, they have to be called out, counted and dealt with appropriately.

I would like to return to discussing the independent complaints and grievance procedure, which is known as the ICGS. I can report to the House that, from the launch of the ICGS in July to the end of September, a total of 51 calls were made with complaints and concerns, and a small number of investigations into complaints are currently under way. Initial indications for October show that the call rate is continuing at the same level. I can tell the House that we intend to publish the reporting data quarterly.

Vitaly, the ICGS is confidential, which encourages complainants to come forward without any fear of publicity or retribution. The investigation process is also completely independent. Where the finding against any individual is so severe as to require consideration of terminating their employment, there is a clear route in all circumstances. Specifically in the case of MPs who are accused of wrongdoing, that route is currently to the Committee on Standards, which has taken steps to allow the seven lay members to have a vote in addition to the seven elected members. This is an important step. I am aware that some want to see further independence from Members themselves, and the House of Commons Commission and the Standards Committee will look at

how this can be achieved while still upholding the principles of democratic accountability. To be absolutely clear: we are fully committed to ensuring that the accountability of MPs is enforced.

As I have said, ever since taking on the chairmanship of the working group, establishing the complaints procedure has been the first, and not the last, step towards the culture change we all want to see. There are three crucial next steps that we agreed earlier in the year. First, there should be an independent inquiry into allegations of bullying of House staff, and it is this report that we are debating today. Secondly, there should also be an independent review of historical allegations of Members and their staff, which I understand is to be publicly launched tomorrow. I do urge all those who have experienced bullying and harassment in any way to come forward to give evidence to that inquiry. Thirdly, there will be a review of the ICGS after six months of operation, and again after 18 months. I will be meeting with the ICGS steering group shortly to consult further on how we take forward that first review.

**Mr Sheerman:** On an important factual point, the right hon. Lady may remember that I chaired the anti-bullying group in Parliament, a cross-party group that was very much supported by the Speaker. Some of its members are no longer Members, but will they be eligible to give evidence? Having such a parliamentary group was a very important turning point psychologically. We were accepted as having a contribution to make, and we started to look at the behaviour of Members of Parliament. Some of us knew about their behaviour, but could not actually drag it out into the daylight.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I would certainly be very happy to discuss how the hon. Gentleman and colleagues can feed into the review. As he will be aware, the ICGS steering group is made up of Members of this House and of the other place, as well as trade union members and members of staff of MPs and peers. Nevertheless, it will be for a wide variety of stakeholders to feed into that process, and I would be delighted to discuss that with him.

Turning now to Dame Laura’s report, its findings are shocking. As I said on 16 October, it was important that the House leadership responded promptly and comprehensively. The House of Commons Commission has met twice since then and has agreed in full Dame Laura’s three key recommendations. The commission has further directed the Commons Executive Board to produce a speedy action plan in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, which will be taken forward with the help and support of the external members of the Commission.

I would now like to turn to each of Dame Laura’s key recommendations. First, she recommends that the Valuing Others and Respect policies, which were available to House staff, are discarded. House staff have been able to access the ICGS since it began in July, so the House of Commons Commission has agreed that the pre-existing policies should be discarded.

Secondly, Dame Laura recommends that the new ICGS is amended to ensure that those House employees with complaints involving historical allegations can access the new scheme. I think it is important to clarify that House staff already do have the same rights of access to

the ICGS as everyone else here. The steering group agreed that historical allegations would be accepted by the new scheme. However, legal advice taken advised that allegations referring to events that predate the 2017 Parliament could be considered only under any sanctions available at the time of the offence. Dame Laura's report suggests that the House of Commons Commission look at this again. It has agreed to do so, and that will be taken forward.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): The Leader of the House mentions the important fact that if anybody has allegations, those allegations will be judged against what was right at that time. However, surely it was always wrong to harass and bully people in this place. That is the standard against which we should treat everybody.

**Andrea Leadson**: My right hon. Friend is exactly right. That is a very helpful clarification because there has been some misunderstanding. Anybody with a historical allegation that predates July 2017 can and should come forward under the complaints and grievance procedure. The difference is that the behaviour code itself cannot be applied pre-July 2017. However, as my right hon. Friend points out, exactly correctly, most of the sorts of behaviours that people will expect to come forward to complain about would already have been captured under a pre-existing code of some sort—either the code of conduct for MPs or, indeed, employment contracts. I do encourage anybody with any complaint to come forward under the complaints procedure and not be put off by the fact that the behaviour code itself—this new creation of the House—applies only from July 2017. This is an incredibly important point, because there has been some misunderstanding about it. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for clarifying that point.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): On the scope of the scheme, will my right hon. Friend confirm, as many of us spend a lot of time in our constituencies, that it also includes our constituency staff and offices?

**Andrea Leadson**: Yes. Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for another point of clarification. The scheme absolutely includes everybody who works for or with Parliament, including members of staff in our constituency offices, pass holders and indeed those who work on a voluntary basis, provided they are actually employed here. There are some limitations, but it also applies to visitors to this place. It is all-encompassing—it covers all those who come here or work for Members of Parliament.

Dame Laura's third recommendation is that complaints brought by House staff against Members of Parliament should be subject to an entirely independent process in which Members of Parliament play no part whatsoever. I can tell hon. Members that, before establishing the ICGS, there were several productive meetings with the Committee on Standards. The then Chairman, the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron), recognised the need for lay members to have a majority vote on sanctions against MPs and took steps to ensure that this could be the case. I have recently met the new Chair of the Standards Committee, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who is in her place. I know she has further suggestions on

how to ensure greater independence of the process, so I look forward to hearing the hon. Lady's contribution today.

Dame Laura's key recommendations are clear and have been agreed by the House of Commons Commission. What is less clear, however—but this is definitely the most important part of today's debate, as some hon. Members have already said—is how we can change the culture of Parliament that has made these recommendations necessary. The failings are institutional: they are systemic, they have become embedded and, as noted by Dame Laura, they cascade “from the top down”. It is my strong view that we need to look at the governance of the House of Commons, and we need to democratise it to ensure that with authority comes full accountability.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): The truth of the matter is that it is down to leadership. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin): we are talking about leadership, and all the rules count for nothing if our style is wrong. We know what is right, and people who do wrong should be called out by the rest of us and dealt with. We do not need commissions or rules for that. What is right is right and what is wrong is wrong. We should know that as MPs.

**Andrea Leadson**: My hon. Friend is right: it is about leadership. The complaints procedure is vital to give satisfaction, justice and clarity to those who have suffered at the hands of any Member or, indeed, any member of staff, but my hon. Friend is right that leadership is key.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab) *rose*—

**Andrea Leadson**: I would like to make one point—I think the hon. Gentleman will be interested to hear it—before I give way.

We need to democratise the House of Commons, but governance change cannot and should not happen overnight. The then Public Administration Committee, chaired, as the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is now, by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), said in written evidence to the House of Commons Governance Committee, which held the last review of House of Commons governance in 2014:

“Any structural or organisational change should only be considered as a consequence of a full understanding of the underlying causes of difficulty or failure. If this is not done, structural change, with all the disruption which that involves, will become no more than a distraction. This may be welcomed by those who want to avoid the more difficult, personal causes of problems in the organisation, which are likely to be in the culture. By culture, we mean what is embedded in the attitudes and behaviour of the people in the organisation, and PASC has found this is by far the most important determinant of organisational effectiveness.”

That still rings true—structural change needs to be considered in the context of an organisation's culture.

**Chris Bryant**: I completely agree with the point that the right hon. Lady just made.

Leadership comes in many different styles. There are autocratic styles of leadership: when I was on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee many years ago, our Committee was run in that way and it was inappropriate. Now most Select Committees are much more likely to work as a team. I wonder whether the House of Commons

[Chris Bryant]

Commission would be better if it were constituted more like a Select Committee that worked as a team of people, throughout a Parliament, with each individual in the team able to assume responsibility. That might be a better way of leading change within the House.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point and I am keen to hear all Members' views on how we can improve the democracy in this place.

Dame Laura's report has made it clear that we need to consider first, changing the power balance in this place; secondly, giving staff a stronger voice; and thirdly, addressing how to stop failures at the top infecting our entire workplace. Therefore, one of the questions I would like the House to consider and give views on today is whether the current structure of the House of Commons leadership is fit for purpose.

The Commission has tasked the Commons Executive Board with bringing forward a speedy action plan, and I support that. My vision for a future democratisation of governance is a leadership structure that is fully and fairly representative of all who work here, and accountable for all actions and decisions. Any changes to governance need to be carefully considered, and they need to be fit for a 21st-century Parliament. My three personal tests for considering future proposals for change in the House's leadership are, first, will they mean that everyone who works here can expect to be treated with dignity and respect? Secondly, will they rebuild the confidence of those who have suffered in the past? Thirdly, do all those who work here feel they have a proper stake in the decisions that affect them?

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): My perception is that if we are to democratise the House, whatever system we use must be simple, not bureaucratic. We have a tendency in the House when we look at new ideas and introduce new institutions to get very bureaucratic. Any new structure must be a simple one that everybody understands, not top-down and overburdened with people at the top.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I completely agree and I will be interested to hear whether the hon. Gentleman has further thoughts on any changes he would like to propose.

In opening today's debate about Dame Laura's report, I welcome not only her specific recommendations for urgent change, but her broader conclusions about accountability and leadership in this place. I look forward to hearing views from all colleagues.

6.25 pm

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for opening the debate. I hope that she will join me in sending good wishes to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who is not very well. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) who is taking his place.

Once again, I, too, thank Dame Laura Cox QC OBE for her diligence in carrying out this inquiry. As the Leader of the House said, the report is important. The Opposition accept the recommendations in full, immediately. It is vital that victims of abuse have their voices heard and that we get it right now.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Does the shadow Leader of the House agree that the crux of the problem is that, until we have a culture in this place whereby a member of staff who makes a complaint about a senior manager or a Member is confident that they are not ending their career, nothing will happen?

**Valerie Vaz:** The Leader of the House has set out the new process, so people should feel confident.

The Opposition are grateful to all those who contributed to the report. I say to those members of staff: I acknowledge the hurt that you have suffered and the courage of those who have spoken up. Those who work in the canteens and throughout the House, you undertake your work professionally and with integrity. You are helpful, creative, and supportive of Members. There is a very high standard of work here, which is appreciated. This place simply would not function without you.

I hope that the debate will do justice to the responses and the work that was put into the report, and I will highlight just a few areas. The report notes that a cultural change needs to happen. In paragraph 67, Dame Laura Cox says that,

"structural and governance arrangements have changed several times over the years, while the organisational culture has remained firmly in place."

I know that the Leader of the House agrees that a culture change is needed and has previously said in the House that it will "not happen overnight". However, will she update the House on how a cultural change will be measured so we know we are making progress?

Dame Laura Cox highlighted the gender and racist dimension to bullying and harassment. Paragraph 123 states that,

"some areas of the House were described as having a particularly bad reputation for sexist or racist attitudes".

Of the 200 people who came forward to give information to the inquiry, the majority, nearly 70%, were women. The House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service diversity and inclusion strategy 2019 to 2022 is evidence of the House service's commitment to ensuring that this place is a positive and inclusive environment to work in. Jennifer Crook is head of diversity and inclusion, and work is already under way. She has produced a very good report highlighting successes in, for example, talent management, and rolled out unconscious bias training.

According to the recent staff survey, staff with disabilities have the highest rates of experiencing discrimination, bullying and harassment and are less likely to agree that the House service provides an inclusive environment. That is followed by black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, particularly black British staff. The Cox report, taken together with results from the staff survey, which suggested that 18% of staff had experienced bullying or harassment in the past 12 months, most of it at the hands of other staff, and that 3% had experienced sexual harassment, shows we clearly have a long way to go before we can claim we have an inclusive workplace.

Dame Laura Cox raises the need for training. In paragraph 311, she states:

"Even those Members most implacably opposed will gain from it, despite any current intransigence."



At the urgent question on 16 October, the Leader of the House said:

“available is a wide range of optional, voluntary training in how to carry out appraisals, how to lead an office and so on.”

She went on to say:

“Compulsory training for new Members will be introduced after the next election. It was decided that there was no consensus in favour of compulsory training for those who were already Members”.—[*Official Report*, 16 October 2018; Vol. 647, c. 541-2.]

In my view, if we want cultural change everyone should have training and it should be compulsory. Will the Leader of the House please reconsider, in the light of the Cox report, that compulsory training should be discussed again?

**Chris Bryant:** My personal suspicion is that if we made training very available so it was easy for Members to attend, the vast majority of Members would sign up to it without us having to get to the compulsory stage. I am up for making it compulsory if we have to do that, but I am sure the vast majority of Members would not be intransigent. Most of us would not even know whether we had been inappropriate because we have not had proper training and we would be delighted to do it, but it needs somebody to get on the phone and persuade us all to turn up.

**Valerie Vaz:** I think my hon. Friend is saying two slightly different things: that someone has to get on the phone and that Members will do it. We could say to people that training is available and that everyone has to undertake it. For example, people in the civil service have to go through training before they can interview anyone. I think it is perfectly reasonable to say to Members that they should undergo some training.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** This point about training is very contentious. I am afraid that Members of Parliament are not civil servants. It is only recently in the history of the House of Commons that Members of Parliament were considered even to be employed in legal terms. Until the mid '60s we were self-employed. The idea that we should be treated as civil servants is not right. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is completely right. If training were available and those in leadership positions in this House set the right example, by taking the training themselves and telling junior Members that they are expected to be trained in these matters, training would become part of our culture. It depends on the leadership, not compulsion.

**Valerie Vaz:** I was not suggesting that this is like the civil service. I was just saying that if you are going through a process you need to be trained in it. I think that some people do not understand what sexism or racism is. They do not understand certain behaviours. If people at the top are expected to do it, everyone should do it. There is not an issue; half a day should be acceptable.

**Mrs Miller:** May I suggest that the hon. Lady takes a leaf out of the Canadian Government's book? They put in place training for every Minister within weeks of the #MeToo campaign kicking off. Everybody did it and they actually thought it was a good thing to do.

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the right hon. Lady. I will come on to that later. That is a very good point.

The House of Commons Commission met on Wednesday 24 October 2018 to discuss the report's recommendations and consider a way forward. The meeting was chaired by Jane McCall, the senior external member of the Commission. The task is falling to Jane McCall and Rima Makarem to oversee the work. Quite rightly, there will be no Member involvement. At this point, I want to thank Dame Janet Gaymer for her involvement and for all her work on the Commission. The Opposition welcome the decision by the Commission to accept the recommendations of the Cox report. The Commission is terminating the Valuing Others policy and has suspended operation of the Respect policy, recommending that the House terminate it as soon as possible.

Dame Laura's report was critical of the independent complaints and grievance policy. The Commission recommends that the House amends the new independent complaints and grievance scheme to ensure that those House employees with complaints involving historical allegations can access the new scheme. The Commission rightly recommends that the House considers the most effective way to ensure that the process for determining complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment brought by House staff against Members of Parliament is an entirely independent process in which Members of Parliament play no part. The Commission agreed not to wait for the six-month review of the independent complaints and grievance scheme, due to start in January 2019, but to identify a way to give those with historical complaints access to the scheme. Could the Leader provide the House with details on what work is already under way? She said that she will report quarterly. When will we get the first report?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene. I fear she is in danger of perpetuating the mistake that currently people do not have access to the complaints scheme for historical allegations. They absolutely do and I urge anybody with any complaint to come forward to the complaints scheme now—they do have access to it.

**Valerie Vaz:** I am not perpetuating a myth. I am reporting factually what the Commission decided. That is exactly what the Commission decided: to look at the scheme to ensure that people can do that. The Leader of the House did not answer my question, but maybe she will answer it at the end.

In respect of historical allegations, there should be a fair process. In paragraph 401, Dame Laura Cox suggests that

“Distinguished senior lawyers or retired judges, highly experienced in handling these sensitive cases and in analysing evidence and finding facts, would ensure that the investigations...were treated with respect.”

She also suggests that everyone will have confidence in such a process. Investigators currently in place do not have that experience. Will the Leader of the House ensure that investigators with sufficient experience will handle those cases? In paragraph 379, Dame Laura Cox highlights the general reluctance of Members to judge the misconduct of other Members or even to assist in investigations. She makes reference, as the Leader of the House did, to the Nolan principle of leadership, which

[Valerie Vaz]

“requires all holders of public office to be willing to challenge misconduct or inappropriate behaviour, wherever it occurs.”

That includes Member on Member, which we should remind ourselves of.

Cox states:

“There is now an institutional responsibility to act to restore public confidence in the central institution of our representative democracy.”

I hope that is respected with the widest consultation on any new process with a broad range of the trade unions that operate in this workplace and other stakeholders, and, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), that the current and new system have sufficient resources. What discussions has the Leader of the House had with the Government to ensure the allocation of proper resources and extra staff to make this work?

There should be time to look at best practice around the world—the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) suggested looking at Canada—and in other public organisations. Democracy is stronger when it is inclusive and reflects all the people it seeks to serve irrespective of age, disability, ethnicity, faith, gender identity, sex, sexuality or socio-economic background. It is vital that everyone working in a modern Parliament knows the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in a safe and secure workplace, and that we all play a vital role in ensuring that our Parliament and our democracy thrive.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** We will start off with a seven-minute limit.

6.38 pm

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): I pay tribute to the tenacity and commitment of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. I do not think anybody has done more to try to deal with the situation we face. She is absolutely right that being a Member of this place is a privilege. It is like no other job. We represent our community, but we also speak truth to power. Today’s debate cannot fall shy of that.

The people who work here have a right to expect to be treated in accordance with the law, as they would be elsewhere. They want a safe workplace. The people I have worked with as a Member of Parliament, whether Clerks or anybody else, are an extraordinary bunch of people with the most extraordinary commitment to supporting the work of this place in whatever role they have. I very much welcome Dame Laura Cox’s report and I, too, pay tribute to the 200 or so people who gave evidence. Nobody but nobody today should even attempt to dismiss this report because of that enormous commitment from our members of staff.

Many staff have approached us as Members and welcomed the proposed changes, but there is a toxic lack of trust in management about whether the changes will actually come into effect. I will come on to the point about culture in a moment, but it is important to point out that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) said, culture is something that we all have ownership of and all shape, but we shape it at a very high level. When it comes to shaping that culture for a working environment,

staff are much more likely to see that coming from their direct management, and that direct management culture prevails for the vast majority of members of staff in this place. What has been most revealing about the Cox report is that, although there are of course issues about the behaviour of Members of Parliament, there are also significant issues about the behaviour of members of staff as well, and we should not be shy about discussing that.

Dame Laura Cox’s report talked about a culture of complacency, cover-up and denial that has allowed the abuse and harassment of staff to thrive for so long. I believe that that culture still pervades. We have only to look at the way in which the management here reacted to the “Newsnight” allegations in March: they were immediately dismissed as a “grotesque exaggeration”, yet the Cox report categorically exposes the fact that, far from an exaggeration, all those allegations are much more likely to be an accurate depiction of what is going on for too many people in this place. Indeed, the problems run deeper than just the abuse, to the dismissive way in which allegations are handled, and that has created a toxic lack of trust in senior management. Why does this matter? It matters because our staff have a right in law not to suffer discrimination and management have a duty in law to treat people correctly, and make sure that they are treated correctly. However, we also have a duty to make sure that we set the best of examples—indeed, so that we can attract an even more diverse cross-section of MPs to this place.

The current situation risks bringing the House of Commons and, thereby our democracy, into disrepute. The media revelations in the spring were a real wake-up call, but why did it take “Newsnight” to report this and to prompt Dame Laura Cox’s report? According to data given to the Cox inquiry, despite an increasing number of complaints under “Valuing Others”, there had been no findings and external investigations of bullying or harassment for the past four or five years. Why did management systems not pick this up? This is why, while the Leader of the House is right to talk about changes to process, the issue of culture and management is really important, too.

The laws passed in this Chamber are being wilfully ignored by the people tasked with running the House of Commons. The laws that we insist are enforced in the courts are not being enforced in this place. In particular, the House of Commons is subject to the law under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 on the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The Equality and Human Rights Commission, as the regulator, is now threatening to take action against the House of Commons. That is a disgraceful situation for us to be in. How can we be in a situation where we are in breach of the laws that we have agreed on the Floor of the House? This is serious.

I very much welcome the clarifications from the Leader of the House on the work that she is doing to make sure that the independent complaints and grievance scheme can address historical allegations and that it will be clear to everybody that it does so; that it has built-in independence; and that things will not be delayed unnecessarily. However, Members cannot allow the Commission to cherry-pick from the Cox report. It has

to be adopted in full if we are to get away from the disgraceful situation of the EHRC potentially intervening on this place.

The Cox report is absolutely clear that new processes are insufficient in their own right to bring about the culture change that we need. The report says:

“The House strategy...risks being thwarted without a change in the culture necessary to deliver it.”

Bullying and harassment continue to be regarded as a distraction from the real work of the House. Cox is absolutely explicit about the need for top officeholders to change—not in her recommendations, because of course, that was outside her terms of reference, but it is integral to the report—yet the Commission is silent on this. Paragraph 414 states:

“I find it difficult to envisage how the necessary changes can be successfully delivered, and the confidence of the staff restored, under the current senior...administration.”

**Andrew Bridgen:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only way to give confidence to future complainants is to ensure now that historical complaints are dealt with effectively and efficiently?

**Mrs Miller:** I think the Leader of the House has already said that that is the case.

Turning to my concluding remarks, although I see that I did not get an extra minute for the question asked by my hon. Friend—[*Interruption.*] To quote again from the report,

“there are a number of individuals who are regarded as bearing some personal responsibility for the criticisms made, and whose continued presence is viewed as unlikely to facilitate the necessary changes”.

The report could not be clearer. We have to make sure that there is senior management change in this place before we can make sure that the important process changes come into play. We have to make sure that the Commission is democratically accountable in the way that the Leader of the House has talked about. I believe that we also have to insulate the role of Speaker from dealing with these sorts of organisational issues, which are an immense distraction from his main role, which is to be in here presiding over impartial debate.

In summary, we really need to make sure that nobody here today can dismiss this report; that the debate is focused not just on process, but on making sure that we have the right leadership in place to fix the issues as we move forward; that we tackle the culture that has led to devastating criticism of the management of this place; and importantly, that we focus on how we can build back the trust of staff. That has to be the focus of today's debate. We need to consider how we can make sure that the root cause of the cultural problems that we face are dealt with systematically not only by every Member of this House, but in the management of this place.

