

**Thursday
24 January 2019**

**Volume 653
No. 240**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Thursday 24 January 2019

House of Commons

Thursday 24 January 2019

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Devolved Administrations: Discussions

1. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on the UK leaving the EU. [908744]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): The hon. Lady asks about recent discussions. Having been in post for just over two months, all my discussions seem fairly recent. She will be aware that on my first day in post I met the devolved Administrations as a priority. I have had meetings with the Prime Minister and the First Minister of Scotland. Indeed, the Prime Minister met the First Minister again yesterday, and they had a phone conversation last week.

Dr Whitford: This week's report from the Institute for Government suggests that Whitehall Departments are not yet prepared for Brexit, deal or no deal. The UK Government started talking last summer about stockpiling, so why was the list of critical drugs not shared with the Scottish Government until just before Christmas?

Stephen Barclay: I think that the assessment in Whitehall is that Whitehall is more prepared than the devolved Administrations. We are looking to work closely with the devolved Administrations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been very clear that medicines and medical products are our No. 1 priority for the supply of goods, and the extra ferry capacity has been purchased with that very much in mind.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If the discussions were about the maintenance of frictionless trade, a customs union of itself will not deliver that, will it?

Stephen Barclay: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not just about what tariffs apply; it is also about what regulations apply on non-tariff barriers. Much of the debate in this place is about tariffs, but standards and regulations are also relevant.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know from his discussions how concerned the Welsh Government are about the prospect of a no-deal exit—the Prime Minister was told that last night. The Secretary of State will also have seen the comments from the chief executive of Airbus this morning, and his stark warning about no deal. Will he therefore take this opportunity to condemn the comments of his Conservative MEP colleague David Bannerman, who described Mr Enders's warning as

“a German CEO putting EU interests first before his own employees”?

Stephen Barclay: I take very seriously the warning from the chief executive of Airbus, but I remind the hon. Lady that he supports the Prime Minister's deal. Many in business regard the deal as the way of delivering certainty through the implementation period. There is a lot of positivity with Airbus. If I look at the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) has done to champion the “wing of the future” at the research and development centre there, I see that there is huge opportunity. What the chief executive and others in the business community are clear about is that they want a deal in order to avoid the uncertainty of no deal, and that is why they are backing the Prime Minister.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): Welsh lamb producers send 90% of their exports to the European Union. In the event of a no-deal Brexit, they will face an effective tariff rate of 46%, so how are the UK Government working with the Welsh Government to support our farmers in this very serious situation?

Stephen Barclay: We are talking closely with the Welsh farming community, as are Members on both sides of the House. The Prime Minister was at the Royal Welsh Show last year as part of that engagement. The hon. Gentleman will know that the National Farmers Union in Wales, and indeed across the United Kingdom, has made it clear that the best way of supporting farmers is by backing the deal.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Prime Minister has promised that her discussions with the devolved nations and the Opposition parties will be without preconditions, so clearly she will not refuse even to discuss the prospect of extending article 50, because that would be a precondition; she will not refuse even to discuss the prospect of taking no deal off the table, because that would be a precondition; and she will not refuse even to discuss the possibility of giving the people another say, because that would be a precondition. Can the Secretary of State therefore confirm on the record that all those topics will be available for discussion, in honour of the Prime Minister's promise that there will be no preconditions?

Stephen Barclay: The Prime Minister was clear in her statement to the House on Monday that there are no preconditions. That is why she is engaging not just with the devolved Administrations; today I will be joining her for meetings with trade union leaders as part of that engagement. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the extension of article 50 is not a unilateral decision—it requires the consent of the other 27 member states. However, the main issue, and in fact, probably the only

precondition that one could apply, is the fact that we need to honour the referendum result, and that is what the Prime Minister is committed to doing.

Peter Grant: The Prime Minister was very clear in her statement to the House that there were no preconditions. She has been equally clear in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) that there are preconditions. The Secretary of State, and indeed the Prime Minister, will be becoming only too well aware that within probably a fairly short time the UK Government will be bombarding Scotland with promises about how much they love us, how equal a partner we are, and how much they want us to stay. Can I suggest to the Secretary of State that if he expects the people of Scotland to be conned by those false promises again in 2019, he should at the very least make sure that his Prime Minister stops breaking the promises she made to the people of Scotland last week?