6.46 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House; the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz); and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for their comments on these very serious issues; they have very much set the tone for the debate. I commend Dame Laura Cox for her report and every single person who has contributed to it and felt that they were brave

enough to come forward to speak and share their experiences, as traumatic as they no doubt were. My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) cannot be here today—he is in his sick bed—but he very much agrees with what has been recommended in the report, and we in the Scottish National party give our backing to its findings as well.

When my hon. Friend last spoke about this topic in this place, he said:

“Historical patriarchy practically oozes out of the walls”—[*Official Report*, 16 October 2018; Vol. 647, c. 534]—

of this building, and I absolutely agree. I have no doubt that the ingrained masculine culture in this institution is a key factor in the shocking cases of bullying and harassment that have been brought to the attention of the House. This behaviour has to stop. Those perpetrating such bullying need to be under no doubt that their behaviour is unacceptable.

I question what the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) said in an intervention about people knowing, of course, that their behaviour is unacceptable; I am not sure that they do. I think that is part of the problem and why I very much agree that training needs to be put in place, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) mentioned, because if we are not aware of the impact of our behaviour, we are not going to change it.

**Bob Stewart:** I absolutely endorse what the hon. Lady says. She is probably right that the people who are bullies do not even realise that they are bullying. It is tragic, but they do not, and they need that pointed out and to be educated.

**Alison Thewliss:** Yes, I agree. Some people may be well aware of what they are doing and of the impact of their behaviour, but some may not. It is time that we were brave enough to point that out to them, and I will mention that later.

The report is damning. It has the potential to be very damaging to the public's trust in the procedures and legitimacy of this place and of us as elected Members—a trust that has already been thoroughly ravaged by the expenses scandal a few years ago. It is vital that we take this report seriously and treat all those who spoke out with the absolute respect that they deserve.

I agree with the Leader of the House that solving this problem is a non-negotiable course of action, and we have to act now before any further damage is done. As well as the horrific personal toll that abuse and harassment take on individuals, there is the wider impact, as this culture has led to the discouragement of women in politics. The gender balance in this Parliament is nowhere near good enough. Although we have a record level of female MPs in 2018, it is still less than a third of the total number elected. Many women I come across say, “Oh, I couldn't do your job,” and they do so not because it is a fundamentally difficult job—some aspects are—and not always because of the hours or the distance, but because of how they perceive the culture of this place. They see Prime Minister's questions as men in suits shouting at one another, and they see no place for themselves here as a result.

Dame Laura Cox's report is particularly enlightening on the broader culture in which this situation has been able to fester. She describes it as

[*Alison Thewliss*]

“an excessively hierarchical, ‘command and control’ and deferential culture, which has no place in any organisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

This culture is our biggest issue as policy makers. It is no exaggeration to say it has wide-reaching detrimental effects on society. Unfortunately, trickle-down patriarchy has been much more effective than trickle-down economics has ever been.

There is gross over-representation in this place of a certain demographic—namely, upper-class, white men in suits. The report makes reference to certain public schools and Oxbridge universities as having a disproportionate influence. Of course, there are many among this demographic who are dedicated public servants whom I take no issue with and who work tirelessly for their constituents, and it is not my intention to single out any one person or party, but it is irrefutable that over-representation in one area leads to limited understanding of the experience of others.

I have spoken at length in this place about the terrible practice of retro-fitting women into policies. Women are not an afterthought to be tacked on to the decision-making process. That is how we have ended up with welfare reforms that make matters worse for abused women and immigration rules that discriminate, and it is why we have the two-child policy and the despicable rape clause—because these policies were not made to reflect the lived experiences of women.

It is really important to look at ways we can change the misogynistic culture in the House. Many women in my constituency and elsewhere would make fantastic representatives or members of staff, but without serious change they will not put themselves forward in a culture that does not respect their skills and experience. My former colleague Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, when she was elected to this place, was subject to woofing noises in this Chamber. If that is the example being set by Members, it reflects very badly on us all.

The Cox report described the experiences of female staff:

“Some women described always being asked to buy the coffee or make the tea, or take notes of meetings, for example, or being humiliated in front of colleagues by comments about why they needed to work or have a career if they had a husband, or ‘why do we need another woman in here, we already have two.’”

It is clear that the systems in place—the Valuing Others policy and the revised Respect policy—are not fit for purpose and need to be disregarded. We need to move on to something better.

A lot of the focus has been on the behaviour of MPs, but I want to be absolutely clear that this culture has deep roots. A lot of it is built on class hierarchy and misogyny, and bullying would appear to be rife throughout this institution. Those at the bottom of the wage scale in this place are those at most risk. I am deeply concerned about the caterers, the cleaners, the contractors—those people who are not as visible to the public as we are but who as a result are so much easier for the House to ignore. I want to ensure that their voices are heard in all future policies, and I want them to feel they can challenge unacceptable behaviour, regardless of who it comes from.

We need to recognise, too, that our own staff are vulnerable by dint of how they are employed. After all, how does someone challenge their employer directly

and deal with something effectively within a very small team of staff? I have heard several times how MPs have treated their staff, and I think we all need to get a good deal braver in calling this out when we see it; not doing so allows it to continue. We need to stop making excuses for people. On page 141 of the report, Dame Laura highlights how unlikely we are to criticise our fellow MPs—the Leader of the House mentioned this, too, in the context of our procedures. We need to think about how we do this, without fear or favour and without risking our own personal relationships—a lot of us in politics grew up together and have those friendships and relationships.

**Mrs Miller:** The hon. Lady is making an important point. It is also part of our job to hold to account those managing this place. On behalf of the SNP, does she not find it very concerning that the Commission has not commented on the need for a complete management change here? What does she feel we need to do about that?

**Alison Thewliss:** The report makes it clear that there has to be change and that we need to look at our policies and procedures and make sure that everything is fit for purpose, and yes the report falls short.

**Mrs Miller:** The report does not fall short.

**Alison Thewliss:** Sorry, I mean the response to the report falls short—very short—in a number of aspects.

I do not have permission to name names, but I have heard testimony from a former member of staff in this place who was subjected to offensive sexist remarks by a more senior manager, used quite deliberately to undermine her position and confidence. She did not feel she could complain, and she did not want me to raise it further, but I fear that the person who made those comments will have thought little of them and will make them again to other women in his future career. As I say, if we do nothing, this culture grows and festers, and if people do not see their behaviour challenged, they believe that it is acceptable and that they can get away with anything.

Culture change would help participation in politics in the future, but it is of limited consolation to those who have suffered injustice in the past. Ours is often seen as rough-and-tumble profession with long and unforgiving hours and an immense workload, but that does not for one second excuse the unacceptable behaviour described by this inquiry, which is far reaching and fundamental. Discourse can be robust, but the allegations we are hearing about go far beyond what is acceptable during any normal disagreement.

Huge elements of this can be changed, and the Scottish Parliament, while not perfect, set itself up to avoid this kind of culture. From the outset, the Scottish Parliament made clear its commitment to inclusive and family friendly workplace practices, with key principles of accessibility, participation and equal opportunity. As the Leader of the House mentioned, best practice was drawn upon in its planning phase to ensure that the establishment of the new legislature could learn from the mistakes and successes of other legislatures, including this place. There was a firm understanding that Holyrood would not simply be a Westminster in the north.

Promoting a family friendly culture and work environment has been a key priority of the Scottish Parliament, and that is reflected in its sitting hours finishing at 5 pm, voting being fixed at a set time so that staff and MPs do not have to stay late into the evening, unlike in this place, where sitting hours can vary hugely. We also have in this building a pervasive culture of alcohol—this has been missing somewhat from the debate thus far. We have receptions at lunchtime serving drinks and people encouraged to hang around in bars while we wait for late-night votes, and this breeds a culture where we are not behaving as professionals in this building. We are then forced to spend a ridiculous amount of time in crowded voting lobbies, which is unpleasant and unsafe, particularly when some Members have been drinking for a good part of the day.

A lot of the reporting on this has been done in dramatic tabloid language, and the culture in the past has been to cover it up and pretend that it is all fine, which has led directly to the situation today where we worry too much about the reputation of the House, rather than the people who work within it.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Is this place not part of the problem? Members of staff have complained to me about the behaviour of other Members. I say, “Make a formal complaint,” and they say, “But I’ll lose my job.” We have to remember that if someone is employed by the House of Commons or the Palace of Westminster and loses their job, it will go on their CV and affect their future employment prospects, and that is why they will not make a complaint.

**Alison Thewliss:** That is absolutely true, and it is reflected in the report in many ways. For example, people fear that if they were to complain or raise an issue, they would be seen as a troublemaker trying to upset the way things have been done—and from reading the report, it seems to me that the way things have been done absolutely has to be turned around.

**Andrea Leadsom:** On a point of clarification, the new ICGS is totally confidential. I want people to know that if they proceed with a complaint their name will not be mentioned and they need not fear retribution or publicity.

**Alison Thewliss:** That is good to hear, although people have to have confidence in that anonymity, and we have to see results.

In moving away from the way things have always been done, we need to be frank with ourselves. There has been some discussion about the culture in higher education, and it has been suggested to me that the institutions with low levels of reporting of harassment are the ones we ought to be watching, rather than those that are prepared to report and to act on those reports. Unless we encourage reporting, the problem will continue and nothing will be done. I agree that staff must feel they have ownership of the system, that there must be accountability, that the implementation must be robust and that people must have confidence that they can report anonymously and that something will be done. During a conversation that I had earlier today, it was suggested that someone might not want an allegation to be made but would like it to be noted, so that in the event of any future allegations that tied up with the same person and similar circumstances, the link could not be overlooked. I think it important for that to be

recorded in one way or another. I also want to ensure that if an allegation has been made, the person who has made that allegation is not forced to sit down with the perpetrator, because that would put them in a very vulnerable position.

No one should be too powerful to be beyond the reach of any new reporting system. We must ensure that members of staff who wish to complain about bullying and harassment have the necessary access and support, regardless of when the incident occurred and who it involved.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. May I suggest that we lower the speaking time limit to six minutes, given that there is so much interest and so many Members wish to speak?

7 pm

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). She made what I thought was a rather hard-hitting speech, with much of which I agreed.

One of the themes that have emerged from most of the contributions today is culture. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) was the first to mention the “culture” word, and he was absolutely right to do so. Like others—including, I think, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central—the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), talked about the merits of looking at other systems, not just in the United Kingdom but around the world, to see how they work. I would like to extend that. The focus seemed to be on other legislatures or on public bodies, but I think we should be more ambitious and look at some of the best practice in the organisations in the private sector that have changed their culture.

Let me throw one example into the mix. One of the best culture changes that I saw took place during my time at Asda, when Archie Norman was the chief executive and Allan Leighton was his deputy. They transformed the strongly hierarchical culture in what had been a very “control and command” kind of business when they took over. They revolutionised the way in which managers treated their colleagues, and ensured that everyone was considered to have equal value within the business, whatever their role might be. I think that there would be a great deal of merit in persuading people like Archie Norman and Allan Leighton to come to Parliament and explain how they changed the culture of companies such as Asda. What was done there was a massive feat in itself, and Asda became one of the top businesses in the country in which to work, according to one of the annual polls carried out by *The Sunday Times*.

Let me stress, in the limited time available to me, that this is a very important issue and we all have a responsibility to try to put things right. Our staff, whoever they are, deserve to be treated properly and with respect. Indeed, why would people who want to get the most out of their staff not treat them properly and with respect? Any sensible manager would want to do that anyway. However, I do not think it helpful to try to use this issue as some kind of witch hunt, or as an attempt to settle scores with the Speaker of the House of Commons. I think

[Philip Davies]

that that has featured far too often in some of the contributions to debates on this subject. Whatever problems there are in the culture of the House, they almost certainly predate the Speaker's time in the Chair. This is a long-standing issue in the House, and it is absolutely wrong to lay the blame for it at the door of the Speaker.

I have no qualms about criticising the Speaker. As it happens, I was one of those who put their names to the motion of no confidence in the previous Speaker, and I did not vote for the current Speaker to be in his position. At the time of his election, I spent an hour explaining to him all the reasons why I was not going to vote for him, although it was, strictly speaking, a secret ballot. So I have no qualms about, if necessary, telling people why I think that they are unsuitable for that particular role. However, I do not think it either fair or appropriate to use what is a long-standing issue in this place as a way of settling old scores with the Speaker. It is largely people who, like me, did not vote for him in the first place who are using this as a way to say that they still do not want him to be here. This is just a convenient stick with which to beat him. Such action trivialises what is a serious issue for everyone in the House, and I hope that we will caution against it. We all have a role to play in ensuring that we get the culture right.

It is clear to all of us that the culture in the House is not always right. Let us get in people who have expertise in changing cultures in organisations where staff are put at the front and centre. Let us do something positive as a result of the challenge that we face, and use the report to deliver that positive change. Please let us not use this simply as a way to do something negative—to settle scores with someone with whose present position some Members were never reconciled in the first place. I did not vote for the Speaker, but I recognise that it is not the Speaker who is responsible for the problems.

**Mrs Miller:** I did not intend to intervene, but my hon. Friend must recognise that the report contained some criticism. Is he just dismissing that? I hope that he would not characterise my comments as those of “one of the usual suspects”.

**Philip Davies:** I know that my right hon. Friend has been outspoken on that particular issue, but she is certainly not at the forefront of my mind. [Laughter.] She has very considered opinions, and I appreciate that. I am not oblivious to it. My point is that whoever had happened to be the Speaker at the time when the report was written, the same issues would have been raised in it. I do not think that it constitutes a specific criticism of this individual Speaker. This is a much deeper and more widespread problem than that. Anyone who thinks that these issues have only arisen since the current Speaker took his position knows, deep down, that that really is not the case.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Given his argument, does my hon. Friend believe that the culture in this place can change if the current Speaker remains in position?

**Philip Davies:** Yes, I do. I have no reason to think otherwise in my dealings with the Speaker. People take others as they find them. I think that this goes much wider than the current incumbent. As my hon. Friend knows, I agree with him wholeheartedly on virtually

every issue, but I am afraid that on this one we must part company. I do not think it helpful to make it into a personal vendetta against one individual in the House. The culture goes much deeper than that.

Let us use the report to do something positive. Let us get people in who can help, but let us not make this into a personal vendetta on the part of people who were never reconciled to the current incumbent of the Chair in the first place. That is not helpful, and, to be fair, in many respects it does not do justice to the people whom we actually need to help: people who work in the House of Commons, either as the staff of Members of Parliament or as other staff members. We can do this without needing to go for what I would consider to be the very nuclear option that my hon. Friend proposes, which I do not think would make a blind bit of difference in itself. The problem goes much deeper than that.

7.8 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of the House of Commons Commission. I also thank Dame Laura Cox for her report on the bullying and harassment of Commons staff.

The Commission recognises that it has a statutory responsibility for the employment of House staff, but too often has failed in its duty to provide a workplace free from bullying and harassment. The report described an institutional failure to address a problem that has undermined the legitimacy and authority of the House. As others have said, bullying and harassment have no place in the House or in any other area of public life. The Commission is determined to take immediate steps to rectify past mistakes and offer robust protection and support to all who work here.

As Members will know, the Commission met on Wednesday 24 October to discuss the report's recommendations and consider a way forward. Members of the Commission, including the Clerk of the House and the director general, were unanimous in recognising that it is time for a change, and agreed to the three fundamental recommendations in Dame Laura's report. This decision was reinforced at a further meeting on Monday 29 October.

We agreed to terminate the Valuing Others policy and the Respect policy, to expand the new independent complaints and grievance scheme to enable House employees with historic allegations to access it—although we have heard the Leader of the House point out that that is available to them already—and to ensure that the process for determining complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment brought by House staff against Members of Parliament is an entirely independent process in which Members play no part. Work will start on this immediately with the Leader of the House and with input from the Chair of the Standards Committee and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards—the widest scheme possible, perhaps in the way the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was asking for earlier.

The Commission is also committed to preventing any further bullying and harassment of, and sexual misconduct towards, staff, and has directed the Commons Executive Board to produce an action plan, in consultation

with a wide range of stakeholders. This will be taken forward under the auspices of the external members of the Commission, drawing on independent and external advice.

Since the publication of the Dame Laura Cox inquiry report, the Commons Executive Board has been leading events with House of Commons staff to hear their reactions. Judging by their comments at these meetings, the mood of many staff members is a mix of anger at past events, disappointment at the failure of the House to deal with them adequately, and concern about whether lasting change can happen. This is perhaps an example of the toxic lack of trust that the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) referred to.

The right hon. Lady also referred to section 149 of the public sector equality duty and said that it applies to the House. There may be an argument about whether that is the case, but clearly the House would always want to observe that even if there was not a statutory requirement for it to do so. The right hon. Lady might be interested to know that the Clerk of the House is due to meet the Equality and Human Rights Commission shortly to discuss this matter.

**Mrs Miller:** I gently remind the right hon. Gentleman that the EHRC has put in writing very clearly that the House of Commons is subject to the public sector equality duty. It is the regulator; it made that decision, not the House of Commons.

**Tom Brake:** I thank the right hon. Lady for that intervention, and it is on the record.

There is concern, too, that these issues might be used as an opportunity to score political points, perhaps losing sight of the fact that this is about real people who are hurt and let down by their place of work and how their complaints were handled.

What is clear is that fine words are not enough: change must follow, and swiftly. As we move forward, the Commission has confidence that the new independent complaints and grievance scheme will offer far greater protection for staff members than ever before. The behaviour code, for example, is a set of inarguable standards by which we must all abide, regardless of rank, power or allegiance. The code has now been adopted by both Houses, and no one may regard themselves as exempt from these standards. However, as many Members have said, there is a deeper issue beyond policies and processes: this is about the culture of the House, especially in relation to deference, hierarchy and the abuse of power. This theme resurfaces repeatedly. We must collectively strive to change fundamentally a culture which has tolerated such abuses.

The sentiment in the Commission is to see swift action, but action that must be effective at securing lasting and permanent change. An action plan focused on addressing the cultural fault-lines that persist in dividing the Commons community is being developed with external input and individual staff input seen as critical. This plan will be informed by the voices of staff, who have signalled their impatience to see concrete actions—actions that will, once and for all, address the serious issues that undermine the quality of their working environment and make the change lasting and permanent.

But it would be foolish and foolhardy to suggest that an immediate action plan implemented over months will in itself change a culture that has developed over many, many decades. Lasting and sustainable culture change requires a movement. We all have a role to play. The bullying of House staff is perpetrated by both Members and by other House staff; these are equally unacceptable but will require different remedies. Soon, there will be decisions and choices to be made by this House, and I hope that all Members will recognise the responsibility they have and the role they can play in changing the culture of the Commons for the better and for good.

Every member of the parliamentary community has a right to feel safe and respected. The Dame Laura Cox inquiry report clearly shows that this is not the case. This must, and will, change, and that change starts now.

7.14 pm

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I follow the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) who sits on the Commission, and I am grateful for his account of the Commission's discussions and intentions. He threw into his remarks references to culture, and "culture" is a word that drops into this debate quite easily. I will discuss later in my remarks how we should perhaps be exploring what we mean by the word and how we might address the culture. He said that

"deference, hierarchy and the abuse of power"

are in the culture and that we all have a role to play, and he went on to discuss what all Members must do, but I look around this Chamber now and do not see all Members here. In fact, I see a rather small minority of Members here, and part of the problem is that the whole of the House of Commons is not engaged.

I look upon Dame Laura Cox's report as a very serious piece of work setting out very big challenges, but I do not think it is the first word and I doubt very much that it will be the last word; I gather we are to have another inquiry into a different aspect, concentrating more on the way in which Members treat their staff. It is important that we get above this and think about how we can develop a conversation about what sort of House and institution we want to be, how we are going to develop our personal behaviour—our individual values, our principles—in order to advance that objective, and how we engage all Members in that conversation.

I was very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for quoting words that I well remember drafting as part of the submission that the Committee I chair made to the Straw Committee on the future governance of the House. The point I was making in those words, which referred to governance, leadership, values, attitudes and behaviour, was not that the changes to the governance structure would fix the problems. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that we need to democratise the governance of the House, and I am certain that we do need to make transparency and accountability more evident, but these things in themselves will not solve the problem.

To some extent I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who referred in person to the office of Speaker. I have not been part of any campaign to remove the Speaker as a result of the

[*Sir Bernard Jenkin*]

Cox report, because he is but one figure in the House who is accounting for the culture of this place; there are far more people giving permission for the wrong behaviours and wrong attitudes than just one person, and we must keep that perspective in mind.

The question we perhaps need to ask about the House of Commons Commission if we are not satisfied with its conduct is that old friend *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Maybe there needs to be some kind of informal, or perhaps formal, oversight body that discusses what the Commission does and that gets it to report more formally than it does, but I do not suppose that that will actually deal with the problems we have got.

In the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee submission to the review of the House of Commons code of conduct we point out that governance and compliance are not synonymous, and that structures and procedures can embed change and culture but cannot on their own create the right culture. What we need to think and talk far more about is what we mean by our values. When we sit in the Tea Room with our colleagues we do not talk much about values. What do we mean by values? Values are about the way in which we should seek to live and, incidentally, to lead. Our values should be evident in the way in which we lead and in the principles by which we conduct ourselves in this place and in our lives. The rules, which are enforceable and whose breach will cause punishment, are a relatively ancillary question, yet so much of the debate is about creating new rules and punishments and not about explaining how we live our lives better in this institution.

The big question is: how do we hold this conversation? When the House divided on these matters a little while ago, barely 100 colleagues voted and I should not imagine that 100 colleagues took part in the debate either. How do we hold this conversation about the values and principles that we want to demonstrate in our leadership of public life and that should be evident throughout our entire institution?

7.20 pm

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Like everyone else who has read Dame Laura Cox's report, the other members of the Committee on Standards and I were shocked by its contents. We were horrified to read of the extent of the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff by some Members and by some senior staff, and dismayed that so many feel that they have been ill served by the House authorities in their attempts to be heard and to have redress. That cannot continue. Every single one of us bears responsibility in this matter, and all hon. Members need to read this report and reflect seriously on our own conduct. Could any of us have been guilty of bullying behaviour or harassment of staff? Have we witnessed or heard reports of such behaviour by others but failed to act? How, collectively and individually, do we change behaviours and, most importantly, the culture in this place?

It is barely three months since the House put in place the independent complaints and grievance scheme, which is aimed at tackling bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. While Dame Laura Cox acknowledges that the new process contains much that is of value—I commend the Leader of the House and her steering

group for their efforts and determination in introducing the new scheme three months ago—she makes such fundamental criticisms of it that the House will have to revisit aspects of the scheme. Indeed, the House of Commons Commission has moved quickly to accept her three key recommendations: that the Valuing Others and Respect policies should be scrapped; that complaints relating to historical allegations should be heard; and that complaints by House of Commons staff against Members of the House should be determined through “an entirely independent process, in which Members of Parliament will play no part”.

This gives rise to detailed questions about implementation, and about ownership and responsibility for driving forward the recommendations for the implementation of the Cox report. There is a danger that we will fall into a vacuum. Mr Speaker and the Members on the House of Commons Commission have, to a degree, and for understandable reasons, stepped back from the process, leaving the task to the two external members, who have asked the executive board to draw up an action plan. However, there are issues that go further than those that a board of officials can deal with. The wider House, the political parties, the Committee on Standards, individual MPs and individual House staff have responsibilities too.

The Cox recommendations must be implemented in a way that inspires the confidence of those who have made complaints of abuse, and of the wider public. The outcome that we seek might be no involvement by Members, but we need to recognise that Members will be involved to some extent in designing the process. The Committee on Standards, which includes elected and non-elected members, is the mechanism that the House has set up to advise it. Final decisions, particularly on a new system of sanctions, will have to be taken by the House. We will have to think carefully about how we can discharge those responsibilities in a way that inspires public confidence. The Committee on Standards has already begun to think about measures that we could take, which we might recommend in our report shortly, to strengthen people's perception of and trust in the system that we hope will apply in the future, as well as the system that we brought in on 19 July. Existing complaints will have to be dealt with under that system until further changes are made.

I want briefly to mention two or three of the quick wins that I hope the House will consider in the near future when my Committee brings forward our report and its recommendations. We hope to do that very soon. The first proposal is to extend full voting rights not only to the elected members of the Committee on Standards but to the lay members as well. Dame Laura Cox has criticised the Committee as inadequate for purpose in its current form. Offering full voting rights to the lay members would strengthen and embed the independence of the Committee, because those members would form a *de facto* majority on the Committee. There would be equal numbers of lay and non-lay members, but the Chair has only a casting vote.

Other immediate and much simpler steps include giving the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards the right to go to the police with matters that she believes need criminal investigation without having to consult the Committee first, and abolishing the requirement that complaints to the Commission have to be submitted



in hard copy only. I am sure that, in the 21st century, we can switch that so that complaints can be accepted via email. These proposals would be without prejudice to the further and more sweeping action needed to give the Cox recommendations full effect. Procedural changes such as these are essential, but as we have heard again and again tonight, it is painfully evident that Dame Laura's report rings the alarm for the need for wholesale cultural change. This is not a political issue. It is not a constitutional issue. It is simply an ethical issue—an issue of values and morality—and every single one of us has an obligation to ensure that it is treated as such.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. There will now be a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. I call Gillian Keegan.

7.26 pm

**Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), and I congratulate her on her new role as Chair of the Committee on Standards. Having served as a member of Parliament for only a year and a half, I did wonder whether it was appropriate for me to speak in this debate. I personally have not witnessed many of the things described in the report. However, I do have prior experience of managing thousands of people from different backgrounds and cultures in large companies for more than 27 years, so I might be able to provide some useful insights into industry best practice. I completely agree with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) that many companies have gone through this culture change, and that we can learn a lot from them.

As a new MP, however, I can safely say that Parliament is very different from any workplace I have ever seen, and it has a very distinct culture. Parliament is effectively a common workplace for what are in reality 650 separate small businesses, each with their own leadership and teams. This is unusual, and it is probably one of the reasons why this issue has not been effectively tackled earlier. There is no real central control, and certainly no central HR support. The reputation of Parliament is vital, because we have the responsibility to pass legislation—not least, employment law itself. Dame Laura Cox's report shows us beyond all doubt that our present approach is not working. It is letting staff down, and we need to change.

So, what does good look like in the workplace and how can we achieve it? Based on my experience, and on the valuable insights I have received from professional organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, I believe that we need to approach our “get well” strategy under two headings: preventing bullying and harassment from happening in the first place; and dealing with them decisively when they do happen. Our prevention approach needs to start at the top, by which I mean all of us elected representatives as well as senior managers in the House of Commons administration. We need to show that we are serious about tackling this issue, and that means that we as Members of Parliament should lead by example and personally demonstrate the right behaviours and attend training programmes and awareness raising events. Best practice would include monitoring attendance at such

events and even publishing a list of those MPs who are and are not attending them or, as happens in the workplace, completing online educational work modules. That is usual practice in other industries. If we conduct ourselves in this way, we can start to shift the culture away from where it is now towards a more inclusive diverse and respectful workplace.

Turning to the subject of what to do when it is alleged that bullying or harassment may have taken place, we should again follow best practice, with a simple, well understood, consistent, confidential, independent and, above all, fast escalation process. There are some existing policies in this area, but the Cox report clearly states that they are overly complex and do not enjoy the confidence of our colleagues working in Parliament. In order to cleanse the system, we need to show that we take the issue seriously, acting when required with full transparency, and we must be seen to do that.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Given my hon. Friend's extensive experience in business, what does she think the House should do about historical allegations? What lessons can be learned from the private sector?

**Gillian Keegan:** I had this conversation with someone at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and I asked what they do in business, and he said that there is no time limit for sexual harassment, but that they impose some kind of time limit on bullying and harassment, because cultures and expectations have changed over time. I am not suggesting that for this place, but that is what somebody at the CIPD advised, and we could examine what different industries do, because most people have already faced this issue.

**Chris Bryant:** The most basic thing that every serious company does is ensure that there is a proper HR function to provide support whenever it is needed. When new Members come into the House, some may have employed hundreds of people, but some may have never employed another person and may be desperate for more support. Should we not put far more energy into that if we are to prevent such problems?

**Gillian Keegan:** I completely agree. It is unfair to expect a simple, well understood, consistent and fair process if we have not trained people about that expectation. In business, people would be given induction training on the standards and then top-up training every year, and whether the top-up training had been done would be publicised.

Dame Laura Cox's report runs to 155 pages and I agree with all its points. The answer, however, is perhaps simpler than the length of the report suggests. This is about prevention and cure. It is about being seen to take action. It is about each and every one of us demonstrating the correct behaviours and showing, by example, our commitment to make this great institution a modern, respectful, inclusive workplace fit for the 21st century. It is not about trying to scapegoat individuals or outsource the solution to a Committee or indulging in a trial by media. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if we tried to suggest that others are responsible for our collective failings, we will certainly demonstrate that we have not at all grasped the systemic nature of the problem we face.

[Gillian Keegan]

Let us remember that we are all collectively responsible for this system, and we must work together to improve it. Even though, as the report is keen to point out, the vast majority of MPs are courteous and entirely respectful of staff, our reputations sink or swim together. If each and every one of us takes steps to implement Dame Laura's report, and if we report on progress at regular intervals, we will begin the journey to better support our staff and to recover our reputation, which goes to the heart of the credibility of this place.

7.33 pm

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan)—I will call her my hon. Friend—and I think she made some important points. I want to start by saying that I have absolutely every faith in the Leader of the House's commitment to make the situation better. I also have every faith in the new Chair of the Committee on Standards, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). I do not think that many people could question her unfailing commitment to equality over the years, and people should feel real faith in those institutions and in all the people in the Chamber—there are not enough of us here—who have bothered to come to talk about this.

I say once again that anyone who has any historical complaints should absolutely come forward. In fact, the legal advice given during the creation of the system that we have now does not mince its words, stating:

“Retrospective effect is therefore regarded as desirable.”

It says that it is better that we look back in retrospect. Unlike some Conservative Members, I am not going to lean on business for the best option. Arcadia, for one, is an organisation that I would not currently be taking any advice from, but it is with my interest in Sir Philip Green that I want to ask some questions about how this House uses non-disclosure agreements. I am really interested in the subject, but I still have no idea about how most things actually work in here. It is a mystery to most people. I want to know who signs off a non-disclosure agreement in this building against a member of staff, because I do not have a clue. I know that in business, someone at board level would have to see some of that when big pay-outs are being made, but I do not know who has governance and oversight of that in this building. How will those things be dealt with going forward? Will any new inquiries report on whether we think it is appropriate to use NDAs in repeated cases where the perpetrator is the same person clearly showing a pattern of behaviour?

**Andrea Leadsom:** To answer the hon. Lady's question directly, I have also been concerned about this matter. I asked the House authorities about it and was told:

“Like many other organisations, the House of Commons uses settlement agreements to resolve employment disputes under certain circumstances but these are not what are known more widely as ‘non-disclosure agreements’ and that settlement agreements do not in any way seek to prevent whistle-blowing or the disclosure of facts on public interest grounds.”

**Jess Phillips:** I thank the Leader of the House for that answer. I think some real clarity going forward about what we as parliamentarians in this place will and will not accept should certainly be part of how we improve

something that I think we have already improved. As somebody who has been a critic of this place and some of the people in it, I want to say that I think that we have tried to make real strides. Historical cases have been talked about a lot today, but the situation needs to be made much clearer and more robust. I heard the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House sharing a real commitment to that today, which gives me hope.

I agree with the idea of democratising the House of Commons Commission because, once again, I do not know how someone gets to be on it or how to be the spokesperson for it. I will go on the Commission and on the Committee on Standards now that my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston has made a gap—I will go on all the Committees. Part of the problem is that there is no real accountability for who is on what and what is being said where, and if I do not know that, it is likely that the vast majority of Members will not know that, because I take an interest, and also that the public will not have a clue about what is going on.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) made an important point about having a log on which things can just be recorded without action necessarily being taken. Third-party reporting is another issue, because I have received some harrowing reports of behaviour by people in this place, but I know that the people will never come forward and say anything. I am then left with my hands tied knowing some of those things, and we need some system so that we do not end up in a Jimmy Savile situation in which everybody says, “Well, we all knew. Everybody knew he was a bit like that. Of course he was.” We need a place where Members of Parliament and members of staff—anybody around this place—can, without prejudice, log something somewhere so that we can see the patterns.

It would be wrong of me to say that this process has been pleasant for all those who had to come forward, and who are still having to keep on pushing. Unless we get this right pretty quickly, trust and faith in this place will be gone—they are already pretty low. Each and every one of us should take on the responsibility of making sure this does happen.

7.40 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): I speak partly as Vicky Ford, but also as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament, which I am very honoured to have recently taken up. Since I have been in this House, a vast majority of Members have been hugely helpful and have shown great respect to me as a newish Member. It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who sits on the Women and Equalities Committee, the Chair of which is here today. There has been a huge amount of work on this debate.

The Dame Laura Cox report makes for harrowing reading. It cannot be swept under the carpet, and it is very clear that culture change is needed. Although the culture has gone on for many, many years, it cannot continue and, as Dame Laura says, the reset button has to be pressed. I am extremely pleased to hear that the Leader of the House has set up a new independent complaints and grievance procedure because, in the past, people who have suffered have not felt confident about coming forward with their complaints. People need

a safe space, and the system needs to be confidential. Many people have spoken about that, but it is almost more important to make sure that we reset the culture so that such incidents do not happen again. We must try to make such incidents far less likely.

I have said before in this Chamber that we are living through an incredibly tense time in politics, and a very stressful time in British politics. My experience is that we often say things we regret when we are stressed. There is no excuse for that, but if we can work somehow to try to destress some of our working lives, maybe that will contribute to a change in culture.

Many people have said to me that one thing they find stressful about this place is the lack of predictability. It is not necessarily mothers wanting to have shorter hours—actually, a lot of people who travel from further afield say that they want to work long hours when they come to London—but not knowing what is coming next can be challenging. There are times when an urgent question is an important question but, Mr Deputy Speaker, urgent questions are not always urgent—sometimes they are just important—yet we all run around rescheduling our lives. If we could set time aside for important issues, without needing to have that higher level of stress—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** I am sure you are not trying to influence the Chair in making decisions on urgent questions, as that is done in the morning and not at this particular time.

**Vicky Ford:** I am not suggesting it is you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was just hoping that you would register the point.

It has also been said that, as we often sit late, it would help people with caring responsibilities if more sitting days could start at 9.30 am and if some Select Committees did not always send out their reports for us to review over the weekend but gave us a bit more time to submit comments. There is also stress because of the nature of online abuse that Members receive. We need to be careful about the language we sometimes use—we saw this in the press the other day—because, if we use violent language, it can encourage violence against others.

Lots of people have spoken about the need to improve training and HR, and some of that is in place, but there is not a great deal of awareness of it.

I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to a report on sexual harassment and violence against women in Parliaments across Europe. The report looks at 45 different Parliaments, and there is great work happening in Switzerland, Sweden, France and Finland, and in the European Parliament. We have taken some of the same initiatives, but it would be worth looking at that report to see whether there are lessons that can be learned from those Parliaments, which all face similar issues to this Parliament. If we do not adopt similar procedures, we should give a jolly good excuse for why we have not, otherwise we could find that we have not taken on good practice.

Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to the next urgent question.

7.44 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I thank Dame Laura Cox and all those who contributed to this report, particularly those who have been the

victim of bullying and harassment. I appreciate that it cannot have been easy for them to come forward, even under the condition of anonymity, to recall experiences that we have heard about only in outline. I was disturbed to read that some people did not even wish to come forward to give evidence for fear of losing their job, which tells us about the mountain we have to climb.

As other Members have said, there are some fairly obvious procedures we could adopt to help improve the situation, but we are deluding ourselves if we think that introducing a few new procedures, or removing some high-profile people, will be enough. From what Members have already said today, it is clear that a few cosmetic changes will not have the desired effect if the same atmosphere that has allowed these problems to exist in the first place remains.

The bigger challenge for us all will be ridding this place of the culture that is described in the report as “widespread, enduring and profound”, and one that is “as embedded as it is shocking.”

The unhealthy atmosphere of servility and entitlement leaps from the pages of the report. Perhaps when we become caught up in all the drama of this place, we forget that this is far removed from what a modern workplace looks like.

I am sure that most Members remember the whirlwind of the initial few weeks after first being elected to this place. The conventions, the courtesies and just trying to find the way around are huge challenges. In no time at all, a new Member has to get used to this place, start representing their constituents and, of course, recruit a group of staff to help them do so. I understand that new Members’ inductions have improved greatly in recent years, but even three years ago it was obvious to me that one area that is sorely lacking is employment guidance and HR advice. Basically, no advice was available. When a person enters an environment in which their power as an employer is absolute, and where there is a culture of impunity going back decades—for many new Members it will be the first time they have employed someone directly—it is little wonder that, from time to time, things go wrong.

There are two clear actions that we need to take following the Cox report, and I say that in a collective sense. One of the more unhelpful aspects of this has been the way reports have been sensationalised and individualised, with a one-sided trial by media that does no good for the victims, for the accused or for Parliament as a whole. Everybody deserves the right to a fair hearing, no matter who they are. Disputed allegations—as far as I can see, they are all disputed—require due process, and one of the recommendations of the Cox report will enable us to have that.

I am pleased that there appears to be no barrier to pre-2017 complaints, because I am concerned that the further review that we have talked about today will not be enough on its own. The only thing that will be enough is the sort of procedure that Dame Laura Cox refers to when she talks about the need for individual investigations to be conducted

“by someone whose status, independence, expertise and experience are beyond question”.

Dame Laura Cox says that it has to be a rigorous and transparent process that is seen to be fair to both sides. As the report makes clear, the person investigating complaints against Members ought to be

[Justin Madders]

“more than capable of recommending an appropriate sanction.” This process needs to start happening now, because some victims have already been waiting years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) mentioned non-disclosure agreements, on which I have previously commented. I appreciate that there will be considerations when entering into such agreements, not least the complainant’s wishes. People who work here may be privy to information that is of interest to the outside world, but when it looks like every complaint is subject to an NDA, no matter what the complaint is about, it adds to the impression that this is an institution that does not like scrutiny of its internal workings.

Connected to that, staff have indicated to me that such is the insularity of this place, and such is the culture of fear about speaking out, that they do not want to be seen to be talking to Members about issues in case it gets back to their line manager. The fact that the staff handbook specifically prevents employees of the House from complaining to their own Member about workplace issues says to me that there is far too much defensiveness. If an employer in my constituency told their staff not to speak to me, I would be on to them straightaway. That is one huge reason why we cannot let this issue slip any further down the agenda.

I came to this place to fight for better working conditions for everyone in this country. If we cannot get our own house in order, how can we effectively challenge the worst employment practices out there? We should actually be more than that; we should be a beacon, an exemplar of best practice, and the standard others look up to and try to emulate. Yes, this is not like any other workplace, there are pressures here, and we are all human and sometimes standards can slip, but plenty of other workplaces face huge pressures and people there do not go round routinely bullying and harassing their staff, and then covering it up. So the toxic environment of deference and impunity has to go. We need to get the sense of pride people have in working here set through the whole place, so that everyone has a culture that we respect and so that they actually enjoy working here.

7.50 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who spoke with great sincerity. I also want to mention the speech made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), particularly as she is single-handedly doing a huge amount to change the culture of Parliament, just in the way she goes about what she does. I should also mention my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who is no longer here, but who has fought for years on these kinds of battlefields.

People look to this place to set the highest possible standards, yet we know that people who work here are being victimised, demeaned, bullied, harassed and, in some cases, assaulted—that shames us all; even if this is a case of a minority, it is a significant and important minority. Dame Laura Cox’s report makes for truly difficult reading. I found it particularly worrying that most of the bullying and harassment was targeted at women; that 68% of the contributors to the report were

women; that more women than men have had their work undermined and their careers curtailed in this place; and that women were less likely to be taken seriously if they complained. Most disturbing of all, Laura Cox found that sexual harassment, which, to be clear, is an illegal form of discrimination, was pervasive, directed both by MPs at House staff and by House staff at their juniors.

MPs have many responsibilities: representing our constituents’ best interests, protecting their data, being honest and transparent with our expenses, abiding by the Nolan principles and upholding standards of public life. But we should also take seriously our responsibility to staff: those we employ directly ourselves and those whom we do not employ personally but none the less rely on. Progress has been made, and I pay tribute to the Leader of the House and the working group for developing the new independent complaints and grievance scheme and the behaviour code. I welcome the recognition that sexual harassment and sexual violence are different from other forms of intimidation and require different procedures, the introduction of an anonymous helpline, the support for people wishing to pursue complaints and the introduction of sanctions.

However, there is more to do. In particular, for staff to have confidence in the new system there must be a meaningful change to the culture of this place. The very fact that we are here debating this report, when one of its key recommendations is that complaints procedures should be completely independent of Members of Parliament, encapsulates the dilemma; we have a voice, while staff do not. Some of the things that make Parliament a unique place to work also perpetuate its toxic power dynamics. Hierarchy is written into the fabric of this building: there are Members-only bars and canteens; Committee Rooms have Members-only doors; there are Members-only lifts, Members-only corridors and Members-only stairwells; and one of only three showers in Portcullis House is reserved for “Female Members Only”.

All this compounds a sense of “us and them” for the thousands of non-Members who work here. Staff have told me that when walking around this building they feel like “second-class citizens”. When I have mentioned that, some MPs have told me that they think it is okay—I was staggered. Although I can see the case for access to be limited to some places, such as this Chamber, I do not know of any modern workplace that has so many no-go areas for the majority of its staff. It is time for us to face some uncomfortable truths about the culture of deference that has allowed bullying and harassment to thrive. We must make sure everyone can share more equally in the benefits and privileges of working here.

This is a unique institution, but it is also a workplace, like any other. Most modern workplaces of a similar size have a host of structures in place to protect staff and to support them, help them to cope when things get tough and make the most of their skills and potential. They have things like appraisals, performance reviews, regular staff surveys, informal check-ins and 360° feedback, and so how well a member of staff manages people counts in respect of their performance, pay and promotion prospects. All these things should be a formal part of changing the system and the culture fundamentally in this place. Everyone who works here, from caseworkers

to clerks to catering staff, contributes to the effective running of our democracy, and they all deserve to be treated fairly and treated better.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. I am sorry, but I have to reduce the time limit to four minutes.

7.55 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The power of the Dame Laura Cox report sits in the fact that the voices of staff across the House had the opportunity to be aired. As she held up a mirror to the institutions of this place, it spoke truth to power, which is why I am heartened by the fact that all in this House are listening carefully to the words she set out. The report cuts to the heart of what is wrong with the culture of this place: the huge inequality in power that sits in the seat of Parliament. Everybody is here to do a job and they should be valued equally, but we see a hierarchy of entitlement. We therefore have to see the structures move and the place move. I suggest to the Leader of the House that one way to do that is to start by looking at how reviews are brought about and to work with the trade unions and recognise them. They are the very voice of the staff in this place and we need to make sure they have got a seat at the table to take things forward. When they are involved, as they have been in this process, they add real value: they reflect exactly what is happening on the ground.

There are several points I wanted to make but time does not allow me. However, I say to the Leader of the House that we have no definition of “bullying” in statute; we have no recourse to legislation. Such a definition would seriously change the context, as we would have legal levers over what happens with bullying. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 is the lever that can be used, but it is totally inappropriate because it was set up to deal with stalking.

We do need to deal with processes in this place as well. I urge again that we look at the emphasis that is put on mediation when we are dealing with systems where there is huge inequality in power. There is too much in the report to highlight how mediation can solve problems—I say that simply because inequality of power will drive things forward. We need to heed the report when it talks in paragraph 227 about

“serious questions over the coherence of all the current arrangements in place for dealing with these cases”

and in paragraph 291 about how the processes will

“damage the prospects of success for this new Scheme”

if they are not right.

Of course that takes us on to historical cases, which absolutely must be looked at. The legal representation did not draw out the arbitrary date of June 2017 and nor should these processes, moving forward. Therefore, it is absolutely right that we do not just allow voice and agency over what has gone wrong in this place, but we see action. We need investigation and then to look at what penalties were available at the time the bullying or harassment took place. I have already made representations to the Leader of the House on the vital need to have a tariff of penalty across the House, so that different institutions are not applying different penalties and so that there is real transparency in the way this works.

I also want to raise my concern, as I have before, about the role of the Committee on Standards. We need to pull this process far more into an independent space than by having MPs arbitrating on the behaviour of their colleagues. That is completely inappropriate, and again it speaks of inequality of power in this place. I therefore urge the Leader of the House to look at that as she moves on taking forward the recommendations that Dame Laura Cox has diligently pored over, to start really bringing redress to this culture, because this is about our future and about the future of the staff who work so hard in this place.