Stephen Barclay: Let me just say very gently to the hon. Gentleman that the con is to have a referendum and then say that one will not honour the result. We had a referendum on independence in Scotland. The Scottish people spoke very clearly in that. I suspect that one of the reasons for that was that the trading relationship within the United Kingdom is the most economically beneficial to them. Having taken that decision, the next referendum was on a UK-wide basis, and it needs to be respected on that basis.

Support for Farmers

2. **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on support for farmers after the UK leaves the EU. [908745]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): I continue to have regular conversations with ministerial colleagues across Government on all aspects of exiting the EU, including support for farmers. The Agriculture Bill will allow us to break free of the common agricultural policy and help our farming sector to become more profitable while sustaining our natural environment.

Glyn Davies: I, too, want to ask about sheep farming, which is economically very significant in my constituency. It is an industry that, for many decades, has been underpinned by an EU payments system. There is major concern that this support system will be changed too abruptly for the industry to cope as the UK leaves the European Union. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give to the sheep farmers of Montgomeryshire that that will not be the case, and that changes will be gradual and manageable and not destroy the industry?

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. One of the main reassurances to those farmers, I suspect, is knowing that they have such a champion of their interests in my hon. Friend. In terms of the policy, the Government have pledged to commit the same cash total in funds for farm support for the duration of this Parliament, providing much needed certainty to farmers and landowners. The Agriculture Bill includes a seven-year

transition period for direct payments to provide further stability for farmers, giving comfort to them as they look to a brighter future.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Farmers in my constituency tell me that the majority of grain exports go to the European Union, and they are very concerned about the risk of the imposition of tariffs in the event of no deal, or indeed after the end of the transition period, when arrangements are very uncertain. What assurances can the Government give them?

Stephen Barclay: We have already covered the fact that there is an issue for the farming community in terms of tariffs. That is why I advocate a deal and those voting against a deal need to explain the impact of that issue to farmers. However, polls are obviously selective, but a poll taken in *Farmers Weekly* showed that a majority of farmers supported leaving the EU. I suspect that that was because they see a brighter future where we can have high animal welfare standards and good environmental standards, building on the reforms set out in the Agriculture Bill. So instead of talking down the opportunity of Brexit for farmers, this House should be looking at the opportunities that a green Brexit will deliver.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister might know that as the chair of my party's Back-Bench DEFRA committee, I think there are at last real signs that preparation for farming and farmers has been quite significant. However, that contrasts distinctly with what has been happening with the Secretary of State for International Trade. Has the Brexit Secretary seen the disgraceful remarks that his colleague made in Davos yesterday? Has he seen the front page of *The Times*, which says that 100 companies are going to the Netherlands, to Ireland and to France? What is he going to do, talking to colleagues, actually to get things moving?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman talks about disgraceful comments from Davos, but I do not want to dwell too much on what Tony Blair may or may not have said. The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, which is that timing is of the essence for the business community. Businesses face decisions about their no-deal planning, and they want the certainty of the deal that the Prime Minister has to offer. Opposition Members who have tabled amendments that seek to delay the level of uncertainty need to ask themselves how that uncertainty and delay is helping the business community, who need to get on in the real world and make those decisions.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): With special reference to the farming community in Northern Ireland, what discussions have been held with the permanent secretary for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs at the Northern Ireland Assembly regarding the transport of livestock beyond March?

Stephen Barclay: I know that the hon. Gentleman has considerable expertise and takes a deep interest in that issue. He will know that there have been extensive discussions within the Department for Environment,

Food and Rural Affairs on that very issue, and I am happy to liaise with him and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on it.