7.59 pm

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who speaks passionately on this topic.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) referred to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, which put a duty on organisations to eliminate unlawful victimisation, discrimination and harassment. The irony of the year of that law was probably not lost on those people who came forward with complaints. What the hell have we been doing? Apologies for that inappropriate language, Madam Deputy Speaker. What the devil have we been doing since 2010, when we imposed on the rest of the country laws that we cannot impose in our organisation?

I feel like I have been going through a degree of penance. I have five brothers, so I grew up in a very male household, and I went to an all-boy secondary school. I studied civil engineering at university, which was almost entirely male, and then worked on a building site. In fact, I did not come across women in the workplace until I was 27, and I have no doubt that I had developed some sexist attitudes. I then went to work for an American company that employed probably 70% women and my eyes were opened. I suddenly realised that women are not just the equal of men; in very many if not most cases, they are definitely our superiors.

We in the Conservative party frequently congratulate ourselves because we have had two female Prime Ministers, but although that is something to celebrate, it is certainly not something to hide behind. Frequently, when I stand in the Chamber at Prayers at the start of the day, as I turn to face the wall, I see only men on our side of the Chamber. That is terrible, because those members of staff who work in the rest of the House must see the Conservative party as one that has not done enough to promote and encourage women. That is why I am keen and proud to support the “Ask Her to Stand” initiative.

I come back to the legislation. Section 149 of the 2010 Act should have eradicated the problems that we are discussing today, but it has not. The problem we have now is that we need to move quickly enough to be seen to be acting promptly, but not to move so quickly that we make inappropriate laws or take inappropriate action, because the other thing of which the Laura Cox report was critical was the fact that we are so reactionary in this House. Something happens and we need to be seen to be doing something about it, so we implement some changes, but they are not embedded, sufficient or sustained.

Many people have said that we perhaps need some sort of HR training, but I think that as a bunch of adults we understand inappropriate behaviour when we

[Eddie Hughes]

see it, and we need to do more to call it out. It is simply not good enough. I speak from a privileged position because, as a male MP, I am perhaps least likely to suffer from bullying, but we certainly need to do more about it. We need to make sure that people are proud to work in this place and that in no circumstances do they ever come to work in fear of their jobs. We need to do more and we can do more. From now on, we will do more.

8.3 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I agree with nearly every word that the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) just said, apart from one thing: I do not think that everybody does necessarily know what inappropriate behaviour is. He was right in what he said about women, and I completely endorse everything he said in that respect. When I first arrived here in 2001, as a gay man, I certainly faced bullying in this place. We have to be alert to the fact that we can all still learn more about the way we present ourselves and how we behave. There is not a single Member of this House who could not benefit from proper training, because the biggest driver of cultural change in any institution in the world is always education and training. That is what we need to do more of in this House.

I know that in a few moments the Leader of the House is going to mouth at me, "But we are doing it!" We are, and lots of training is available, but sometimes it is not very well advertised; sometimes people are not aware of when it would be available to them; and sometimes it is put on at a time when a Member simply would not be able to go. The hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) was absolutely right to make the point about predictability. Sometimes, we might want to go and do a training programme and we simply cannot, because suddenly something happens in the parliamentary day that makes it impossible for us to go.

Incidentally, there is something that the Speaker could help us with. When a debate under Standing Order 24 is decided the day before and is it not going to be voted on, why do we not hold that debate at the end of the day, rather than at the beginning, so that Members can have the certainty of being able to go home at the time at which they thought they would go home? That would mean that we could still have important debates such as the one we had on Yemen, but it would not necessarily make life difficult for everybody.

I completely agree with the Leader of the House about democratising the Commission. I have worked in many institutions, including the Church of England and the BBC, and I am now here—it is like a *Daily Mail* terrible headline, is it not?—and in all those institutions, the problem is that all too often the institution's first reaction when there is an action or story against it is to defend itself. That has happened here in the House, for the whole House, but it is also intrinsic in the nature of the Commission, because each of the Commission's members is appointed by their party political leader. It would be better if we elected the Commission and it started to behave more as a team, rather than just one person leading for the whole House.

One thing that I have been asked by a large number of staff, particularly women, who work here is whether we could do something about lighting in the House. When we did work on disabled access to the building for the restoration and renewal report, the thing that came up most was that the building is very dark. People cannot read their papers. There are parts of the building that feel dangerous. If we are to talk about safety, why not light the public access ways and the corridors, so that the corridors of power are not a frightening place?

Finally, many members of staff have seen what has happened in relation to this issue and despaired because they think change is never really going to be possible. Do not despair. Even in the time for which I have been here, there have been changes. Portcullis House is a far more democratic space than many of the eating places and drinking places in this part of the estate—and guess what? That is where everybody gathers. MPs, their staff and people who work for the House all gather there together. Change is definitely possible. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) said, we now have an induction programme; we should have a really good induction programme. Would it not be great if every single member of the Cabinet and the shadow Cabinet and all the members of the Commission committed by the end of this week to do full training on bullying and harassment within the next 12 months?

8.7 pm

**Andrea Leadsom:** With the leave of the House, I wish to make a few short closing remarks. First, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who showed some optimism and pointed to some good quick wins. He is right that things have changed. There is a lot more to be done, but things have changed.

Let me highlight some of the things that have changed. First, all staff here can access the independent complaints and grievance procedure, and I urge them to do so. Secondly, I would like people to be aware that all calls and complaints are strictly confidential. Nobody will have their details publicised or have to face retribution for coming forward with a complaint. Thirdly, historical allegations can and should be brought forward to the complaints procedure. They can already be brought forward. Finally, there is much more to be done, and the Cox report, plus the independent inquiry into complaints by Members' staff that begins tomorrow, will guide much further work to change the culture here. Change is afoot and there is much more change to come.

I conclude today's informative debate by thanking the House of Commons staff and everyone who works here for making our Parliament such a formidable pillar of democracy on the world stage. To all those staff, I say you are valued, you are vital to this democracy, and we will do better by you in future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Dame Laura Cox report on the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff.

## Road Safety

8.9 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered road safety.

This debate is, in its own way, of no less importance than the one that preceded it, and to many people around this country it is of still greater importance. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue of road safety. With 500 people killed or seriously injured on our roads every week, there is no Member of this House whose constituency and whose person is not affected by the impact that road collisions have on their constituents. Road safety touches all of us, whether rural or urban, pedestrian, cyclist, horse rider or driver.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** On the horse riders, may I bring to my hon. Friend's attention the B3058 as it travels through Bashley where I have witnessed the most shocking and thoughtless behaviour? The principal victims are horse riders, as they are throughout the New Forest often enough. Was not an opportunity missed in the revision of the Highway Code in not specifically dealing with the problems faced by riders and appropriate measures that motorists should take?

**Jesse Norman:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the concern in his own constituency. He may not be aware that, actually, horse riders are mentioned in the Highway Code. Measures are taken in the Highway Code to ensure the protection of horse riders alongside other users of the road.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** On the issue of horse riding, I took up the challenge to get back on a horse this summer after many years of not riding and to experience for myself how dangerous it is on the road. It is very clear that drivers need greater awareness. Will the Minister possibly champion the work of the British Horse Society and its "Dead? Or Dead Slow?" campaign in this area?

**Jesse Norman:** The British Horse Society has shown itself to be a formidable campaigning engine in the way that it has managed to lobby my colleagues across the House, and I take my hat off to it. The very first debate in which I took part in my present job was a Westminster Hall debate on the safety of horse riders on roads. Ever since then I have had a very careful concern for the matter.

Indeed, road safety comes up regularly in this House. Only two weeks ago, I was debating the matter in Westminster Hall. Many colleagues then wished to speak, and I see that many have put their names down for speeches today. I am very grateful to them for the continued interest that they take in this important topic.

On this night, bonfire night, our thoughts may turn to those who have been involved in one of the most serious traffic incidents in recent times. Thirty-four vehicles were involved in a crash on the M50 motorway in heavy fog, with 51 people injured and seven people killed on 4 November 2011. Thankfully, such events are a rarity. In the UK, we have—and we must remember this—some of the safest roads in the world, but all road deaths are a tragedy for the families involved, not to

mention the impact that they have on our health service and on the economy. It is vital that we strive continually to bring the numbers down.

The latest road safety statistics, covering 2017, were published last month. The country can be proud of the record over time. That is to say that there were 39% fewer fatalities in 2017 compared with 10 years earlier in 2007. However, as in many other countries, our road safety figures have generally plateaued since 2012. An ageing population comes with higher injury risks, and there continues to be those groups, such as young drivers, that are disproportionately represented in our casualty statistics. We know that technologies such as smartphones are distracting to drivers and present challenges, but new technology also presents opportunities for the future with a new era of automated vehicles.

The Government are taking a very active and wide-ranging approach to tackling issues of road safety in relation to matters such as infrastructure, training and enforcement. Of course, the roads themselves are a key part of ensuring an adequately safe system.

**Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):** Over the last 12 to 18 months, there has been a number of accidents in Coventry as a result of criminal behaviour, and they have led to deaths, including among young children.

**Jesse Norman:** I absolutely recognise what the hon. Gentleman says and the deaths that he describes and it is the constant challenge of the Government to seek to address them. There can be no doubt about that at all. I am regularly approached by colleagues who know of grieving families with children. Whenever I can, I meet those families and talk to them about their experience. I have visited around the country with them to experience the trauma that they have suffered and to talk to them about what can be done to improve things, so I absolutely recognise the point that he makes.

**Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** My hon. Friend was coming on to the point about infrastructure improvements. In Basingstoke, we are grateful to the Government for the amount of money that we have had on infrastructure improvement, but my constituents were really keen when the Government announced that all of these improvements should be cycle-proofed. Will he give us an update on how that cycle-proofing programme is going?

**Jesse Norman:** As my right hon. Friend will know, we are in the middle of a safety review of cycling and walking and of vulnerable road users generally, including horse riders and others. We have not yet reported on that. I expect that we will do so by the end of this year, and we will cover a very wide range of potential interventions that improve cycling safety and that go towards better infrastructure.

**Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con):** I know of my hon. Friend's commitment to cycling, which is very welcome, but is he aware that New York City has recently introduced, very cost-effectively, cycle tracks on resurfaced carriageway? Does he think that that is something that the United Kingdom could learn from as a cost-effective way of making cycling safer?

**Jesse Norman:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I lived in New York City myself for a couple of years and I can tell him that I used to cycle there as well as in London. I am not sure whether it has changed much, but it was a lot less safe then there than it is now in London. We as a Department very much wish to learn from all best practice in this area, and we also encourage local authorities and cities to do so. Part of the function of the money that we have given as a Government to supporting city transformation, which, as he will know, reaches not merely the largest five cities, but now 10 and potentially 12 equally substantial cities across the country is very much designed to enable them to think about the kinds of innovative and imaginative interventions in cycling and walking that might include that approach.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. An area of particular concern in my constituency is road safety in the immediate vicinity of schools and the way in which parents and carers bring their children to school by car, stop pretty well immediately outside the school gate with little regard for the fact that other children are crossing and going in and out of the school premises and then drive off without any concern for the road safety of the children around. What can the Minister say about how we can incentivise and encourage best practice across local authorities to ensure that the highest standards of road safety are in place outside all of our schools?

**Jesse Norman:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention. Of course it is a matter not just of specific behaviour around schools, but of speed and the effects not merely of congestion, but on air quality. I will be touching on some of that later in the speech.

The roads we use are only one part of the overall picture of road safety. Earlier this year, we granted £100 million to improve 50 of the most dangerous stretches of A road in England through the Safer Roads fund. We have already seen all of the 50 road schemes receive funding, and we expect the work to be completed by 2020. I was very pleased to note that, in the Road Safety Foundation's latest publication, "Getting Back on Track", the most improved road is the A161 in the East Riding of Yorkshire. The improvements to this road were joint funded between the Safer Roads fund and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

The Budget last week highlighted the importance of our local road network. The local highway network is one of the most valuable national assets and an essential component of our economy. A good, well-maintained and safe local highway network has never been more important. The House will know that I think we need a substantial approach, and I will outline what that approach is.

Local authorities have an existing legal duty to maintain the highway under section 41 of the Highways Act 1980, as amended. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) wishes to make an intervention, he is very welcome to do so. If he does not, perhaps he would care to stop chuntering from a sedentary position. Good transport and roads are essential to this country's economic growth.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I must say to the Minister that on this occasion I myself was inexcusably chuntering from a sedentary position, for which I apologise. I am normally consumed by the Minister's speeches, but I was chatting to a colleague so I did not witness the offending behaviour. If there was other chuntering beyond my own inexcusable chuntering, it is not excused.

**Jesse Norman:** Mr Speaker, it is kind of you to acknowledge your own temporary distraction, but I am afraid that the one to which I was referring was rather more intentional.

Having roads in an acceptable and safe condition is vital to us all, whether we are car drivers, lorry drivers, bus passengers, cyclists, pedestrians or horse riders. In fact, most of us are more than one of those.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I am very interested in what the Secretary of State has to say about the state of our local roads. If that is such an important issue, why do we have a £9 billion backlog and why did the Budget only address 5% of it?

**Jesse Norman:** As hon. Members know, there are many widespread and varying estimates of the backlog. The Government are putting in place a comprehensive programme. We have already seen the largest investment in strategic roads for, I think—in real terms, certainly—the last generation or more. I would like to think that the excellent investments that we have made in pothole fixing will continue in the years to come, but the hon. Gentleman will know that these things are ultimately dependent on the spending review to be announced next year.

Ministers and Members of Parliament receive plenty of correspondence on the matter of potholes. The condition of the road also regularly appears among the top concerns in public opinion surveys, and this was a major issue raised by respondents to our recent cycling and walking safety review call for evidence. That is why a further £420 million was made available to highways authorities in England outside London for highway maintenance—to support authorities to keep bridges and other structures safe and open, to help repair potholes or stop them forming, and to undertake further minor highway works where necessary. We will be announcing individual allocations to highways authorities shortly, but I am sure that Members across the House will welcome this funding, which comes in addition to over £6 billion that we are providing to local highway authorities in England outside London between 2015 and 2021, including £296 million for a pothole action fund, which is being allocated to local highway authorities between 2016 and 2021 to help repair potholes.

The Chancellor also announced a further £150 million in the Budget to improve local traffic hotspots such as roundabouts. It is our intention that this funding will help to improve existing local road junctions, to ease congestion bottlenecks and to improve reliability—not only to improve access, but to make sure that these junctions are safer for all road users. Further details will be announced in due course.

Infrastructure is one thing but effective education is another. We are improving training for new drivers to familiarise them with the conditions that they will encounter on the roads. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency



is developing new materials to improve learners' awareness of hazards in different weather and lighting conditions. As the House will be aware, new legislation is in force allowing learners on motorways when accompanied by an approved driving instructor. Learner drivers are already gaining experience and we will have a new generation of drivers who are confident in using our motorways.

We are also taking action against the most dangerous kinds of behaviour. Evidence repeatedly shows that the use of mobile phones, and drink and drug driving, give cause for concern. Tackling these dangerous forms of behaviour has long been an element of our road safety strategy.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): The Minister rightly draws attention to some of the dangerous behaviours that people display when driving. May I return to the issue of horses? Would he consider asking for the Highway Code to be amended to incorporate the British Horse Society's "Dead Slow" advice?

**Jesse Norman:** The topic has already been raised. As I have pointed out, there is already guidance relating to horse riders in The Highway Code. I am always delighted to take further suggestions from colleagues and will look further at the question that my hon. Friend raises in the light of this debate.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts). This matter becomes ever more pressing. Across the whole country, rights of way are being salami-sliced, piece by piece; and, piece by piece, horse riders are being forced on to the highway. That is why this matter is important, and its importance will only continue to grow.

**Jesse Norman:** I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is very interesting that he makes the point about not only the danger to horse riders, but the reason for that danger. It is therefore rather important that all the unregistered roads and byways are properly acknowledged, notified and recognised in order to make sure that spaces are available for people to be able to ride happily and safely without having to go on to the highway.

**Andrew Selous:** Further to that point, will the Minister give way?

**Jesse Norman:** I would be happy to, but there are going to be 18 speeches and I have already spoken for—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I just say that everybody thinks that he or she is an exception? The trouble is that if we keep having interventions, we simply will not get through the list; sorry.

**Jesse Norman:** Thank you very much indeed, Mr Speaker.

We have already taken a tougher stance on drivers who use a handheld mobile phone at the wheel. The penalty doubled to six points and a £200 fine last year, which means that drivers face having their licence revoked if they are caught using a mobile phone while driving. Since 2015, repeat drink-drivers have to prove they are not alcohol dependent medically before getting their licence back. We have also removed the right to a blood test for drivers who narrowly fail a breathalyser test.

That has had the effect of denying people the chance to sober up while waiting to take the test. We are also making progress in providing police forces with the next generation of mobile breathalyser equipment, with bids currently being assessed in the £350,000 innovation competition run by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety.

To help the police with drug recognition and impairment testing, we have granted £1 million to police forces in England and Wales for equipment, enforcement and training of officers. Alongside that, we announced in June this year a refreshed road safety statement and a two-year action plan. Rather than take an entirely generalised approach, we are specifically focusing on four priority groups: motorcyclists; rural road users; older, vulnerable users; and young road users. At least three of these groups—young people, rural road users and motorcyclists—are continually over-represented in our road casualty statistics, and we have data to confirm that the safety of older road users is a growing concern. Of course, this too will be informed by work from the new road collision investigation project that we have launched, and I am delighted that that will be bringing us more in-depth qualitative analysis so that we can better understand the underlying causes of crashes and road safety incidents.

We are very focused on the wellbeing of the most vulnerable road users. Last year, the Government published our cycling and walking investment strategy, setting out an ambition that walking or cycling should become the natural choices for shorter journeys. But people will only walk and cycle more if they feel safe to do so, which is why earlier this year we launched a cycling and walking investment strategy safety review call for evidence, seeking views on how best to achieve that. We received 14,000 or so responses from people from every imaginable road-user walk of life, including children, parents, local authorities, police forces and more.

Last month, we published a summary of those responses. We are still carefully analysing all contributions, but some trends have already emerged. One of those—this bears very much on the concerns of those who have spoken about horse riders—is the fear of being close-passed, which is extremely scary. It should be noted that this is not merely being passed from behind—overtaking—but passed from the front. Working to tackle that dangerous behaviour is one of the themes in our response. I have had the chance to visit and see in action the excellent work of the West Midlands police, and to talk to police constables Mark Hodson and Steve Hudson about the great initiative they have taken with their colleagues there. My colleagues and I are working to enable other police forces to follow the West Midlands lead with some additional support.

We are piloting safety training for driving instructors so that they can pass the important knowledge of cycle safety on to their pupils. As I said, we will be reviewing parts of the Highway Code. That review will not only highlight how to avoid the dangers of close passing but encourage people to adopt the Dutch reach—a method of opening a car door with the hand furthest from the handle to force drivers to look over their shoulder for passing traffic. We recognise, as I mentioned, that these issues are equally applicable, in many ways, to horse riders. We should be clear that the cycling and walking strategy may have that name but is absolutely targeted at vulnerable road users, including horse riders.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

**Jesse Norman:** I will, once more, but then I have to get on.

**Dr Wollaston:** I am really glad to hear the Minister talk about close passing, but it is also about the speed of passing, which he has not mentioned. Will he also look closely at 20-mph limits and how they can be enforced?

**Jesse Norman:** I am happy to let my hon. Friend know—or she may know—that we already have a consultation out on this, and we expect to report on that later this year.

Many factors go into making our roads safer, including the road environment, the vehicles we drive and behaviour, but so does enforcement. Last October, the Ministry of Justice published its response to a consultation on the penalties for the most dangerous drivers, and Ministers announced that they will introduce life sentences for killer drivers—an increase on the current 14 years. The Government have said that they will create a new offence of causing serious injury by careless driving, and that Ministers will introduce new legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

I welcome this debate. As the House will see, the Government remain energetic, focused and determined in their efforts to improve road safety.

8.31 pm

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): The Opposition welcome this general debate on road safety. It is a chance to discuss the Government's record. It is also well timed, as last month the Department for Transport published the 2017 road safety statistics. In recent months, there has been a healthy level of debate in Westminster Hall regarding road safety. We have spoken on the fine work of the Bobby Collieran Trust and the effectiveness of "Bobby zones" around schools; about global road safety; and about the launch of influential reports recommending that the Government change tack with regard to road safety. We therefore welcome today's debate in the Chamber.

This country has a proud record on road safety and some of the safest roads in the world. In fact, we have the fourth lowest number of road deaths per million inhabitants, behind only Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. We should rightly be proud of this record. Although it is proper to say that Britain has one of the strongest road safety records in the world, we must also recognise that in recent years our record has stagnated. Ministers have said that the picture is mixed and generally heading in the right direction. We cannot be clearer: it is not. It has stalled since 2010. The number of deaths on the road has remained at about the same level since 2011. One road death is an unacceptable tragedy, never mind almost 1,800 in 2017.

As I mentioned, the Government recently published their 2017 figures for reported road casualties in Great Britain. While there are some positives in this latest statistical release, there is also cause for concern—and Ministers are, I believe, well aware of this. In 2017, 1,793 people were killed on our roads, an average of five people every day—five people a day—and just under 25,000 people were seriously injured. As the road safety charity, Brake, points out, that equates to 73 people a

day either being killed or seriously injured just going about their daily business. Last year's annual total was the highest since 2011. I am sure we can all agree that that is completely unacceptable. There has been a sharp decline, over decades, in the number of people being killed or seriously injured on our roads. I reiterate, however, that the figures have not really changed since 2010.

The Government talk a good game about road safety being a top priority, but I am very sorry to say that their legacy so far is one of disappointment and, indeed, failure. The latest figures from the Department for Transport only reaffirm this. Since 2010, progress has well and truly stalled. Another year of statistics has been published, and we are no further forward.

The Government scrapped road targets that successfully reduced the number of people killed or seriously injured by a third under the last Labour Government. The Government tell the shadow Transport team that targets do not achieve anything. We disagree. The Opposition believe that targets focus awareness and attention and, ultimately, help hold the Government to account. All the evidence points to targets being a proven facilitator of achieving road safety improvements, and yet there are no targets to assess progress. The Government set themselves targets to meet in pretty much every other area of policy, but not for reducing road deaths and injuries. Why is that the case? Ministers will be well aware that the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety concluded in a recent report that the Government should look into introducing key performance indicators for road safety in order to improve safety—in other words, it would like targets to be reintroduced.

I want to return to the 2017 figures and seek answers from the Minister on a number of points. Worryingly, an estimated 9,040 people were killed or injured in drink-drive incidents in 2016. That represents a rise of 7% from 2015 and is the highest number since 2012. The number of accidents where at least one driver or rider was over the alcohol limit rose by 6% in 2016. I would like to know what plans the Government have to address that.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Would the hon. Gentleman support measures to reduce the allowable drink-drive limit, such as those that the Scottish National party Government have introduced in Scotland?

**Matt Rodda:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. That should be looked at and reviewed across the UK as a whole.

I would like to move on to another aspect of this very important area. The 2017 release stated:

"The population of older people (aged 70 and older) has increased relatively rapidly over recent years. This carries implications for higher levels of casualties in this age group in the future."

What do Ministers propose to do to address that issue? The Minister touched on it, but much more detail is needed. With an ageing population, older road users could become much more vulnerable.

At the other end of the age scale, it is encouraging to hear that the overall number of child casualties of all severities decreased by 2% to 15,721, which is one of the lowest years on record. However, I am sure we can all agree that this figure remains far too high and that the Government must strive to make our roads safer still, especially for vulnerable road users.

Between 2010 and 2016, the number of deaths from road accidents remained broadly consistent, as we have heard. However, the number of pedestrians killed on our roads increased.

**Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that far too many drivers of motor vehicles still seem to assume they always take precedence and that we need a fundamental change in attitude towards pedestrians and cyclists, so that car and lorry drivers start treating non-drivers with respect?

**Matt Rodda:** I agree with my hon. Friend's suggestion. He makes an interesting point.

I return to the wider point about vulnerable road users. Although the number of cyclists killed on the roads in 2017 was slightly lower than in 2016, the 101 deaths was very similar to the levels seen since 2010. If we look at where those fatal accidents occurred, of the 1,793 road deaths in 2017, just over 1,000—or 60%—took place on country roads, 626 occurred on urban roads and 99 took place on motorways. That is a 2% increase since 2016. While the number of people injured on motorways has decreased, there was a 6% increase in the number of deaths on motorways. How does the Minister plan to address that important and worrying statistic?

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that car advertisements often make people—and particularly younger drivers—feel as if they are invincible to any form of injury, so safe have cars become, according to the ads, which can encourage them to drive in a less focused way?

**Matt Rodda:** I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about younger drivers. They are vulnerable, and we arguably need a better education programme.

To return to my speech, we welcome the targeted approach of the Safer Roads fund to enable local authorities to improve the most dangerous stretches of A roads in England. The fund initially totalled £175 million, of which £100 million is currently being invested. However, the other £75 million originally allocated has been described by the Minister as no longer required. Will the Minister explain why the Department believes this to be the case?

I found it interesting that the RAC Foundation and the Road Safety Foundation recently published a report on the possible benefits of the Safer Roads fund, which estimates that it could prevent almost 1,400 deaths and serious injuries over the next two decades on these very risky A roads in England. Given the need to save lives and the evidence that this fund makes a difference, surely it is important that we spend all the money in the fund. Hazardous A roads across England were denied funding to improve safety for not being dangerous enough. The Transport Network has also asked the Department for Transport what will happen to this money. Again, I urge the Minister to reply on this point later.

The Minister was asked about regulations for tyre safety by my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) during the passage of the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill in May. He replied that the Government had a process in mind. He has acknowledged that this is a serious issue. Tyres of

up to 20 years old have been causing great concern in my area of the Thames valley; and there was a horrific accident in Hampshire a few years ago. I ask the Minister also to respond on this point, if he can, and say where the Government have got to on that important issue.

Opposition Members are also concerned about enforcement, particularly as there has been a 24% fall in the number of traffic officers since 2012. Sadly, that has been part of the Government's austerity programme. There was no mention in the recent Budget of extra money for regular policing, and since the Conservatives came to power, 21,000 police officers have had their posts cut. In 2010, there were 3,500 police officers patrolling UK roads, but by 2017 that had fallen to just 2,600. It seems that Government cuts to our vital services are putting safety at risk. Austerity is not over, despite the repeated claims from the Government and the Prime Minister, and that is affecting all areas, including road safety.

Two years ago, the Transport Committee produced its "Road traffic law enforcement" review. It concluded:

"As the number of traffic police has fallen, so too has the number of road traffic offences detected. However, the number of 'causing death' offences...has not fallen. This...suggests that the reduction in overall offences that are recorded does not represent a reduction in offences actually being committed."

As I have said, the latest road safety figures show there has been an increase in the number of deaths of pedestrians and motorcyclists. The number of cyclists killed has remained broadly constant since 2010. Will the Minister address that issue in his closing remarks?

As the Minister said, the Department for Transport is currently undertaking a cycling and walking investment strategy review. I believe the review is to be welcomed, especially the inclusion of pedestrians. I ask the Minister, who will know that my shadow ministerial brief covers cycling and walking, how he will ensure that this review achieves safer walking and cycling, in line with the cycling and walking strategy's ambitions.

We welcome the Government's recent announcement of plans to revise the Highway Code rules relating to pedestrians' and cyclists' safety, as campaigned for by many charities and cycling and walking groups. When the Government are carrying out this review, I hope that they will listen to the sector's concerns, which include speed limits, the use of mobile phones, rules on how much space HGVs and other vehicles should leave when overtaking cyclists—the close passing that the Minister mentioned—and, indeed, how to open car doors safely.

In summary, in our 2017 manifesto Labour pledged to reset the UK's road safety vision and ambitiously strive for a transport network with zero deaths, reintroducing road-safety targets and setting out bold measures to improve safety standards continuously. A future Labour Government would introduce a "target zero" approach to deaths on the roads—a new approach to road safety that does not accept that road deaths and injuries are inevitable. Beyond the obvious benefits to families and society, this policy brings significant financial benefits from avoiding NHS bills, care bills, the costs of transport delays, and costs of lost earnings and production. May I ask the Minister when the Government will commit to such a "target zero" approach?

[*Matt Rodda*]

Finally, I would like to close by saying that although we have one of the safest road networks in the world, which should be celebrated, we should never ever be complacent. More could be done, and a Labour Government would do more. We will continue to press the Government on this matter, and we welcome today's debate.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Tracey Crouch.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Tracey Crouch** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a pleasure—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I apologise to the hon. Lady. The five-minute limit on speeches takes effect now. We will restart the clock for the speech of the hon. Lady, who can perhaps be given a second warm welcome. I call Tracey Crouch.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

8.44 pm

**Tracey Crouch:** It is a pleasure to speak first in this important debate, thus cementing my status as a former Minister who has resumed their old place on the Back Benches.

I could speak about many issues, including the protection of horses, which others have mentioned, and the worrying growth in young drivers who use seatbelt alarm disablers, which my local fire and rescue service raised.

However, I want to use the brief time I have to raise two very different issues. One was brought to my attention by a local resident, but is of national importance, and the other is a local issue, but is no doubt occurring nationwide.

A month ago, I met my constituent, Sam Cockerill, in my office and heard how her partner, Steve Goldbold, was killed instantly in September 2017 after an HGV strayed on to the hard shoulder of the M25 and hit him while he recovered the vehicle of someone who had broken down. From talking to others in the industry, Sam heard about other recovery operators who had been killed while performing their duties. She also heard how recovery operators live in constant fear while working on the hard shoulder, but got a sense that their voice was not being heard by lawmakers. So in September, she, along with a number of industry figures, launched the Campaign for Safer Roadside Rescue and Recovery, and I want, through this debate, to add my support to it.

I am a confident driver, but I am petrified of breaking down on a motorway, particularly with the enormous increase in the amount of traffic, especially heavy traffic, on our roads and the continued roll-out of all-lane-running motorways to cope with it. However, if I were to break down, I know I can go and sit up on the bank away from the dangers of travelling vehicles—of course, that is not an option for recovery workers. I therefore think that the campaign's asks to protect those workers are not unreasonable.

First, there is a request for roadside rescue and recovery operators to be able to use prominent red lights while attending accidents and breakdowns. At present, they are only permitted to be fitted with and use amber

warning beacons while attending incidents. There are two reasons why using red lights makes sense. First, there is a scientific phenomenon called the Rayleigh effect, which means the red light can be seen further away. Secondly, the colour red elicits a more serious reaction, whether consciously or subconsciously, in the minds of road users approaching a hazard and drivers adjust accordingly.

The second ask is for the Department for Transport to collect data on the number of casualties specifically among recovery workers, as there is currently not a specific variable that captures the number of deaths and injuries of roadside operatives in accidents.

The third ask is to build on the important work done by the Slow Down, Move Over campaign, which seeks to improve awareness through the highway code of protocol for motorists when approaching the scene of an accident or a broken down vehicle. In the USA, the Slow Down, Move Over laws were implemented, and are now in place across all 50 states. Failure to abide by the law is punishable as a moving traffic offence, the same type of offence as drink-driving or speeding.

Finally, the campaign calls for the Government to halt the roll-out of all-lane-running motorways and to implement so-called smart motorways in a way that takes account of the rights of those who work on the hard shoulder, particularly recovery operators.

The campaign is for all those roadside and recovery workers who have experienced near misses or lost their lives, such as my constituent Sam's partner, Steve. I would be grateful if the Minister in his response committed to meeting me, Sam and others to discuss the matter further so that we can make progress in protecting those who come to our rescue when we need it on our roads.

My next brief point is very different from the first, and is about safety on local roads, particularly roads affected by major housing developments. I have many local road safety issues, relating to junctions such as that at Bull Lane in Eccles or Walderslade Road, Chestnut Avenue or Luton Arches in Chatham, but I really want to emphasise the problems that the village of Wouldham faces as a consequence of poor traffic modelling relating to the new development of Peter's Village.

In summary, as part of the planning agreement for the new village, a new bridge was built over the River Medway to provide a direct route on to the A228, which in itself provides a link to the M20, the M2 and the fast train to London from Snodland. The plans for that development were all agreed long before I was even the candidate, let alone the MP for Chatham and Aylesford, but it was clear that the fears of Wouldham village that it would become a victim of rat running to the bridge were dismissed and now the safety of residents is at risk.

Residents were reassured that the road modelling had been done and that it was believed that vehicles would go the long way round both in distance and time to get to the bridge, but the village is under siege. The volume and speed of vehicles travelling along the main road to get to the bridge creates a real fear, which I share, that it is only a matter of time until there is an accident. I have worked hard behind the scenes to try to alleviate the problem, and now are we beginning to make some small steps of progress, but the matter would not have got to this point if we had a better system of predictive modelling. Frankly, I think I could have done better modelling on my two-year-old's car mat.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Thirteen more Back Benchers wish to speak, of which I know the hon. Gentleman will sensitively take account. I call Alan Brown.

8.50 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch). I commend her for her principled stand last week on fixed odds betting terminals. I wish her all the best for the future.

This debate, while quite clearly on a serious subject, is a big indicator of the moribund nature of the Government at present. We are having a general debate in the main Chamber, when it could truthfully have been held in Westminster Hall. Indeed, there was a Westminster Hall debate on this very topic just two weeks ago and there is a forthcoming Backbench Business debate.

The key issues raised two weeks ago are going to resurface tonight, so it would be good if the Minister summing up could actually address these matters properly and say what the Government are doing about them. For example, we still take an eye test by reading a number plate from 20 metres. That test was introduced in 1937. Surely we can modernise that? Drivers should have their eyesight tested more regularly. My eyesight has changed as I have got older. I now have to wear reading glasses, unfortunately. It is clear that that happens to many people, so why are drivers not required to get their eyesight tested more regularly? The Scottish Government still provide free eye tests, so that would not be an enormous burden on people. Perhaps the United Kingdom Government could look at doing that in terms of general health and wellbeing.

If the Tory Government are really serious about road safety, surely they will follow the lead of the Scottish National party Government and reduce the drink-driving limit. In Scotland, it has been reduced from allowable limits of 80 mg per 100 ml of blood to just 50 mg per 100 ml. That measure was initially met with scepticism by Opposition politicians. At the time, Tory MSPs were telling us that it would result in the police hounding wee old women and grannies who were just having a couple of gin and tonics, while real hardcore criminals would be getting off scot-free. But that is not what has happened. Since it was introduced, there has actually been a reduction in the number of drink-driving convictions. It is helping to bring about a change in culture, with people not wanting to risk drink-driving. It is time for the UK Government to have a rethink and to move away from having the joint highest drink-driving limits in Europe.

As the shadow Minister said, if the UK Government were serious about road safety they would have a target for reducing roadside fatalities. The Scottish Government have a target of a 40% reduction in road deaths between 2010 and 2020. The UK Government need to sign up to the UN target to halve the number of road deaths. The UN target came about partly because, according to the World Health Organisation, road accidents are the tenth leading cause of death globally. The number of people killed in road accidents across the world is just under that for deaths from tuberculosis, which is in ninth place, but it is predicted that road deaths will become

the seventh highest killer of people across the world. Given that politicians sign up to causes for the eradication of various diseases, it follows that they need to work better and be stronger about this global issue.

In 2017, there were 170,993 accident casualties recorded on Britain's roads, of which 1,793 were fatal. The long-term trend, especially in the past few decades, is a reduction in the numbers killed and injured from road accidents. The reality, however, is that each fatality is a tragedy for the families involved. Each fatality will also involve the emergency services, who have to deal with road traffic collisions. I pay tribute to their work, which is often overlooked. It can be very emotional and traumatic for them. The long-term decline in fatalities coincided with the introduction of drink-driving laws in 1966. There has been a general downward trend, except for a recent plateau. The obvious impact of the 1966 measure underlines the need to reconsider the current levels, especially as we now have better evidence of the impact of alcohol in the blood system.

Another way to tackle road safety is road upgrades to tackle accident blackspots and/or ways to reduce congestion and keep traffic moving more freely. I remind the House that another Union dividend that we in Scotland suffered for years was the lack of investment in Scotland's road systems. It has taken the Scottish National party coming to power to really push this agenda. We now have the new M74 link from Glasgow, the M80 motorway, the £500 million M8, M74 and M73 upgrades, and, of course, the new Queensferry Crossing. Imagine—until recently, there was not even a continuous motorway connecting Glasgow and Edinburgh.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is it not the case that before these Scottish Government investments, the last time that significant investment happened in the road infrastructure in Scotland, particularly in the highlands where I grew up, was as a result of European Union funding? Perhaps that is one reason why people have seen the benefits of the European Union in Scotland and why we voted so heavily to remain.

**Alan Brown:** I completely agree, and I am going to touch on that. Funding for the recent upgrades has been provided from the European Investment Bank, so we want to know what will replace that source because we have heard nothing from the Government about that. My hon. Friend mentioned the highlands, where many roads are still single-track with passing places, and these are sometimes lifeline roads. The trunk road from Fort William to Mallaig, the road to the isles, was only upgraded to a continuous two-lane carriageway in 2009; it was the last remaining single-track trunk road in the UK. Again, that was thanks in part to £3 million of European regional development fund money and European transitional fund assistance, so he is right. It is proof that if Scotland had not been able to access that money from the EU and had been reliant just on the Westminster purse strings, we would not have been getting the money for these vital road upgrades.

Going forward, at the Budget we heard about Barnett consequentials—well, living off Barnett scraps is not the way it should be. It is not how we can do long-term planning. It is a reactive measure to decisions that are made in England, for England, and we should not have to rely on these scraps from the table.

[Alan Brown]

Other measures that can be introduced for road safety include such things as average speed cameras in a bid to change driver behaviour. The introduction of those on the A9 in Scotland was not popular and was cynically hijacked by Opposition politicians, yet since the cameras were introduced, the number of fatalities has been reduced by 40%. They have also been successfully introduced on the A77 and the A90, but the success of those on the A9 demonstrates not only how important these measures can be, but that politicians should act responsibly and not oppose for opposition's sake.

When analysing accident statistics, it is clear which three groups of road users are most vulnerable: pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. Too many short journeys are made by car. Statistically, these should be safer for the occupants of the car, so if we want to get more people walking and cycling, we need to make sure that people feel reassured that that can be done safely. The Scottish Government have announced a community links fund that will make £36 million available over the current financial year to develop walking and cycling paths, and this is certainly a welcome step forward. When we look at motorcyclists, we see that that group has around 6,000 casualties per 1 billion miles travelled and a fatality rate of just under 117 per 1 billion miles travelled. Pedal cyclists have similar statistics, yet car occupants have a casualty rate of 238 per 1 billion miles travelled and a fatality rate of 1.9 per 1 billion miles travelled. There is a huge disparity, which needs to be addressed.

Turning to targets, the Scottish Government have committed through "Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2020" to achieving safer road travel. This maps out intermediate targets, and I am pleased to say that we are well on our way to achieving these. In 2016, the Scottish Government's road safety framework was awarded a prestigious Prince Michael international road safety award for outstanding achievements and strong collaboration with partners. I suggest that the UK considers the work that has been done.

Clearly, it is illegal to drive while impaired by drugs. Scottish Government plans to introduce new drug-driving limits will allow prosecutions when different drug types are detected above specified limits. This is simply intended to make it easier to hold drug-drivers to account, as there will be no requirement to prove that someone was driving in an impaired manner. The introduction of roadside testing means that this can be done without needing to look at whether somebody was driving in an impaired manner.

As other hon. Members have mentioned in interventions, another vulnerable cohort is horse riders. I live in a rural constituency with lots of minor country roads that are great for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, providing, of course, that vehicle drivers pay attention. I know myself to give respect and plenty of room to horse riders, but unfortunately not all car users do. Several of my constituents, including the chair of north Ayrshire riding club, have contacted me to express their concern that horse riders and carriages have not been included in the Department for Transport's review of the Highway Code. I share their concern and that of the British Horse Society, which has highlighted the fact that, over a seven-year period, 40 horse riders and 237 horses have been killed as a consequence of road injuries. Why not include them in the review?

I also echo the call for the Minister to consider strengthening section 215 of the Highway Code to include the British Horse Society's "dead slow" advice to drivers.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making some good points on horses. Mine is an urban constituency, but we often get police horses going about the city, so it is important that different road users—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am extremely grateful, but I think the hon. Gentleman is approaching his peroration.

**Alan Brown:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, as I am sure the whole House does—I am sure hon. Members listened carefully.

I finish with one reminder to the Minister about community transport and the proposed changes to section 19 and 22 permits. I have written to him on this subject. I have a local transport group still concerned that measures the Government are introducing will cost a lot of money. It provides a vital service transporting people and keeping them safe, and I urge him to consider that as well.

9.1 pm

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Road safety deserves the close attention of the House and was the subject of a debate I was pleased to secure only last month in Westminster Hall. My debate made it clear that colleagues from across the House shared my view, and I was pleased to see lots of them turning out. I am delighted that the Government have recognised this point in dedicating time in the Chamber today. I was also very flattered that, following my efforts to raise the profile of road safety, Brake made me its road safety parliamentarian of the month for October.

As I stated in my debate, 1,793 people were killed in road crashes in Great Britain last year, which is 1,793 too many, while the Government estimate that road traffic collisions cost the UK economy in excess of £16.3 billion a year. In Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire alone, all accidents involving speed cost the economy on average £32.5 million annually—costs that could be reduced if we made our roads safer. In September, PACTS released its report, "Developing safe system road safety indicators for the UK", produced in association with Ageas, one of our largest motor insurance companies, with a number of its people based in my constituency. The report focuses on a more systemic approach to road safety, with better indicators and data to assess the dangers.

Next week, on Wednesday 15 November, Ageas will be releasing a new interactive tool to provide information on the most dangerous roads in any area. It also worked in partnership with the Road Safety Foundation to produce last month's "Getting Back On Track" report—the Minister has already referred to it—which unfortunately put the societal cost of road traffic crashes at £35 billion in 2017. I am sure that many Members will agree that that is a shocking figure. The report also states that 73 people are killed or seriously injured every day. The key concern of the report is to improve the rate at which the number of road deaths is falling. Sadly, it has plateaued in recent years.

It is also important that we take local action. As the Government's road safety statement notes, 98% of the road network in England comprises local roads, and local action needs to be encouraged and respected, but there is also an essential duty on the Department to get on with initiatives that spread good practice between local authorities. It is not just about speed either; there are a range of other road safety concerns. Across the country, partnerships like ours in Staffordshire are increasingly delivering a step change in the approach of local service providers. They are focusing on much more holistic and preventive methods, and communities are taking the lead.

Last Friday, *The Sentinel*—the local and proud newspaper of Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire—ran a front-page headline reporting that the shocking number of 877 drivers had been caught speeding by the police in just four months on the A500, the main arterial route through Stoke-on-Trent. The central motorway police group took over the policing of the road in the summer, following 26 fatal crashes in the preceding 10 years. The group is not picking on motorists who are just a mile or two per hour over the limit, as we might expect. Some motorists are travelling at between 60 mph and, on occasion, up to 90 mph on a road with a 50-mph limit. I am sure many Members agree that that is a shocking amount over the speed limit and that we need to get on top of the problem.

Thanks to the lobbying that we have been doing, Highways England traffic officers are regularly patrolling the busiest parts of the A500 and the A50 through Stoke-on-Trent. They are helping to ensure that, when incidents occur, they are managed as safely as possible and to reduce the number of further collisions and the knock-on disruption. I hope that the Minister will join me in commending the work that the police and highways officers are doing in Stoke-on-Trent and in commending *The Sentinel* for giving such prominence to this issue.

9.6 pm

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab):** Many Members on both sides of the House have already commented on the plight of horses and horse riders, which, I think, shows the power of the British horse lobby.

This debate is particularly important in the light of a recent report by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, which states that since 2010, there has been no significant reduction in the number of people killed on UK roads. That shows that the Government need to do more to improve the safety of our road network.

I want to speak specifically about the review of the Highway Code. I understand that the review, which was announced by the Minister last month, focuses on

“how road users should behave in relation to cyclists and pedestrians”.

I welcome the review and any steps that are taken to make our roads safer for all, particularly those who are vulnerable on the roads, but I believe that there is an omission in the definition of vulnerable road users in the review, which was commissioned by the Minister. It is extremely important for cyclists and pedestrians to be protected on our roads, but I believe that horse riders should be included and categorised as vulnerable road users.

According to the British Horse Society, there are 2.7 million horse riders in the UK. This year, the society reported that since 2010 there had been more than 2,914 reports of road incidents involving horses, in which, sadly, 237 horses had died and 40 riders had lost their lives. Those statistics speak for themselves, and the safety of horse riders and their vulnerability on the roads should be taken very seriously.

Rule 215 of the Highway Code provides guidance for drivers in relation to horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles. It states:

“Be particularly careful of horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles especially when overtaking. Always pass wide and slowly.

Horse riders are often children, so take extra care and remember riders may ride in double file when escorting a young or inexperienced horse or rider.”