Secretary of State for Scotland: Discussions

3. **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland on the UK leaving the EU. [908747]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues and has discussed EU exit with the Secretary of State for Scotland on a number of occasions, including at the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU negotiations, the most recent meeting of which was on 19 December. We also regularly engage with the Scottish Government, including through the Ministerial Forum on EU negotiations, and I look forward to attending the next meeting of that in Edinburgh next week.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the Minister for his response. Thousands of jobs in my constituency and beyond rely on programmes such as Horizon 2020 and Erasmus and the freedom of movement on which universities depend. Given the short timescales, what reassurance can he give to universities that those programmes will continue and that we can fully participate in them?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. I have met a number of the Scottish universities to discuss that issue. It is right that universities in Scotland and across the UK are at the forefront of programmes such as Horizon 2020, which is why we have negotiated a deal that specifically envisages participation in them. We have had a positive reaction from the European Union to that. Of course, we need to secure the deal in order to secure the next round of talks and ensure we can take that forward. In the meantime, the Government have guaranteed Horizon funding until the end of the current multi-annual financial framework.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Has the Secretary of State for Scotland told the Minister whether he supports the statement from other Scottish Tory MPs, none of whom could be bothered to be here today, that they will try to block any attempt to include Scottish Government representatives in future negotiations with the EU?

Mr Walker: The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union have been clear that we are committed to giving the devolved Administrations, including the Scottish Government, an enhanced role in the next phase of negotiations. My Scottish Conservative colleagues have been strong champions of the devolution settlement and Scotland's place in the Union.

Scientific, Cultural and Educational Programmes

4. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the provision of scientific, cultural and educational programmes in the UK's future relationship with the EU. [908748]

19. **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the provision of scientific, cultural and educational programmes in the UK's future relationship with the EU. [908768]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular conversations with Cabinet colleagues on all aspects of EU exit, and in particular science, culture and education. The best way for our universities and researchers to continue to benefit from the partnerships we have built with European counterparts is a negotiated deal. The political declaration makes it clear that the UK and the EU intend fully to establish terms and conditions regarding UK participation in EU programmes.

Sir David Amess: When Southend-on-Sea becomes a city, I am keen that we are seen as a centre of excellence for learning. Will my hon. Friend tell the House how the Government intend to replace the funding for the Erasmus+ programme, which is increasingly popular with university students, if we leave the European Union on 29 March without some sort of agreement?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Of course, we are seeking to reach an agreement with the EU so that UK organisations can continue to participate in Erasmus. We are committed to that. As my hon. Friend will know, a number of countries participate in the Erasmus scheme that have never been members of the EU—I believe Israel is one such country—so there is no reason why we cannot have a similar arrangement.

Mrs Latham: Organisations such as Sadler's Wells and the Royal Ballet and many other cultural organisations recruit people from around the world, and some of them come from Europe. What protections will there be for people such as the excellent dancers we need to come to this country to promote tourism?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who is a cultural ambassador for this country, for the great work she does in promoting the performing arts. It is absolutely the intention of Her Majesty's Government to support the great range of talent that comes into this country, and there is no reason why that should be in any way impaired as we go forward.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows all about science, culture and education because he represents Cambridge.

Daniel Zeichner: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. The political declaration makes it very clear that the Government want to maintain a close involvement with EU programmes in future. Will the Minister have a word with the Secretary of State, who is a fellow east of England MP, to see if he shares my disappointment at the reports that the long-established and well-regarded East of England Brussels office faces possible closure? Will he join me in making representations to the East of England Local Government Association?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I would of course be very happy to undertake conversations with my right hon. Friend on the hon. Gentleman's behalf, and I suggest that perhaps the hon. Gentleman takes part in them, too. The principal issue is obviously about scientists; offices in themselves are not what this relationship is about. As a fellow graduate of Cambridge University, I applaud his efforts in representing the town and the university in this place.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: It would be good to hear the voice of Ceredigion as well.