The current rules for riding a horse on the road, rules 49 to 55, state, among other things, that riders should keep to the left, keep both hands on the reins unless they are signalling, and keep both feet in the stirrups. The Department for Transport's THINK! campaign also provides guidance for horse riders on the roads.

It is the responsibility of local authorities to erect traffic signs to alert drivers to accompanied horses or ponies and to position them where there are stables or where riders cross roads from one bridleway to another. However, since the debate was announced, a number of my constituents, including many equestrians and members of communities with a large population of horse riders, have expressed concern that signs are not being erected or are not being replaced when they fall down. They feel that the Government should do more to tackle the problem.

The many keen horse riders in my constituency have expressed dismay that they have been left out of the review of the Highway Code. Furthermore, many of the roads in my constituency are narrow country roads, which are particularly dangerous when shared by horse riders and vehicles. That is why campaigns such as the British Horse Society's “Dead Slow” campaign, which aims to educate drivers on driving at a maximum of 15 mph when passing horse riders, to be patient and not sound their horn, to pass widely—at least a car's width if possible—and to drive away slowly, are so important. Some 85% of incidents between horse riders and vehicles occur because a car driver is driving too close to a horse and its rider.

I therefore have a simple request for the Minister: for these reasons, I am asking that he considers widening the review of the Highway Code and understands that horse riders are vulnerable on our roads as well, not just cyclists and pedestrians. This review should include a strengthening of rule 215 of the Highway Code to include the four messages of the “Dead Slow” campaign, so that our roads can be safer and there can be more awareness and education of how to safely pass horse riders on our roads.

9.10 pm

**Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore). I also warmly welcome the work the Minister has done to improve safety for all road users, especially cyclists and pedestrians, and will use my time to touch on two local issues that are very important to my constituents in Redditch.

[Rachel Maclean]

First, I pay tribute to an impressive lady called Lucy Harrison, who is a local representative of a charity called RoadPeace. She has made considerable efforts in fundraising and raising awareness of the impact of speeding after her brother was, tragically, killed in a road accident. He was a pedestrian hit by a reckless driver travelling at double the speed limit and was killed instantly. The accident was investigated, and a post-mortem was performed on Lucy's brother within 48 hours, but during the trial the defence counsel requested a second post-mortem, and this did not take place for three months. That was over the Christmas period, and we can only imagine the agony and distress of her and her family during this time. The burial process was severely delayed, denying Lucy and her family a chance to say goodbye to her brother until a long time after his death. The admirable charity RoadPeace is doing excellent work on this issue, and many second post-mortems take place as a result of road traffic accidents, so this is ultimately a matter of road safety.

There is widespread confusion regarding a defendant's right to a second post-mortem. I recently met the excellent Justice Minister my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) to discuss this matter and he assures me that new guidance is currently being drafted by the Chief Coroner. However, through the Minister's work in improving road safety, the incidence of even first post-mortems can be avoided, so the pain and anguish of many families who have to experience loss as a result of road traffic accident can be reduced.

I believe more can be done by local councils, which leads me on to the second issue I would like to briefly raise, and in doing so I pay tribute to another constituent, Katie Houghton. She runs a mental health awareness project called Midlands Messages of Hope, which simply seeks to reduce suicide. It is a superb local initiative, but I was saddened by Worcestershire County Council's actions in tearing down more than 150 heartfelt messages of hope attached to the Muskett's Way footbridge in Redditch. It is a place where people have been known to take their own lives, although the suicide rate is no higher in Redditch than elsewhere. The bridge spans a busy road, the Bromsgrove highway, and those messages are intended to make those who are on the edge think again, and they work alongside Samaritans signs that are also displayed. It is claimed that similar initiatives elsewhere save lives, so I implore the council to rethink its policy. Suicides can of course cause accidents, which makes that bridge and road in my constituency dangerous, and people perceive it as dangerous.

Road safety affects us all, both those who drive and those who do not. I am approached by constituents on a number of issues, but speeding is always at the top of the list, particularly in areas like Feckenham. People are always asking for more ways to tackle speeding. An Opposition Member mentioned speeding around schools and we all want children to be safe.

I must mention horses, because mine is a rural constituency. I support the very effective "Dead Slow" campaign to keep horses and their riders safe.

I should like to mention driving licences for dementia sufferers. I have written to the Minister about this before. I am the daughter of a dementia sufferer, and I had to go through the process of having my mother

tested for driving and basically having to get her off the road because she was a danger to herself and others. That process was incredibly difficult and traumatic, especially as she lacked the awareness that she was an unsafe driver, which is itself the result of the disease of dementia. Please will the Minister look again at this policy area? Unfortunately, dementia is increasing, and I am sure that more and more of us will be touched by this sad state of affairs.

I am pleased that more investment has been made by the Minister, and I hope that this will help us to maintain our safe roads. We must keep the focus on that issue. We must decrease the amount of accidents that happen on our roads, reduce risks and protect vulnerable people, and we must always work to prevent the pain and grief that are caused by an unsafe road environment.

9.15 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean). Road safety is an issue that I repeatedly raise in the House, and I welcome the opportunity to debate it in the Chamber this evening. We all know what a vital issue it is, and it affects many of our constituents, often tragically. In West Yorkshire, 815 people were killed or seriously injured in road traffic incidents last year. In my constituency, more children are killed or seriously injured on our roads than almost anywhere else in the country. I know that it is ambitious, but we should aim to eliminate road deaths and serious injuries entirely in the UK. Vision Zero seeks to do exactly that, and I urge the Government to look into that approach.

Clearly we will need a wide variety of tools in order to achieve that, and one crucial part is a tougher criminal justice approach. It was for this reason that I warmly welcomed the Government's announcement in October 2017 that they would bring in longer sentences for drivers who killed through dangerous or careless driving, as well as the announcement of a new offence of causing serious injury through careless driving. I pay tribute to all those who campaigned for this change, including the road safety charity Brake, but we are now over a year on, and the Government have still not delivered on their commitment. In fact, we are no closer to those changes being made.

Ministers are now claiming that the changes will be incorporated into a review of cycle safety, but I have to say that that is completely unacceptable. It is right, of course, that the Government should look at the laws around cycling in order to make it safer for all road users, but it is not good enough that already-announced changes on sentencing are being rolled into the open-ended process. I really hope the Minister will listen and set out exactly when parliamentary time will be available to bring these changes into effect. The delay is adding to the suffering that families face when they lose loved ones.

Turning to another criminal justice issue, we must ensure that the exceptional hardship rule, which allows drivers to keep their licence even when they have reached 12 points, is not abused. Data from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency show that more than 200 people in Bradford alone successfully used that argument last year and escaped a ban. There are 11,000 drivers across Britain who still have their driving licences despite passing the 12-point limit. We are allowing unsafe drivers



to remain on our roads, and ultimately we are putting people at risk. Anyone who reaches 12 points should expect to be banned. Anything less makes a mockery of our road laws.

Of course, our laws are an effective deterrent only if they are properly enforced. For this we need well-resourced police forces that are able to patrol our roads, proactively tackle dangerous driving and bring those who break the law to justice. It is for this reason that the cuts to frontline policing caused by a reduction in funding from this Government are extremely worrying. On top of the 30% cuts in West Yorkshire since 2010, police forces across the country are facing an additional £165 million unexpected pensions bill, which will lead to even fewer officers. Prior to the Budget, I raised the issue of police pensions with the Prime Minister, and I wrote to her about it on 26 October. Unfortunately, I have not yet received a response. We cannot keep people safe on the cheap, and we cannot keep roads our safe without sufficient resources. If the Government are serious about making our roads safer, they must properly fund police budgets.

Finally, I would like to mention graduated driving licences, which allow new drivers to build up their driving skills and experience gradually, in well-defined, structured stages. There is clear evidence that a graduated licence system would make our roads safer, by reducing the number of young people involved in car accidents. Drivers aged 17 to 24 currently make up only 7% of drivers, but they represent nearly 20% of the people killed or seriously injured in car crashes. To conclude, I would like to return to that Vision Zero ambition to eliminate road deaths and serious injuries in the UK entirely. Ambitious, yes, but we owe it to the families who have lost loved ones to do everything we can to reduce deaths and make our roads safer for all.

9.19 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), and I want to make four points in this important debate on road safety. First, on vehicle safety standards, it is great news that the past decade has seen a 39% drop in road fatalities, but that is not just down to luck. Some of that reduction is due to the fact that our vehicles are better designed for safety, which is partly thanks to decades of work between the UK and other EU countries on EU safety standards. As we leave the EU, we will be encouraged by other parts of the world, such as America, to adopt other standards, but there are reasons why standards sometimes diverge. For example, Europe has narrower roads, with more pedestrians, so we build bigger bumpers on our cars, but cars in America flip over more often due to how the highways are designed. We do not need their standards, and they would not want ours, so let us continue to work with Europe on the car safety standards that have introduced, for example, airbags, ABS systems and other more advanced safety measures.

Secondly, many Chelmsford cyclists have written to me asking me to raise awareness. Chelmsford is a high-growth area, and we need to encourage people to get out of their cars and on to alternative transport. East Anglia is quite flat, so people are happy to use cycles, but they need to feel safe. We are investing more in cycle paths, but Cycling UK also has important proposals to

ensure that there is more in the Highway Code to prohibit pavement parking and to encourage more cycle training and the use of the “Dutch reach” whereby drivers have to look over their shoulder when opening the door.

Thirdly, we need to raise awareness of what to do when a police siren goes off when someone is driving. I spent a day and a night on call with the police over the summer, crossing my constituency six times at top speed with the blue lights flashing, which clearly scared many drivers. We need an awareness campaign about how to get off the road safely to allow emergency vehicles to pass.

My last point is about horse riders. I am told that Essex has the highest level of horse ownership in the country, but my constituency is almost entirely urban. If one goes on that amazing source of data that is Facebook, one can see that 960 people in my constituency like tennis—like you, Mr Speaker—1,800 like hockey, but 3,800 like horse riding, and they are mostly women. Women are nine times more likely to ride horses—it is the top outdoor pursuit for women. People on horses have a right to be on the road, and riders often have to use a road, even if only for a short time, to get to a bridleway or another safe place.

I admit to having been an experienced rider in the past, but I got back on a horse this summer and found it absolutely terrifying. It was not just about the amount of traffic, but the lack of driver awareness of what they need to do if they see a horse. Drivers need to pass wide and pass slow, and they must remember that if two horses are riding side by side, that could be because there is an inexperienced rider or a young horse. Finally, please do not beep the horn—that really is spooky for horses. I have been concerned by stories of some drivers finding it fun to be unsafe when a horse is nearby. It is not fun; it is deeply dangerous, and 40 people and over 200 horses have lost their lives.

We need more driver awareness, and one solution could be to use the bit of time between a learner taking their multiple-choice theory test at the test centre and getting the results. All those new learner drivers need to wait for their results, and the British Horse Society has some fantastic virtual reality headsets that will give those new learners a quick experience of what it is like to be on a horse when a car goes past too fast. Maybe we could use that little bit of time to do just a little more driver awareness.

9.24 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). I am grateful to various organisations for their briefings on this evening’s debate, including PACTS, Brake, Cycling UK, the Road Safety Foundation, Guide Dogs, Ageas and the Towards Zero Foundation. I have two main comments, one about language and one about why road safety is a constituency issue, as well as a national and international one.

First, we as politicians know that language is crucial, which is why we should, and the emergency services do, now speak of “road traffic crashes” and not “road traffic accidents.” We should know now, if we did not know before, that most incidents, and the consequent statistics of people killed or seriously injured, could have been avoided if humans had made positive decisions.

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

They are not accidents; they are avoidable tragedies. If drivers had only observed the rules on speed, drink, drugs, mobile phone usage, seatbelts and the rest, those lives could have been spared.

I am also struck that Brake describes the failure to cut the number of deaths and serious injuries in recent years as figures that have “stagnated”. Many commentators, including me and the Minister, have used the word “plateau” but, on reflection, that suggests high ground and achievement. “Stagnated”, however, suggests something entirely different, negative and certainly not nice.

On the question of targets, as raised by a number of colleagues, in May the Department for Transport published an independent capacity review on road safety by Systra. Among its recommendations were:

“Set interim quantitative targets to 2030 to reduce the numbers of deaths and serious injuries”.

And:

“Set measurable interim targets to 2030 to reduce the numbers of deaths and serious injuries with supporting road safety performance objectives, as proposed for the national framework.”

As well as this independent review, deaths and serious injuries as a result of road traffic crashes have been recognised by the United Nations and the World Health Organisation as an international crisis—1.25 million dead and 20 million seriously injured every year—and they are now subject to two sustainable development goals. SDGs 3.6 and 11.2 recommend a target of halving the number of people killed or seriously injured by 2030. The Government signed up to those goals and published the Systra recommendations, so why will they not formally endorse targets as part of the weaponry to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries?

The UK fire service has a proud record in international aid, including providing second-hand fire engines and other equipment, unused kit from brigades and supply chains, and training and advice. That has been happening for decades, and not just following disasters. The charity Fire Aid, which I chair, especially provides pillar 5 post-crash response. It is hugely frustrating that UK aid from the Department for International Development has billions of taxpayers’ pounds to distribute but cannot support small charities like Fire Aid, which is saving lives in 40 countries around the world and delivering soft diplomacy for UK plc.

I said at the beginning of my contribution that this is as much a local issue as a national or international one. In Poplar and Limehouse 190 people were killed or seriously injured between 2011 and 2016. Twenty-two were under the age of 16, and 78 were between 16 and 29. RTCs are the biggest killer of our young people nationally.

Investment in road safety not only saves lives but makes economic sense. Each year road crashes cost UK plc £35 billion, or 2% of our GDP. For every £1 invested, £4.40 of monetary value is created. This not only makes economic sense; it makes human sense, too.

Road safety should not be a party political issue. The Minister is held in high regard as a man of integrity. There is an opportunity here for him to reset our efforts, to give leadership and provide ambition and to reduce our KSI—killed or seriously injured—statistics. I look forward to him delivering, but I think he needs targets in his campaign.

9.28 pm

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) in what has been a powerful debate.

Cars can kill, and I start by telling the story of two Sarahs. Sarah Childs, 22 years old, crossed Walsall Road with her 20-year-old sister and was mown down by a driver doing 64 miles per hour. Sarah died instantly. Bizarrely, the driver got four years in prison and a four-year driving ban, and he started serving the ban on his first day in prison. We campaigned together with Avril, the grieving mother, to get the law changed, and I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who agreed to the law changes so that, in future, the prison sentence and the driving ban are served consecutively.

Sarah Giles, a 20-year-old much loved by her family, was killed by a speeding car fleeing a police chase. A car flew through the air, as her car was rammed at high speed. John and Sharon Giles, her loving parents, are absolutely distraught over what has happened. Avril has come together with John and Sharon to say, “Why is it that the Government 13 months ago agreed that tougher penalties should in future apply for drivers who kill with a car and there has been no action yet taken?” Nothing will ever bring back their daughters, but they want at least to contribute towards ensuring that never again should anyone suffer as they have suffered.

I come then to the story of Poppy-Arabella Clarke, a wonderful little three-year-old girl who was crossing the Chester Road with her mother. She was on a pedestrian crossing when she was hit by a 72-year-old driver and killed instantly. The driver had been told twice in the previous three weeks, by a doctor and an optometrist, never to drive again, but he got behind the wheel of the car and as a consequence Poppy is dead. This raises fundamental issues that have not yet featured in this debate and which relate to drivers who can no longer see safely behind the wheel. When people pass their driving test they take a 20-metre test. It is an 80-year-old test that was invented before the second world war, and it is completely out of kilter with the rest of Europe; we are one of only five countries that has this kind of test. We are also one of the very few countries that allows an instructor, as opposed to a doctor or an optometrist, to carry out the test before somebody gets their licence.

What is clear beyond any doubt is that action needs to be taken. There is an argument as to how we should proceed: should we have regular tests throughout people’s driving life, as they do in many continental countries in Europe; or should we have a test for those who renew their licence at 70? At the moment, people self-declare that their eyesight is sound when they renew their licence; there is no obligation for someone to have an independent third party carry out a test that says that they are safe to drive in future. Whether the test is staged throughout the driving life or at the age of 70 or beyond, there is a powerful case for the Government now to embrace changing the law so that we can ensure that people on the road are fit to be on the road and that they can drive safely. That is right in itself in order to avoid terrible accidents, the kind of which befell Poppy-Arabella Clarke, but it is also right because eye tests pick up a range of other problems that an individual may have, such as glaucoma.

In conclusion, for all that progress has been made over the years on a number of fronts, there is a simple, sad reality: too many innocent people still die on our roads. That is why I hope that the Minister says in responding to this debate that the Government will act on tougher penalties for those who kill with a car and that they are prepared seriously to examine in future having such an eyesight test, so that never again is a precious little three-year-old girl taken from her grieving parents.

9.33 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Tonight I will talk about Bobby Colleran and Livia Galli-Atkinson. Bobby Colleran was a bright, fun-loving boy. As his mum Joanne put it, he was “cheeky but charming”. The middle child, he adored his brothers. On 24 October 2014, while Bobby was walking home from Blackmoor Park Infant School with his mum, he was knocked down and killed. He was six years old. The incident sent shockwaves around my constituency and Liverpool as a whole. The coroner said

“when a six year old dies in these circumstances, it affects the whole city”.

In the aftermath of that tragedy, the Bobby Colleran Trust was created to encourage and promote better road safety awareness for children, parents and schools. One of the ways they have done that is by encouraging schools to introduce “Bobby zones”, which are designed to slow down traffic, prevent the unnecessary build-up of vehicles and ensure a maximum speed of 20 mph. If people drive around Liverpool, they will see a “Slow down for Bobby” banner outside pretty much every primary school. I want to keep that legacy going by making sure that the challenge is taken up not only across Merseyside but throughout the country. I urge the Minister to make that happen.

When I was the MP for Enfield, Southgate, a similar incident happened in my then constituency. Livia Galli-Atkinson was just 16 when she was killed on her way to ballet on 12 January 1998. A driver had mounted the pavement behind her. Last Tuesday would have been her 36th birthday. Out of that tragedy arose the annual Livia awards. The Livia award for professionalism and service to justice is an annual award given to a Metropolitan police officer in the traffic operational command unit who is judged to have provided the most meritorious service. I have had the privilege of chairing the Livia awards since its inception and of seeing some of the exemplary professional commitment shown by police officers in often harrowing circumstances. Next week will be the 20th anniversary of the award and all colleagues are welcome to attend the annual awards ceremony at 7 pm next Monday.

Let us learn the lessons from the families of Bobby and Livia. I pay tribute to my good friends, Bobby's parents Joanne and David, and Livia's parents Guilietta and George, who have gone above and beyond to ensure that no other child is hurt or dies on our roads. I pay tribute to them as I pay tribute to the fantastic campaigning organisations such as Brake and RoadPeace, which have made such a big difference. As we have heard, though, in recent years the decline in the numbers of deaths on our roads has stagnated. Indeed, last year the number of deaths on our roads was at its highest since 2011. We must do better. Targets are not a panacea, but

they demonstrate a determination. I urge the Minister to look into the reintroduction of national casualty targets as part of the Government's strategy.

Let me finish by saying something about the global challenge. Road casualties are a major killer, particularly in some of the world's poorest countries. The death or injury of a family member can further entrench poverty, leaving a family without a breadwinner or without the capacity to work. That is part of the reason why, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) said, the sustainable development goals include targets to cut the numbers killed and seriously injured on the roads. The 2015 United Nations global goals include SDG 3.6, which is to halve the number of deaths and serious injuries on the world's roads by 2020. That is in two years' time. This has been declared the decade of action for road safety.

As part of our inquiry into the global goals, the International Development Committee found

“a worrying lack of engagement in the SDGs across Government.”

Next year, the United Kingdom will submit itself to the United Nations for a voluntary national review of progress on the goals. Will the Minister tell us how the Department for Transport will take part in that review? I urge the Department to make road safety a priority for its participation in the national voluntary national review, and I urge the Minister to work on road safety with his colleagues in the Department for International Development, because if we are to achieve the goals, Departments working together will have the biggest impact.

Around the world, 3,500 people die on the roads every day. Every single death or injury is one too many. Let us reaffirm our responsibility to do all we can to achieve the vision of zero deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

9.38 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby. Like him and my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), I wish to talk about deaths and serious injuries caused by dangerous drivers.

Last year, 191 people were convicted of causing death by dangerous driving, yet the average prison sentence given to the perpetrators of those crimes was just 29 months, with a similar period of time to be spent released on licence. We are all aware that, in response to pressure and campaigning from bereaved families and the road safety charity Brake and its “Roads to Justice” campaign, the Government finally agreed back in December 2016 to hold a consultation on sentencing for those who cause death by dangerous driving. That consultation ran until February 2017 and received more than 9,000 responses.

Last October, the Government finally announced that, as a result of the consultation, they were introducing tougher sentences, including the possibility of life sentences to replace the current maximum sentence of 14 years. When that was announced more than a year ago, there was much relief among campaigners and bereaved families that, at last, the Government were taking action to ensure that other families would not have to suffer the

[Liz McInnes]

same injustices. Not only were they sentenced to a lifetime of grief at the loss of a loved one, but they suffered the injustice of seeing their loved one's killer receive a prison sentence of just a few years.

Ian and Dawn Brown-Lartey in my constituency of Heywood and Middleton had a 25-year-old son, Joseph, who was killed by a 19-year-old driving an uninsured unlicensed hired Audi at 80 miles an hour in a 30-mile an hour zone, running through a red light and smashing into Joseph's car, killing him outright. The impact was so great that Joseph's car was split in two. His grieving parents were determined that no other family should have to suffer as they had done and they, supported by award-winning campaigning journalist Michelle Livesey, launched their campaign "Justice for Joseph", handing in a petition at 10 Downing Street signed by thousands of people.

The day before the horrific crash, Joseph's killer posted a photo of his dashboard on social media, showing the speedometer at 142 miles an hour on the M62 motorway, and boasted of driving from Leeds to Rochdale in just 11 minutes. That is a distance of 33 miles, which means that he must have been travelling at an average speed of a staggering 180 miles an hour. He was imprisoned for six years in May 2015, but has since been released on licence after serving half his sentence. Joseph's father said:

"It is absolutely frustrating, especially when you're driving on the streets every day and you can see what's going on. There is simply no deterrent. If the Government are not putting in place a deterrent, they are saying to people it's OK to get behind the wheel and kill somebody."