Ben Lake: Diolch, Mr Speaker. In addition to ensuring participation in the European Union framework programme for research and innovation, it is just as crucial that immigration policy facilitates and, indeed, supports research conducted by teams consisting of members from an array of European countries. What discussions have there been with the Home Office to ensure that UK immigration policy aligns with the Government's priorities in this regard?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We have a labour mobility framework that especially ensures that highly skilled people are able to come into this country. There is a lot of doom-mongering and fear-mongering on this subject. It is absolutely the intention to keep an open policy for highly skilled, highly talented people to come into this country and contribute enormously to our society.

Contingency Planning: EU Member States

5. Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to co-operate with other EU member states on contingency planning for the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908750]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): I thank my hon. Friend for his question. It is in the UK and the EU's mutual interest to continue discussions regarding interdependencies in our respective contingency plans. We are pleased to see EU commitments to step up preparations for all scenarios and its recognition of the bespoke preparations needed in different member states. Progress continues to be made. On citizens' rights, we have called for member states to protect UK nationals' rights, and countries such as France, Italy and Spain have already taken such action.

Nigel Huddleston: Is the Minister as concerned as I am about the EU's no-deal planning relating to the aviation industry, which would put limits on new flights and new routes by UK airlines and put in place ownership restrictions? Is it not obvious that this is not in the best interests of the EU or the UK? It would, for example, limit the growth of tourism across Europe.

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend is extremely knowledgeable in this area, and he is correct to point out that the Commission has indicated exactly what he said. Obviously, we are seeking an ambitious and comprehensive air transport agreement with the European Union in all areas. My hon. Friend should note that nothing has yet been agreed on the Commission's draft

regulations, and we look forward to engaging with the Commission and other member states on the detail of these proposals to ensure that they deliver continuity. The UK has the third largest aviation network in the world. Air travel is vital for both the UK and the EU in connecting people and businesses, and he needs no pointers from me to the statistics demonstrating how important this matter is for many EU destinations for UK tourists.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): In a week in which P&O has announced that it is reflagging its entire cross-channel fleet in Cyprus, Sony is following Panasonic in moving its European headquarters from the UK to the Netherlands and Airbus has warned of potentially very harmful decisions if the UK crashes out without a deal, including future investment going elsewhere—I would definitely describe that as sub-optimal—when are the Government going to make their own announcement that under no circumstances will they allow the UK to leave without a deal, so we can stop this slow and damaging haemorrhage?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee for his question, but it prompts me to ask in reply why on earth he is not backing the deal that delivers the certainty that all the businesses that he named have asked for. He needs to look once again at the deal, and deliver the certainty that businesses across the UK require.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): When the Minister meets his opposite numbers in individual member states, does he take the opportunity to stress that they could stand down their plans for a no-deal scenario if the EU collectively showed some flexibility regarding the Irish backstop, so that a deal could then be settled?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Obviously, I look forward to getting a deal over the line, and as the Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee knows, I believe that leaving without a deal is "sub-optimal". In all conversations that every Minister has with representatives and Ministers from member states, we are pushing exactly the case that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has said that no deal would be "catastrophic", and that plants will close and jobs will be lost. I do not understand why the Government do not rule out no deal, but if they will not, why not hold a series of indicative votes, as recommended by the Exiting the European Union Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), on the different options for going forward, such as staying in the customs union? The Government know that their deal does not have a majority and that we must now move to the next stages. Why will they not do that?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. She and I co-existed in the European Parliament for a time, back when I was younger and she was the same age as she is now. She will understand that her constituents voted to leave the European Union, and they expect us to deliver on the result of that referendum. The one way of doing that is by having a deal. Over the

course of the referendum she and I have debated all the different difficulties that there will be in getting a deal across the line. We have a very good deal on the table—she should vote for it.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Earlier this week the chief executive of the civil service publicly confirmed what Ministers know and the public suspect, which is that despite the huge amounts of money being thrown at it, the Government will not be fully prepared to exit the European Union in 64 days' time without a deal. Will the Minister finally come clean with the public and admit that a no-deal exit on 29 March is not just "sub-optimal", it is simply not a viable option?

Chris Heaton-Harris: This House voted to activate article 50, and the legislation before us means that we will leave the European Union on 29 March. I would very much prefer to leave with a deal, as would the hon. Gentleman, and I think he should vote for it.

Agricultural Policy

6. **Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on agricultural policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908751]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): We continue to have regular conversations across the Government and with ministerial colleagues on all aspects of exiting the European Union, and agricultural policy is a key part of that. The Agriculture Bill is part of the Government's programme of legislation to deliver a smooth exit from the EU, and as the Secretary of State said, we must seize the opportunities of a green Brexit and break from the EU's common agricultural policy.

Damien Moore: Does the Minister agree that the Agriculture Bill presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help our farmers, protect our environment, and be part of the fourth agricultural revolution?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—I am still trying to work out what the first three agricultural revolutions were, but I fully support his sentiment. The Bill constitutes the first major agricultural reform in the UK for more than 70 years, and we will support our farming industries, as we have done as a Government since the 1920s and long before we joined the European Economic Community. The Bill will also allow us to break from the EU's common agricultural policy, and it is an incredibly positive and dynamic step forward.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): A no-deal Brexit would mean that the UK would not be listed as an approved country for agricultural exports to the EU. Gaining that status could take months to negotiate. Given that almost a third of sheep production in the UK goes to the EU, what discussions has the Minister had with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about compensating sheep farmers for the potential loss of that market?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We are absolutely focused on delivering the deal. The hon. Gentleman has expressed very clearly the dangers and pitfalls of no deal, while at the same time people in his party are complaining about the dangers of no deal, yet refusing to back the deal. That is completely irresponsible. I urge the hon. Gentleman to encourage his colleagues to back the deal.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We do not allow two bites of the cherry at substantive questions, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to chance his arm at topicals, he might be successful. We look forward to that with eager anticipation.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): There is a real danger in looking at farming policy dissociated from what happens further along the food chain. This week, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee took evidence from the National Farmers Union and the Food and Drink Federation. Those organisations are obviously concerned about things like tariffs if we exit without a deal, but they are also really concerned about packaging, machine parts and so on—everything that is involved in food production.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Of course, the modern economy means that all these issues are integrated. As we said, the Agriculture Bill offers the possibility of a more bespoke policy. That is what Brexit can potentially deliver. So we are completely aware that a lot of these industries are integrated, and have a wide range of problems to solve. That is something that we are fully prepared to deal with.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is the Minister aware that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs told me two weeks ago that he believed other European countries would be looking enviously at the UK's deal? Is that officially the Government's position, and if so, are they not concerned that it puts the entire European project at risk, because everyone will want an identical deal, and there will be no European Union left?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) has said a lot of things in the last three weeks—I am not particularly aware of them. In terms of the sentiment, the hon. Gentleman will understand that agriculture is a devolved issue. As a Government, we still view Brexit in a very positive light. I think there are lots of opportunities, as things like the Agriculture Bill would suggest, for this country going forward. What other countries do is up to them. I do not know what moves there are for other countries to leave the EU, but that is exactly what we intend to do: we want to deliver the deal, and we are leaving the EU on 29 March.

Citizenship Rights

7. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to secure citizenship rights for (a) UK citizens residing in the EU and (b) EU citizens residing in the UK after the UK leaves the EU. [908752]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): EU citizens will be able to stay in all scenarios under the EU settlement scheme. As the Prime Minister announced this week, we will waive the application fee, removing any financial barrier for them to do so. We are working with member states to understand how they will protect UK nationals in all scenarios. I am pleased that some, like Cyprus and the Netherlands, have published such plans.

Bob Blackman: That will clearly be good news for the 13,000 EU citizens that live in my constituency, providing certainty going forward, but will the Minister make further efforts to ensure that the European Union provides reciprocal rights to all UK citizens that live in the EU?

Mr Walker: Yes, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right: not only are the EU citizens in all our constituencies valued members of our communities, but of course the UK nationals in other EU member states are also valued members of their communities. This is really important. We shall be urging our EU counterparts to echo the reassurances that we have given for UK nationals living in their country, and to provide reciprocal protections.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Although waiving the £65 charge is, of course, very welcome, it still leaves EU citizens as second-class citizens in a country they have chosen to make their home—if not the citizens of nowhere, in that disgraceful phrase used by our Prime Minister. Would the Government consider covering any reasonable costs that EU citizens might incur in securing their settled status, beyond the £65 charge that has been waived?