Sadly, as we have heard, the Brown-Lartey family are not the only family to suffer in this way. Because of my work with the Justice for Joseph campaign I have met so many bereaved families. They include the family of Bryony Hollands, who was killed while walking with her boyfriend by a driver who was three times over the drink-driving limit. Her boyfriend was injured and has been left with permanent deafness in one ear. Both were talented music students.

Bryony's family lives in the Prime Minister's constituency of Maidenhead, where the Conservative-controlled Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council wrote to the Justice Secretary in June this year to urge him to bring forward the promised legislation. Bryony's father, Mark, is deeply disappointed by the Government's inaction. He said that the slow progress in implementing changes to the law

"sends out the message that it is not that important."

Bryony's killer was sentenced to just eight years in 2015 and is expected to be released on licence next year, while her family serve a life sentence of grief for their daughter, killed at just 19 years old.

After the horrific deaths of two-year-old Caspar and six-year-old Corey Platt-May at the hands of a driver high on cocaine in February of this year, I and more than 70 other MPs wrote to the Justice Secretary asking again when the Government's decision to introduce life sentences for death by dangerous driving was to be brought into legislation. Again the response we received was, "When parliamentary time allows". Well, when will that time be? This should be an easy change to

implement. Why do this Government continue to drag their feet over this issue, which is so important to safety on our roads?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** A four-minute limit applies now.

9.43 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): There are two issues that I wish to raise in this debate. The first one relates to an issue that I have previously raised with the Minister, which is that of road poles. This is about how we can minimise the casualties in the collisions on our roads. The second one is about how we can make roads in the far south-west, particularly in Devon, safer. The Road Safety Foundation has declared that half of all Britain's road deaths take place on just 10% of the road network. One of those roads runs through the constituency that I represent. The stretch of the A38 that goes through Devon is one of the most dangerous roads in our county. Members who have spoken in road safety debates in Westminster Hall will know that this issue is close to my heart, because I have spoken particularly about a constituent of mine called Trevor Gorman, whose son—also called Trevor—was killed in a road collision on the A38 last June, along with his friends Marshall and Zachary. Their van collided with a road traffic signpost and all three men were killed instantly. The post that they collided with was made of steel that was not designed to crumple, collapse on impact or absorb shock. Hard steel posts are common on nearly all major roads, from smaller B roads through to the motorway network. Experts at the inquest stated that the pole met requirements when it was erected in the 1990s, but it has not been replaced or upgraded since.

The accident that took the lives of those three men could have been avoided if the steel signpost in an accident blackspot had been upgraded to a frangible pole. Members will have seen frangible poles on the road network. They are lattice-shaped poles that are designed to absorb impact, so they do not have a hard surface against the impact. Ever since his son's death, Mr Gorman has been campaigning tirelessly to improve road safety standards, swapping hard steel poles for frangible ones. This may sound like a small technical detail, but it can save lives. Mr Gorman wants to ensure that no family has to suffer the grief that he and his family have been through after the loss of his son and his son's two friends, and to ensure that they have not died in vain; his strength really is inspiring.

Plymouth City Council, particularly Councillor Mark Coker, has been galvanising support for replacing hard steel poles with frangible poles in the accident blackspots in our city, but this is an initiative that every single local authority could be doing. I would like the Minister to look at whether support can be given to local authorities where accident blackspots exist in order to replace hard steel poles with frangible poles. This will save some lives. We will not be able to affect the stagnation in the number of road deaths with one silver bullet, as we will need lots of different measures, such as those mentioned in this debate, but replacing hard steel poles would be one small effort. The work that Councillor Coker has been doing in Plymouth has the support of Public Health England, and Devon and Somerset fire and rescue service.

As well as poles, we need to look at the other items on the roadsides that are not frangible. I am talking about trees in particular. The London plane tree may have been instrumental in saving air quality in the Victorian era and the silver birch may be a similar saviour for dealing with nanoparticles and microparticles in the 21st century, but the trees along our roadsides are not frangible, and many people die or are seriously injured in collisions with trees. We need a solution to address the hard surfaces that people can collide with, particularly on the roads where such accidents really happen, and the A38 in Devon is one of those roads. Extending the M5 from Exeter to the Tamar bridge will make a substantial difference to safety, because motorways are the safest roads on our network. The Minister has bids from Devon County Council and Plymouth City Council to look at that. I would be grateful if he lent his support not only to the frangible road pole campaign, but to the plans to extend the M5.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister will be called to give a two-minute wind-up at no later than 9.58 pm. Members can do the arithmetic for themselves; I encourage them to be considerate of one another.

9.48 pm

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** I am a cyclist myself. In fact, I am probably one of the few Members who cycle to this place on an almost daily basis, so I could talk about cyclists and road safety at length, but tonight I will quickly reiterate the points made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who is about to leave the Chamber. The beauty of being one of the last speakers is that one can reinforce a particular message.

I ask the Government further to improve road safety for pedestrians, cyclists, bikers and vehicle drivers with one critical measure: proper eye-testing. At the moment, there are no robust regulations to ensure that vehicle drivers can actually see. UK regulations for drivers' eyesight are among the weakest in Europe, relying on self-regulation and self-reporting. UK drivers can pass their driving test without having a full examination to prove that their eyes are roadworthy, and can then drive for the rest of their lives unpoliced. All we have in the UK is a basic vision test by a non-medically qualified driving test centre. The test is to read a number plate at a distance of 20 metres.

It ignores other essentials such as peripheral vision, which is also essential for safety for cyclists. It means that there is no medical rigour to confirm that most drivers are visually fit to drive. It means that cyclists, pedestrians and motorists who have regular eye tests are sharing the road with people driving a tonne of metal who have never given their eyes an MOT. The campaign for proper eye-testing originated in my constituency. The Government require vehicles to pass an annual MOT test, and it is illegal to drive after drinking or taking drugs, but there is an obvious gap in the law that allows drivers to drive with poor eyesight.

This is not a technical question. The World Health Organisation says that poor eyesight is a key risk factor in road crashes. Approximately 3,000 casualties in the UK can be attributed to drivers having poor vision. Poor vision costs lives. It also costs money—an estimated £33 million a year. While some drivers have their driving licence revoked or refused because of poor vision, there

is no structured approach, and lives are being lost as a result. People can lose 40% of their vision before they notice a problem. There is no requirement for good eyesight and acceptable peripheral vision. Good vision should be a requirement to drive: road safety demands it. Current procedures lack medical rigour, increasing the potential for injury or death.

The Driving Blind campaign calls for a change in legislation to require drivers to be tested by an optician before their driving test and at every subsequent licence renewal application. It also calls for new drivers to be vision-tested, including for peripheral vision, and certified by an optician, with follow-up tests every decade up to the age of 70 and then every three years thereafter. If we can reduce the number of people driving blind on our roads, we will improve road safety. I look forward to the Government's response.

9.51 pm

**Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab):** When I am contacted by my constituents about this subject, the section of road that comes up more than any other is the M56 motorway between junctions 12 and 14. It is an area blighted by collisions, causing serious delays in the whole area as well as significant impacts on those involved. After a concerted campaign for improvements alongside my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), we were pleased to hear that improvements will now be considered.

I appreciate that it is by no means certain that something will happen, and that includes the smart motorway that we want. However, I urge Ministers to look very closely at this, and then, if a decision is made to proceed, to consider very carefully how the improvements are delivered, because I have had a number of complaints about smart motorways, particularly regarding the works on the M6. Virtually the whole of the stretch of road from Cheshire to Birmingham is coned off, with speed limits, yet whenever I go on it, there appear to be few or no workmen there. This seems to be an incredibly inefficient way of improving the network. Is it reasonable to have 20 miles of motorway coned off for years at a time? Why cannot the work be done on a small section and then moved along? I am not harking back to the glory days of the cones hotline, but I do wonder if anyone is monitoring what is going on there. The suspicion is that the contracts—or conetracts—that were agreed are putting their cost above the long delays and economic impact caused. There is also concern about the safety of some of the night-time closures and diversions.

Closer to home, I am also regularly contacted about the A540 in Neston. It is a very busy road. The number of serious incidents each year is in double figures, and there are fatalities on the road in most years. I pay tribute to Pauline Fielding, who has been campaigning for improvements on the road for almost 25 years, after her son Andrew tragically lost his life. Thanks to the efforts of Pauline and other local campaigners, the speed limit was reduced to 40 mph. Some improvements were made to the junction with Raby Park Road, which—I have to declare an interest—I sometimes drive through when I take my children to school. However, it is clear that much more significant improvements are required not just on this part of the road but the whole length of it. Unfortunately, these improvements are beyond the means of the local authority. Mrs Fielding and many

[Justin Madders]

others believe that installing traffic lights is the only way to improve safety along there, but that will take up all the local authority's capital budget, as well as having a knock-on effect on the rest of the road, including at the junction with Hinderton Road, the next one along, where there are also safety concerns.

Schemes like this fall into a category that deserves a far greater level of attention. They are too large for local authorities to act alone but too small to be considered under the remit of Highways England or the road investment strategy. Often, as with the A540, these sections of road can straddle the boundaries between local authorities and local enterprise partnerships, exacerbating the difficulty in bringing forward a viable scheme.

The Safer Roads fund is a welcome start in tackling these sorts of issues. However, I am concerned that only £100 million of the £175 million originally budgeted has so far been allocated. If the Minister still has any of that £75 million left, burning a hole in his pocket, and he wants to spend it on the A540, he will be welcomed with open arms if he comes to Neston.

9.54 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): This is a massive issue. With the Christmas season, Christmas parties and the rush of the season approaching, it is imperative that the message is reinforced that the holiday spirit is wonderful, but driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs is never acceptable at any time of the year, and certainly not at Christmas time.

Two hundred people are still killed in drink-drive accidents every year. Even after 30 years of drink-drive education and enforcement, more than 70,000 people are still caught drink-driving annually. Often it is an innocent person who suffers, not the driver who is over the drink-drive limit. In 2016, 100 pedestrians were killed or injured by drink-drivers, as were 330 car passengers and 40 children. In 2016, almost half a million roadside breath tests took place, and some 60,000 drivers or riders failed or refused to take the test. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the maximum blood alcohol limit is 80 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood, but in Scotland that has been lowered to 50 mg.

I remind the Minister that the Government commissioned Sir Peter North to conduct a review of drink and drug driving law in 2010. In that review, evidence was heard that drivers with a blood alcohol level of between 50 mg and 80 mg are two to two and a half times more likely to be involved in an accident than drivers with no alcohol, and up to six times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash. We must be ever mindful of those figures.

In 2000, the Government's road safety strategy estimated that reducing the limit to 50 mg would save 50 lives and prevent some 250 injuries each year. When that was reviewed, it was estimated that it could save 65 lives and prevent 230 injuries each year. I ask the Minister to give further consideration to the North review, which concluded that a reduction to 50 mg would

"undoubtedly save a significant number of lives."

It estimated at the time that 168 lives could be saved and 16,000 injuries prevented annually, and after six years, some 303 lives annually could be saved.

Finally, I want to refer to the Highway Code as it pertains to the safety of horse riders. If my understanding of the figures is correct, my constituency has the largest number of people involved in the horse industry and sector in Northern Ireland. A review is to be undertaken into this issue, but could the Minister ensure that there is a mention of horses in that? I underline that case because of the 40 riders killed, 237 horses killed and almost 900 horses injured on our roads in the last seven years. Some 85% of road incidents involving horses are because drivers pass too close or too fast to them. In particular, I ask the Minister to look at strengthening section 215 of the Highway Code on horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles, to include the British Horse Society's "dead slow" advice to drivers on how to pass horses safely. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

9.57 pm

**Jesse Norman:** This has been an interesting and lively debate. Many colleagues from across the House have had a chance to comment, and I want to respond to as many of them as I can.

I have mentioned the dreadful crash that took place on the M5 in 2011, and we have heard many examples this evening of dreadful road incidents. To recap, in response, the Government are taking vigorous action. We are improving roads infrastructure, looking at the training of new and novice drivers, taking action against the most dangerous driving behaviour, investigating collisions and targeting future activity at the highest-risk groups. In doing so, we are reliant on and very grateful for all the constructive and expert support that we get from key partners, from traffic police to local authority road officials.

Let me touch quickly on some of the many questions raised. The issue of targets is constantly raised with the Government, and this evening has been no exception. I repeat that some countries with great safety records have targets, and some do not. There is no necessary correlation, and it would not be right to hide behind targets when there are so many specific measures that we can potentially take. I will touch on some of them.

The hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) was right to mention older users, and they are included in our two-year plan. He mentioned the Safer Roads fund and asked why it has not been spread. We received 50 applications, and we funded 50 applications.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) correctly reflected on the importance of thinking of recovery operators. We very much bear them in mind, and I saw them recently at the RAC.

Horse riders are vulnerable road users—there is no doubt about that, and there never has been—and they have been included in the work we are doing. We are interested in the evidence coming from Scotland on lower alcohol limits. I salute my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) for the work done by *The Sentinel* newspaper in his constituency.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered road safety.

## Business without Debate

### SITTING IN WESTMINSTER HALL (6 NOVEMBER)

*Ordered,*

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 10(1)(b), the sitting in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 6 November shall be suspended from 11.30am till 3.15pm and may then continue for up to 3 hours.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

### STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

*Ordered,*

That Derek Twigg be discharged from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and Jessica Morden be added.—(*Mark Spencer, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

### REGULATORY REFORM

*Ordered,*

That Jeremy Quin be discharged from the Regulatory Reform Committee and Ben Bradley be added.—(*Mark Spencer, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

### TRANSPORT

*Ordered,*

That Iain Stewart be discharged from the Transport Committee and Robert Courts be added.—(*Mark Spencer, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

### PETITION

#### Illegal Encampments in Berkshire

10.1 pm

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): It has been a particularly difficult summer for many of the residents of West Berkshire, who have been subjected to illegal Traveller encampments close to where they live—mainly on public land, but in every sense in circumstances that have brought great difficulty to them and their neighbours. I therefore submit a petition to the House on behalf of 244 signatories, with a further 366 on my website, as well as on behalf of the many people across neighbouring constituencies who have suffered from the over 50 illegal encampments we have had in West Berkshire this summer.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Berkshire,

Declares that they have suffered an intolerable imposition from an increasing number of unauthorised encampments.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to introduce legislation to make trespass a criminal offence, and strengthen the powers used by the police to deal with illegal encampments, in addition to those already available under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002285]

## Healthcare in Essex

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call Robert Halfon.

10.3 pm

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for your continued support, as my constituency neighbour, in our campaign for a new healthcare campus in Harlow. You could not have done more to support me, and I am very glad to see you here this evening.

Today, I would like to update the House on the desperate need for a new hospital in Harlow that is fit for the demands of the 21st century. This is now my third debate on the need for a long-term solution to the healthcare crisis in west Essex, and I cannot stress enough the urgency of the situation. The present site, the Princess Alexandra Hospital, serves over 350,000 people and is no longer able to cope under the pressure of an influx of patients. The new healthcare campus, as proposed by the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust, would encompass accident and emergency services, general practitioner provision, social care, physiotherapy and a new ambulance hub in state-of-the-art, purpose-built facilities.

I thank those Members, some of whom are in the Chamber this evening, who have been so instrumental in the progress of this campaign. In May, they joined me in signing a letter to the former Health Secretary to urge the Government to support the capital funding bid in place for a new hospital. They included my hon. Friends the Members for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing), my hon. Friends the Members for Braintree (James Cleverly) and for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch), my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) and my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), who is present and a big supporter of our new hospital proposal for Harlow.

From this, I have gone on to secure a visit to the Princess Alexandra Hospital from the new Health Secretary, who has heard the case loud and clear, and I look forward to welcoming him to Harlow to discuss the future of our healthcare provision in Essex.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan)—Telford is also a new town—so accurately put it in my first debate on the subject in October 2017, hospitals

“are the centre of our communities and cement our identity”.— [*Official Report*, 18 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 347WH.]

The unwavering support that I have received for a new health campus, both in Parliament and locally, is a testament to its importance, not just to Harlow, but to the wider population of Essex and Hertfordshire.

In March, we received the wonderful news from the Care Quality Commission that the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust had been brought out of special measures—news on which the former Health Secretary, echoing the sentiments of the Prime Minister, congratulated

[Robert Halfon]

the hospital in a special video message on Twitter. The chief inspector at the CQC noted that the driving force behind the 18-month turnaround was “the dedicated staff” and “outstanding leadership” team, headed by chief executive Lance McCarthy. I do not believe that enough credit can be given to the staff at the hospital.

I recently visited the Williams day unit, a specialist cancer treatment centre at Princess Alexandra Hospital, for a Macmillan coffee morning. I was struck by the staff’s compassion for their patients and their determination to ensure that, at possibly the most difficult time in a person’s life, the hospital is a happy, welcoming place to come to, to get better and to leave feeling more positive than when they came in.

From my numerous visits to the hospital, in my capacity as an MP and as a patient and visitor, I defy anyone to find better staff than at Princess Alexandra Hospital. In spite of a working environment that is literally falling down around them, thanks to the efforts of every single staff member, from the porters, cleaners and kitchen staff to the nurses, midwives and consultants, 64% of the services are on their way to a “good” or “outstanding” rating.

Special credit must be paid to the maternity unit, which the CQC deemed “outstanding” overall. The team delivers more than 4,200 babies a year, yet their rate of stillbirths is 10% lower than the national average. For those reasons, the maternity department was recently selected to feature in an ongoing documentary with TV personality and presenter of “The Voice”, Emma Willis. I encourage hon. Members to watch that programme on Monday evenings to see for themselves just how dedicated and caring the staff are.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Robert Halfon:** I will always give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Jim Shannon:** I have always supported the right hon. Gentleman’s contributions in the Chamber since we both came to the House together in 2010. He has clearly outlined the case for healthcare in his constituency. The Government have set aside an ambitious £28.5 billion for healthcare. Does he hope to have some of that money for his constituency? Does he also feel that there needs to be a reduction in red tape so that professionals can use their medical expertise to their full ability? This is about the money, but it is also about reducing the red tape.

**Robert Halfon:** I hope that my hon. Friend the Health Minister knows that a new hospital in Harlow is supported not just in Essex and Hertfordshire, but in Northern Ireland. This is the second debate on the subject that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has attended, and of course I agree with him.

The maternity department serves as the perfect example of how investment can transform patient care under the successful staffing that is already in place, as the labour ward benefits from nine refurbished delivery rooms and a second maternity theatre. However, it also sheds light on the fact that refurbishment is not a fix-all solution. Therefore, does the Minister agree that, were the Princess

Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust to receive the capital funding that it so desperately needs to build a state-of-the-art health campus, that would allow every department to flourish, as the maternity ward has already done?

As I have touched upon before, the dilapidation of the estate is hindering any further progress. A 2013 survey rated 56% of the hospital’s estate as unacceptable or below for its quality and physical condition. That was five years ago now and the situation is only deteriorating. With long-term under-investment, we are continuing to put the capability of the hospital to care for those in need at serious risk—just read the reports of raw sewage and rainwater flowing into the operating theatres. Given that time is of the essence, does the Minister recognise the importance of the release of capital funding to the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust this autumn?

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making such a powerful case. I would like to add my support, because all across Essex we need to have world-class hospitals. Does he agree that the new facility in Chelmsford, our first ever Essex medical school, will train the doctors of the future and provide the staff to work in his fantastic new hospital when it arrives?

**Robert Halfon:** I thank my hon. Friend for coming here this evening. Her presence is another example to the Minister of how the new hospital in Harlow is supported across Essex. She is a brilliant constituency MP, and she is absolutely right about the staff she mentions in her part of our national health service.

To add insult to injury, the layout of the hospital is convoluted and nonsensical. That is evident to any patients seeking urgent care or any visitor looking to find their loved one. As the former Health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), noted in my first debate in July 2017, the hospital suffers from “sub-optimal clinical adjacencies” due to the development of temporary structures. To those who suggest that refurbishment would be a more suitable and less costly solution, I cannot emphasise enough that that is not looking to the long term. The tangled layout of the current hospital, comprising add-on structures and sporadic urgent care, is a direct consequence of short-term financial fixes; my case in point that an Elastoplast solution will no longer stick.

Aside from the natural degradation of the estate over time, the hospital is now forced to deal with new pressures stemming from a rising population and the downgrading of other local healthcare facilities, including Chase Farm Hospital and the Queen Elizabeth II. Cracks are already evident in the accident and emergency department. Back in 1966, the A&E unit was designed for approximately 60,000 attendances per year. It is currently seeing 68% more than that, with 200 to 300 attendances per day. That figure is 10% higher than the national average and, against its size, places the hospital as the busiest A&E department in England.

In the latest board meeting of directors in October 2018, it was suggested that July 2018 was

“the busiest ever month...at the Trust”

for the A&E,

“with attendances as high as 9,400”



in that single month. The influx of patients is only set to continue, with the relocation of Public Health England to Harlow hosting as many as 2,750 workers based at the site, as well as the Gilston Garden Town development, providing 8,500 new homes in Harlow, and the near-completion of Junction 7A on the M11. Does the Minister acknowledge that to support the trust in meeting the 95% four-hour access target, the Government must do all they can to alleviate such pressure? Does he further recognise that the new, expanded health campus would alleviate this immediate pressure, but also future-proof the hospital, accounting for further population growth?

I am grateful for the Government's capital investment to realise Harlow's strategic economic and housing plans, but I ask for the same treatment for our comprehensive healthcare plan. It is not the infrastructure alone that is a burden on the staff. Staff shortages—the hospital frequently operates at an 11% vacancy rate—stem from widespread difficulties in recruiting and retaining well-qualified employees. That is due in particular to Harlow's proximity to London. According to the leadership team at the hospital, the opportunity for career development, or lack thereof, is a much more significant sticking point for potential recruits.

State-of-the-art facilities and a quality healthcare campus would at least offer the hospital the chance to enter the same race. The new campus and medical training facilities would allow the hospital both to attract and retain the very best staff. It would become an apprenticeships and skills centre, offering high-class, nursing degree apprenticeships.

The spiralling health crisis makes the urgency of the hospital campus all the more pressing. According to the Essex local authority portrait, Harlow has the highest rate of premature deaths attributed to cardiovascular diseases and the third highest rate of diabetes in the country. Hospital staff also deal with high rates of substance misuse, and 66.1% of adults are classed as overweight, which is higher than the national average. Harlow has the largest proportion of 10 and 11-year-olds classed as overweight or obese in the country, at 36.2%. There are many reasons why west Essex should have a health campus fit for the 21st century, but these figures clearly evidence a need.