Mr Walker: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the Government's decision in this respect, but it is important to say that this is a simple digital scheme—one that should be easy and straightforward to apply to. The Government are providing help and assistance, ensuring that we invest substantial resources in making the scheme work for EU citizens.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I wrote to the Minister immediately after the no-deal paper on citizenship rights was published on 6 December, seeking clarification on points that appeared to reduce rights previously granted in the withdrawal agreement, but I have had no response. One question was: why have the Government made it more difficult for EU citizens to secure their rights, by bringing forward the deadline for settled status applications, so that in a chaotic period, without a transition, applicants would have not six extra months but six fewer months to confirm their status? If the Government cannot answer such basic questions after five weeks, does it not confirm that they are simply not prepared for no deal?

Mr Walker: I am surprised to hear that the hon. Gentleman has not had an answer, because I have certainly signed one off. I am sorry if it has not reached him. I shall investigate that matter and check.

In the unsought-for event of no deal, there would be 21 months after we leave the EU for people to register for the scheme. Obviously, the same implementation

period would not be in place, so that actually offers a longer period after the change in circumstances than the six-month grace period on offer in a deal scenario.

Automotive Sector

8. Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with representatives of the automotive sector on the UK leaving the EU. [908753]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): The Department has engaged extensively with the automotive sector to understand its priorities as we leave the EU. We met leading manufacturers in summits at Chevening House last year. Those were held with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. It is a dialogue that we are keen to pursue.

Mr Cunningham: Over 800,000 people are involved in the automobile industry. What views did they pass on to the Minister, and what concerns did they express to him, about the Brexit deal? Can he answer that question?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Absolutely. It is a very simple question to answer: people in the automotive sector, the businessmen we talked to—as across many other industries—have all said that they want to see a deal. They want certainty, and they want to be able to plan for the future, which is why, as I have said many times, we want to land the deal—we need a deal.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): The Government are pretending that they would take this country out without a deal at the end of March. This morning, the CEO of Airbus said:

“Please don't listen to the Brexiteers' madness which asserts that, because we have huge plants here, we will not move and we will always be here. They are wrong.”

Airbus alone employs 14,000 people in the UK. The Prime Minister is using hundreds of thousands of UK jobs as leverage with her own MPs. Is it not now time for the Prime Minister to tell the truth, that she will not take the UK out of the EU on 29 March without a deal?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The hon. Lady will understand that the current legal position is that if we get to 29 March without a deal, we will leave without a deal. That is the legal position. The hon. Lady will have read the remarks of the CEO of Airbus and she will have noticed that further on he says very explicitly that he, his industry and his business need clarity. We have to vote for a deal. We have always said that the deal is our favoured option, which is why we want to see it over the line.

Jenny Chapman: If the hon. Gentleman insists that his Government are ready to take us out without a deal in nine weeks' time, what will he do to support the hundreds of thousands of manufacturing workers whose jobs would be threatened?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We are committed to investing £4 billion in the industry over the next few years. There is no doubt that a deal is our favoured option—that is why we encourage Labour Members to support the deal. It

seems ridiculous to me that they complain about no deal while at the same time opposing the deal. That is like complaining about the rain and then rejecting the use of an umbrella when we offer it to them. It is absolute madness. That is why I urge the hon. Lady to back the deal.

Universities

9. **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with representatives of the university sector on the UK leaving the EU. [908754]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Ministers and officials engage extensively with the university sector to understand their issues with and priorities for EU exit. I have held a number of bilateral meetings with university leaders and, later this afternoon, I will join the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), for my regular EU exit meeting with the sector.

Rosie Duffield: Both of my large universities in Canterbury tell me that they have had no communication whatever from the Brexit Secretary, his Ministers or his Department. Given that 10% of their students and 25% of their staff are from the EU, and they are heavily involved in research programmes, as we have heard this morning, will the Minister or his Department reach out to my universities? I am sure that he will be welcome in Canterbury.

Mr Walker: I would be happy to do that. We have had contact with universities directly and through their various representative bodies—Universities UK, the Russell Group, MillionPlus and so on. I am happy to ensure that those universities have been contacted directly by our Department, because it is important that we engage with all universities on such matters.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): A number of university students have been traumatised by remainers saying that they will no longer be able to participate in the Erasmus programme. Will my hon. Friend—if he is not right honourable, he should be—reassure them that the programme is open not only to students in the European Union, but to those in Canada, Israel and other countries outside the EU?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend has made an excellent point. The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), mentioned Israel in this context earlier. It is true that Erasmus has a number of non-EU participants, and it is clear that the UK has ambitions to continue its cultural co-operation with the EU even after we have left.

Contingency Planning: No Deal

10. **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What recent discussions the Government have had with local authorities on contingency planning for the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [908755]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): The Department obviously engages closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that local authorities are prepared for EU exit in any scenario. On Wednesday I had an opportunity to meet the mayoral forum, and later today I shall be speaking to the Local Government Association.

Helen Goodman: Last week I met representatives of Durham County Council, who told me that central Government had not been able to give them any scenarios or planning decisions, and that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had no money whatsoever to help local authorities to plan for contingencies in the event of no deal. Is this no-deal planning a bluff, or is it just a sign of the Government's sheer incompetence?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I do not think we recognise the way in which the hon. Lady has characterised the Government's engagement with local authorities. We have recognised the need for much more localised planning. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has established a delivery board and chief executive-level advisory groups. We have held four national conferences, which have been attended by 350 senior local authority officers and 200 councils. There is much more engagement, and means and money, behind our commitment to ensuring that this country is prepared in the event of a no-deal scenario.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Is it the Government's position that if we need additional time in which to agree a deal that will pass through the House, they will crash out on 29 March rather than extending article 50 and giving us time to negotiate that position?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I have said many times, the Government's position is that we will land a deal and ensure that we leave with that deal on 29 March.

Second EU Referendum

12. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Whether the Government plan to bring forward legislative proposals to hold a second referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. [908758]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): The Government will not hold a second referendum, and will not introduce any legislation to enable one to be held.

Martyn Day: I kind of expected that answer from the Secretary of State. However, the Prime Minister will return to Parliament in a week's time and expect MPs to vote again on her deal. If it is acceptable for them to have a second vote, why is it not acceptable for the public to have one?

Stephen Barclay: It seems to me that some MPs do not want a second vote. They had already voted to give the British public a say in the referendum; then they voted to trigger article 50, and then they voted to include the date in the Bill that became the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. It is not really a great look for the public for people to say, "We got it wrong three times, but give us a fourth go."

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): In the light of today's deeply concerning statements from Airbus, will the Secretary of State tell us first how many workers the Government are willing to see made redundant in order to keep the Conservative party together, and secondly whether those workers deserve the democratic right to a people's vote?

Stephen Barclay: The crux of the issue is that the industries concerned want a deal and support the deal. The hon. Gentleman's party, and indeed he, stood on a manifesto commitment to delivering on the biggest vote in our history. The issue for those workers whose jobs are in question—and the question that the hon. Gentleman needs to answer for them—is why he is going back on a manifesto that he gave his own voters.

Business Community

13. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with representatives of the business community on the UK leaving the EU.

[908759]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): The Department has conducted more than 500 meetings with stakeholders, including businesses of all sizes and descriptions. Currently, after two months in the job, I am making visits around the country, and I hope to meet representatives of firms and hear their views.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Concerns have been raised with me by the road haulage industry about the burden of the extra customs paperwork that will be required in the event of no deal. What estimate has the Department made of the additional time and cost that they will incur in that event?