At the former Secretary of State's recommendation, the trust put forward its strategic outline case—SOC—in August 2017. The board, clinical commissioning group and local authority partners, together with KPMG, concluded that the health campus model would be

“the most affordable solution for the local system”

and

“would deliver the most benefit to our population”.

Since my last debate in July 2018, the timescale for the development plans has changed and the plans are currently in the NHS and NHS Improvement assurance process. The trust is working closely with commissioners, patients and the public to develop a pre-consultation business case and refresh its SOC.

In my debate in October 2017, the former Health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow, so helpfully highlighted:

“The extent to which there is capital available to support very significant projects will depend on how much is made available by the Treasury.”—[*Official Report*, 18 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 352WH.]

As was also noted in the debate,

“upgrading services on this important site will be a priority for a Conservative Government”.—[*Official Report*, 18 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 347WH.]

I take this opportunity to thank the Government for the announcement of £20.5 billion additional annual funding for the NHS, and I ask, in the light of this spending and the end of austerity, as the Prime Minister and the Chancellor said, is this not the most apt time to provide the Princess Alexandra Hospital with the bright future that it is determined to have?

My hon. Friend the Minister has gone out of his way to meet me and the chief executive of the hospital trust and to listen to his concerns and mine, and I cannot say how appreciative I am of that. As a key area of contention for my residents, I would be grateful to receive an update on the progress of this funding and a timescale for the economic investment plans. The issues that the hospital faces today are preventable, but all of them are beyond the control of the hard-working staff, patients and visitors. This is on the Government to act. This is on the Treasury and the Department of Health and Social Care to see reason and allocate the necessary funding for a new healthcare campus in west Essex.

10.18 pm

**The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay):** I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) on securing the debate and on securing an early visit from the Secretary of State. As the whole House knows, he is passionate about the future of the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow and he has raised this issue assiduously in a number of debates and interventions in the House. As he referred to, we had a very productive meeting with the hospital chief executive in June, when we discussed a range of issues, including the workforce and services offered at the hospital. That is in addition to an earlier Adjournment debate, as well as an Adjournment debate with my predecessor a year ago and exchanges at Health questions. On behalf of his constituents, he has brought these issues to the attention of the House extremely effectively.

I also place on record that I very much recognise that these issues are extremely important to Epping Forest as well, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know how assiduously you have campaigned on behalf of your constituents. Indeed, this is an issue that Members across Essex and Hertfordshire have spoken up on. That was reflected in previous debates and was reflected in the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). As we all recall, she was instrumental, as were other Essex MPs, including my right hon. Friend, in securing the new medical school, which, as she said, will help us to deliver the extra doctors to go with the buildings and capital spend, which we are discussing today.

As my right hon. Friend is aware, but for the benefit of the House, we have the sustainability and transformation fund as part of the Government's commitment to upgrading the NHS estate. This investment will modernise and transform the NHS's buildings and services, with the money going towards a range of programmes. This is part of the Government's commitment to spending £3.9 billion on capital investment in buildings and facilities by 2022-23 and alongside the £20.5 billion a year extra that my right hon. Friend referred to. This investment—the

[Stephen Barclay]

biggest ever in the NHS—reflects the fact that the NHS is the public's No. 1 priority, as indeed it is the Government's No. 1 priority, and is an indication of the Prime Minister's personal commitment to funding the NHS and ensuring it is fit for the future.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that the application window has now closed. I know that considerable work was done following the earlier application when a bid of between £500 million and £600 million was submitted. I am sure he will recognise that this was a significant sum but that the further work has brought it closer to the £330 million, and officials in NHS England and NHS Improvement are working closely with the Department to evaluate that bid alongside the other bids. As I mentioned in the previous debate, all bids will be assessed against standard criteria, including their value for money and contribution to transforming services and managing demand sustainably, as well as demonstrating their fit within a wider STP level estate strategy.

My right hon. Friend asked about timescales. The timescales are as previously referred to, with the commitment to decisions being made in the autumn. That position has not changed.

It is worth remembering that STP funding is only one element of support available to trusts. In 2017-18, the trust was successful in securing £2 million of emergency department capital funding to support the redesign of the emergency department. This funding was targeted to improve facilities and support improvements, including investment in paediatrics and the emergency department. In this financial year, capital funding to support winter pressures is also available to the trust, and this funding is part of the £145 million given to 80 NHS trusts across the country ahead of winter to improve emergency care. I understand that this money is earmarked for increasing bed capacity.

As we discussed in the summer, the trust recently exited special measures, with two thirds of services moving to a good or outstanding rating. This is a big achievement, and I know that the focus for 2018-19 is to achieve a good rating from the Care Quality Commission. My right hon. Friend has spoken about this in previous debates, and I join him once again in paying tribute to the staff who worked so hard to take the trust out of special measures.

It is clear that the hospital is a vital element of the local economy. I know that the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust has been working hard to improve recruitment and retention, and I am pleased that this is still a focus for it. The hospital is one of Health Education England's nursing associate pilot sites through its lead partner, Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, and I am aware of plans for a huge expansion in the numbers of nursing associates through the apprentice route, which will positively impact on the work of the trust.

As I am sure the House is well aware, my right hon. Friend, like me, is a keen supporter of apprenticeships. I know that the hospital has taken on apprentices in the last year but that the number of apprentices is well below the target. It should be noted that any nursing associates in training as part of the scheme I just mentioned will not be included in the apprentice figures. As of April 2018, we know of 18 apprentices starting at the hospital, against a target of 76. I am keen to work with my right hon. Friend to continue the work that he has done in the House to ensure that the hospital meets that apprenticeship target. Both he and I are strongly committed to bringing more apprentices into the workforce.

My right hon. Friend referred to the Harlow science hub campus programme. Partly as a result of his campaigning, there will be a new public health campus in Harlow, at a cost of about £400 million. Not only are the Government making a significant contribution to the NHS, but the fact that the project is still on schedule—and by 2024, following a phased opening from 2021, approximately 2,700 staff will be based there—is a significant tribute to the work that my right hon. Friend has done, along with others, in securing a much-sought-after commitment to Harlow. I know that Public Health England and the Princess Alexandra Hospital have been discussing the opportunities that will arise as a result of the move to Harlow, and I hope to hear more about that soon.

I commend the work that my right hon. Friend is doing to raise support for the STP bid by the Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust. He has raised the estate issues faced by the trust on more than one occasion in the House, and in meetings with the Secretary of State and me, and I know that he raised them with my predecessor as well. We recognise that the hospital estate is in poor condition, which is why I am pleased that the trust has submitted the revised STP bid. I am also pleased that money was made available last year, and will be made available again this year, to make improvements to the hospital in the interim.

I look forward to continuing to work on this issue with my right hon. Friend, and to working on the future of the NHS in Harlow as well as the surrounding region. As has been made clear again this evening, Madam Deputy Speaker—alongside your own work—the patients and staff of the hospital can be confident that they could have no better champion than my right hon. Friend, who has campaigned to secure this much-needed investment.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** What an excellent, meaningful, well-targeted debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.27 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Monday 5 November 2018

## DEFENCE

### Armed Forces: Commonwealth Recruitment

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** Citizens from the Commonwealth have a long tradition of serving with distinction in the Armed Forces. In the light of changes to the size of our armed forces a five-year UK residency criterion for Commonwealth citizens wishing to join the armed forces was re-imposed in 2013. A limited waiver to this requirement was introduced in May 2016 to recruit up to 200 Commonwealth personnel per annum to fill skill shortage posts. We have now decided to remove the five-year UK residency criterion for Commonwealth citizens and increase recruitment to 1,350 across the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force. Applications will be accepted from all Commonwealth countries, although in order to mitigate the risks associated with unaccompanied minors travelling to the UK without the guarantee of a job, we will not be accepting applications from those under 18. Applicants from Commonwealth countries will need to meet all necessary recruitment criteria for the service and role they wish to join. Security standards will be assessed on a case by case basis, and may differ from the current UK security requirements. In 2009<sup>[1]</sup> a 15% limit on foreign and Commonwealth nationals in a number of areas of the Army (the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC), the Royal Army Dental Corps (RADC) and the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC) was established as a necessary and proportionate requirement to sustain operational effectiveness. As we now intend to increase the numbers of Commonwealth citizens joining across the full spread of Army roles, we have concluded that it is appropriate to both limit the overall numbers recruited, and to replicate the 15% limit across all cap badges. The requirement for individuals to have Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) or Indefinite Leave to Enter (ILE) to join the reserves has not been changed. This will not affect personnel from the Republic of Ireland, or those in the Brigade of Gurkhas. This policy will be kept under review.

<sup>[1]</sup>Written Ministerial Statement "Army Nationality Policy" dated 2 February 2009

[HCWS1062]

### Defence Equipment Plan

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** I am pleased to place in the Library of the House this year's financial summary of the Defence Equipment Plan. This is the seventh consecutive annual publication of the equipment plan summary, and presents our plans to deliver the equipment needed by our armed forces to defend the country and keep our people safe. The Government are committed to meeting the NATO target to spend 2% of GDP on defence and at

least 20% of that spending on equipment. This report sets out our plans to spend £186 billion on equipment in the 10 years from 2018-19.

We have substantially revised the content of this report to make it more transparent and accessible. For the first time, we have set out the strategic context for the equipment plan and presented in detail the Department's assessment of the affordability of the plan. The NAO has assessed our plans and we are grateful to it for its report which is also published today.

In 2017-18 the Department achieved several notable milestones in procurement and support of equipment and successfully delivered the plan within budget. Looking ahead, there are significant financial pressures we must manage in the equipment plan. Our central estimate for the cost of the equipment plan at April 2018 exceeded the allocated budget by an average of 3.7% over the 10 years from 2018-19. The shortfall is greatest in the four years from 2018-19. This forecast will vary as risks and opportunities materialise and project plans mature or are changed through management action.

The Department secured £1 billion additional funding in the autumn Budget, which will help reduce the risk to affordability until 2020 and allow the Department to continue delivering existing plans for Joint Force 2025 and to modernise some key capability areas.

We are also taking steps to improve management of the plan and enable longer term affordability. The modernising defence programme was launched to further strengthen and modernise UK defence and the armed forces and put UK defence on to an enduringly affordable footing for the future. This work involves rigorously pursuing productivity and efficiency gains as well as prioritising capabilities to meet the changing threat environment. It will reshape the content of the equipment plan and improve the way in which it is managed. We will report on the implications for the equipment plan in subsequent financial summary reports.

[HCWS1064]

### HMS Victorious: Refuel

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** On 6 March 2014, the then Secretary of State for Defence announced the decision to refuel HMS Vanguard and, pending an assessment, to keep the option open to refuel for HMS Victorious in 2018. This was a prudent precaution following the discovery in 2012 of a microscopic breach in the cladding around one of the fuel cells in the prototype reactor plant at our shore test facility at Dounreay in Scotland. Having conducted an evidence-based assessment it has been determined that it is not necessary to refuel HMS Victorious.

The safety of the United Kingdom's submarine force remains our highest priority. We continue to work closely with the independent regulators to ensure the safety of operations both alongside and at sea.

Our submarine-based deterrent has been safely operating for over 50 years and studies have demonstrated that no alternative system is as capable, resilient or cost effective as the current deterrent on continuous patrol.

[HCWS1065]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Great Britain China Centre: Tailored Review

**The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field):** I am announcing today the start of a tailored review of the Great Britain China Centre (GBCC). The GBCC is a non-departmental public body of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Its principal activity is to encourage mutual knowledge and understanding through the promotion of closer cultural, professional, economic, educational, legal, judicial and other contacts between Britain and China.

As a non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the FCO, the GBCC is required to undergo a tailored review at least once in every Parliament. The principle aims of tailored reviews are to ensure public bodies remain fit for purpose, are well governed and are properly accountable for what they do.

The review will provide a robust scrutiny of and assurance on the continuing need for the GBCC—both its function and its form. If the review finds the GBCC should be retained in its current form and status, the review will then consider GBCC’s capacity for delivering on its core mandate more effectively and efficiently. It will also assess the control and governance arrangements that are in place to ensure that GBCC and the FCO are complying with recognised principles of good corporate governance.

The review will follow guidance published in 2016 by the Cabinet Office: “Tailored Reviews: guidance on reviews of public bodies”. The terms of reference for the review can be found at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

In conducting the tailored review, officials will engage with a broad range of stakeholders across the UK and overseas, including staff, management and the board of the GBCC. These consultations will include participating and sponsor organisations of GBCC projects and events and partners from across UK Government, foreign Governments, academics and civil society.

Both Houses will be informed of the outcome of the review when it is completed and copies of the report of the review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1059]

### Marshall Aid Commemorative Commission: Tailored Review

**The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field):** I am announcing today the start of a tailored review of the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission (MACC). Established by an Act of Parliament in 1953, in commemoration of the assistance received by the United Kingdom from the United States under the Marshall Plan, the MACC administers the British Marshall scholarships.

As a non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the MACC is required to undergo a tailored review at least once in every Parliament. The principal aims of tailored

reviews are to ensure public bodies remain fit for purpose, are well governed and properly accountable for what they do.

The review will provide a robust scrutiny of, and assurance on, the continuing need for the MACC—both its function and its form. It will then assess the governance and control arrangements in place to ensure they are compliant with the recognised principles of good corporate governance and delivering good value for money. The review will look both at the current performance of the MACC and at how it is able to respond and adapt to those factors which are most likely to affect its position as a prestigious scholarship provider and effective public diplomacy tool for the UK.

A challenge group, comprising senior FCO and Cabinet Office officials, will have regular oversight of the interim findings, to ensure the review is robust and rigorous.

The review will follow guidance published in 2016 by the Cabinet Office: “Tailored Reviews: guidance on reviews of public bodies”, which can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tailored-reviews-of-public-bodies-guidance>. The terms of reference for the review can be found at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

In conducting this tailored review, officials will engage with a broad range of stakeholders in the UK and US, including across UK Government, devolved Administrations, partner academic institutions, current scholars, alumni, the MACC’s volunteer commissioners and recruitment panels, and the Association of Commonwealth Universities, which provides administration for the programme.

I shall inform the House of the outcome of the review when it is completed and copies of the report of the review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1060]

### Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** The UK is committed to preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. We believe the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) remains the best way of achieving that goal. It is a critical agreement that makes the world a safer place. The United Kingdom, and our European partners, continue to work with the remaining parties to the deal to maintain it. We expect Iran to meet its nuclear commitments as set out in the agreement in full.

In May of this year, President Trump announced the withdrawal of the United States of America from the JCPoA. In consequence, today US sanctions on Iran will be re-imposed, including on Iran’s oil and gas exporting capability. We have been clear with the US Administration about our determination to preserve the JCPoA, and the fact that this is driven by our national security interests.

As a party to the JCPoA, we remain committed to ensuring that Iran receives the sanctions relief to which it is entitled. This includes taking steps to enable firms wishing to engage in legitimate trade with Iran to do so. We are working with our partners France and Germany, fellow parties to the JCPoA, to develop a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to enable continued sanctions relief to reach Iran, and allow for European exporters and importers to trade in compliance with EU and UN sanctions.

In parallel to our work with partners to maintain the JCPoA, we continue to take steps with our partners against the IRGC's destabilising behaviour across the region and to hold Iran to account on human rights, including its treatment of British-Iranians detained in Iran.

[HCWS1061]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Government Vision on Prevention

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** Today I am placing before the House the Government's prevention vision, "Prevention is Better than Cure".

This document sets out a cross-Government vision for stopping health problems from arising in the first place and, when they do, supporting people to manage them as effectively as possible. Our mission is to improve healthy life expectancy, so that, by 2035, we are enjoying at least five extra years of healthy, independent life, while closing the gap between the richest and poorest. When it comes to prevention, we all have a role to play: individuals, families, communities, employers, charities, the NHS, social care, and local and national Government. Only by working together can we make this vision a reality.

I am placing a copy of the prevention vision in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1063]

## JUSTICE

### Justice Update

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer):** I have today laid before Parliament new legislation to implement a new, banded structure of fees for a grant of representation, commonly known as a grant of probate.

Fees are an essential element of funding an effective, modern courts and tribunals service, thereby ensuring and protecting access to justice. The Government are investing £1 billion to modernise and upgrade the courts system so that it works even better for everyone, including

victims, witnesses, litigants, judges and legal professionals. This includes introducing changes to our probate service, which offers an important service to those who are bereaved. The reform of the service allows people to apply for a grant of probate online and to access assisted digital support for those who many not necessarily have the skills or access to engage digitally, and empowers individuals to make applications themselves instead of needing to instruct and pay for solicitors. This aims to reduce the burden on applicants, by providing a more efficient and simpler application process.

But such a courts system is simply not possible without proper funding. Since the previous Government set out their intentions to introduce a banded fee structure for grants of probate in February 2017, a number of concerns were raised. We have listened to these very carefully, and under today's proposal we have revised fees so they will never be more than 0.5% of the value of the estate. Moreover, by raising the estate value threshold from £5,000 to £50,000, we will be lifting around 25,000 estates annually out of fees altogether. For those who do pay, around 80% of estates will pay £750 or less, and all income raised will be spent on running the courts and tribunal service.

It has long been the case that the users of our courts make a contribution to its costs, and we believe this remains both relevant and reasonable—minimising the burden on other taxpayers. Crucially, by asking those who use the courts to pay more, where they can afford to do so, we are able to fund areas where we charge no fees to vulnerable victims and users, including for example domestic violence and non-molestation orders, and for cases before the First-tier Tribunal concerning mental health.

This new banded fee model represents a fair and more progressive way to pay for probate services compared to the current flat fee and reflects our commitment to protecting access to justice by ensuring we have a properly funded and resourced courts system. We are also confident these fees will never be unaffordable. The cost of the fee is recoverable from the estate and executors have several options to fund it. Moreover, the Lord Chancellor retains a power to remit a fee if he considers there are exceptional circumstances.

We will also publish a guidance document before the statutory instrument comes into force, entitled "Guidance on Ways to Pay for Probate Fees". This will benefit from external stakeholder input, and will help applicants to choose the option to pay which most suits their circumstances, providing reassurance at a difficult time.

[HCWS1066]



# Petition

*Monday 5 November 2018*

## OBSERVATIONS

### HOME DEPARTMENT

#### Medical cannabis oil

*The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

Declares that it is an injustice that sufferers of long term and terminal illness in the United Kingdom are currently unable to legally access Cannabis Oil for medical use which may in many cases be their only relief from pain or suffering; further that an online petition by Wansbeck Constituent, Paul Keeney, which has gathered the support of over 280,000 signatories in its calls for the Government to legalise Cannabis Oil for medical use; further the Government should listen to these calls and immediately act on reforming legislation which currently prevents cannabis oil being used in medical treatment in the United Kingdom; and further that in support of that petition and the work of Paul Keeney, this petition seeks to bring the attention of the Government to this important issue and further call for immediate action to be taken to legalise Cannabis Oil for Medical Use.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to legalise Cannabis Oil for medical use in the United Kingdom

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ian Lavery, *Official Report*, 26 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 862.]

[P002161]

*Observations from the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd):*

Recent high profile cases have shown the need to look more closely at the use of cannabis-based products for medicinal use in the UK. That is why the Government

committed to making these products available for specialist doctors on the GMC Specialist register to prescribe legally by the autumn.

This followed a two-part review in which the Government approach was guided by expert medical and scientific advice, such as the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) and the UK's Chief Medical Advisor, that there are potential medicinal benefits from these products.

While the Government have acted to ensure that patients are able to access the most appropriate forms of healthcare, the Government also recognise the particular challenges surrounding cannabis and, as such, we are taking a cautious approach to provide the necessary protections and safeguards both the Government and ACMD feel are essential.

The Government have now set out how cannabis-based products for medicinal use will be defined in order to make it lawful for them to be prescribed when specialist doctors believe this is appropriate. There are three broad requirements for products before they can be prescribed:

- the product is or contains cannabis, cannabis resin, cannabidiol or cannabidiol derivatives;
- the product must be produced for medicinal use in humans;
- it must be a product that is regulated as a medicinal product or an ingredient of a medicinal product.

Additionally, due to the known harms of smoking and the potential operational impact on misuse and diversion, smoking will remain prohibited.

Regulations have now been laid in Parliament to give effect to these measures and the rescheduling of cannabis-based products for medicinal use came into force on 1 November. It is the intention of Northern Ireland to mirror these regulations.

As the Government have been clear throughout, this is by no means the first step in the legalisation of cannabis for recreational purposes. Cannabis is controlled under Class B of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 as there is clear scientific and medical evidence that cannabis is a harmful drug which can damage people's mental and physical health, and harms individuals and communities.





# ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 5 November 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b> .....	1209	<b>HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—<i>continued</i></b>	
First-time Buyers: Help to Buy and Stamp Duty ...	1225	Local Authority Funding: Allocation .....	1218
Homeless Families: Accommodation Outside Home Borough .....	1212	Local Government: Departmental Support .....	1214
Homelessness .....	1224	Midlands Engine.....	1223
Leasehold Changes .....	1225	New Homes .....	1216
Leasehold Charges.....	1209	New Homes for Social Rent .....	1221
Local Authority Funding.....	1220	Residential Property Management .....	1217
		Topical Questions .....	1226

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Monday 5 November 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>DEFENCE</b> .....	43WS	<b>FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE—<i>continued</i></b>	
Armed Forces: Commonwealth Recruitment .....	43WS	Marshall Aid Commemorative Commission: Tailored Review .....	45WS
Defence Equipment Plan .....	43WS	<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE</b> .....	47WS
HMS Victorious: Refuel.....	44WS	Government Vision on Prevention .....	47WS
<b>FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE</b> .....	45WS	<b>JUSTICE</b> .....	47WS
Great Britain China Centre: Tailored Review.....	45WS	Justice Update.....	47WS
Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.....	46WS		

# PETITION

Monday 5 November 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>HOME DEPARTMENT</b> .....	5P
Medical cannabis oil .....	5P

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**not later than  
Monday 12 November 2018**

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## CONTENTS

Monday 5 November 2018

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1209] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government*

**Leaving the EU: Rights of EU Citizens [Col. 1233]**

*Answer to urgent question—(Caroline Nokes)*

**Universal Credit [Col. 1247]**

*Statement—(Ms McVey)*

**Prevention of Ill Health: Government Vision [Col. 1263]**

*Statement—(Matt Hancock)*

**School Uniforms [Col. 1276]**

*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Bullying and Harassment: Cox Report [Col. 1277]**

*General debate*

**Road Safety [Col. 1313]**

*General debate*

**Petition [Col. 1345]**

**Healthcare in Essex [Col. 1346]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Written Statements [Col. 43WS]**

**Petition [Col. 5P]**

*Observations*

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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