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): The businesses in my constituency include many international companies that are headquartered there, such as BASF, which produces chemicals. It wants to ensure it can continue to access EU frameworks such as REACH—the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals regulations—and the European Chemicals Agency. It faces tens of millions of pounds in costs in the event of a no-deal Brexit, particularly through migrating its EU registration. Does my hon. Friend agree that associate membership of such agencies, for which the withdrawal agreement provides, is vital to the success of these key industries?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and at this very moment we are negotiating the precise arrangements. She is right to mention the withdrawal agreement, because extensive passages in that agreement relate to exactly the type of co-operation and participation that she describes. We are focused on this, and hope that we can reach a good conclusion.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Airbus employs 14,000 people in this country, and we have a valuable and important aerospace manufacturing cluster in Wolverhampton. The chief executive of Airbus said today:

“Brexit is threatening to destroy a century of development based on education, research and human capital.”

Is it not the case that the rich men who drove this project can move their money, their investments and their corporate headquarters abroad, but it now poses a clear and present danger to valuable and important UK manufacturing jobs?

Kwasi Kwarteng: When the right hon. Gentleman spoke about “the rich men”, I thought he was referring to his friends in Davos, such as the former Prime Minister, who seems to be very focused on trying to reverse the verdict of the 17.4 million people in this country who voted for Brexit.

It is very clear where the interests of Airbus and businesses lie. They have said repeatedly over the past six weeks that they want to back the deal—they want an end to this uncertainty, and they want clarity and the ability to plan for the future. Where does the right hon. Gentleman stand on that?

Fishing Policy

14. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on fishing policy after the UK leaves the EU.

[908761]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): We continue to work closely with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on our fisheries policy after exit. The fisheries White Paper set out the Government's plans for a bright future for our fishing industry as we become an independent coastal state. By leaving the common fisheries policy, we will be able to make sure, for the first time in over 40 years, that our fishermen get a fairer deal.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Work has just started on preparing a long-term strategy to revive the East Anglian fishing industry. The foundation stone on which this renaissance will be built is taking back control of access to UK waters. Can the Minister assure the House that this right will not be traded away in any future negotiations, however difficult they may become?

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend yet again demonstrates his dedication to help to revive the East Anglian fishing industry. Let me be clear that this deal will mean we become an independent coastal state with control over our waters. We have firmly rejected a link between access to our waters and access to markets. The fisheries agreement is not something that we will be trading off against any other priority.

No-deal Preparation

15. **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What recent steps the Government have taken to prepare for the UK leaving the EU without a deal.

[908763]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): The Government's focus continues to be on leaving the EU with a deal. However, with just nine weeks until we leave, the Government are responsibly preparing for the alternative.

Tom Pursglove: What impact does my hon. Friend believe that terminating no-deal preparations now would have on the Prime Minister's ongoing negotiations with the EU?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend for his question—and as someone who worked for me as my parliamentary researcher for five years, I thank him for no sight whatsoever of his supplementary question.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): He's better.

Chris Heaton-Harris: He is much better; that is absolutely true.

Anybody who has been involved in any type of negotiation—perhaps a union representative trying to negotiate a better deal on employee rights or salaries, or just anyone involved in any sort of deal—knows that they need to have the ultimate option on the table at any given time. Reducing any options basically means that you have less room to negotiate—it would be a foolish thing to do.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The best that the Government seem to be able to say about their deal is that it is very slightly less worse than no deal. That is the metaphorical gun that they are putting against our head, and I would appreciate it if they could give us a decent answer as to why they have nothing better than that.

Chris Heaton-Harris: The hon. Lady knows that I have a huge amount of respect for her, but the premise behind her question is so wrong that it is hard to believe. A whole host of employers in her constituency will doubtless have beaten a path to her door to ask her to vote for the certainty and continuity that the Government's deal delivers. If they have not done so, I would be very surprised, because they are doing it nationally.

Customs Union

16. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of negotiating a permanent customs union between the UK and the EU. [908764]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (**Stephen Barclay**): A customs union would not respect the referendum result. On this side of the House, we are intending to respect that result.

Alex Cunningham: The statutory instrument covering the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—REACH—regulations relating to chemical production on Teesside and elsewhere is inadequate, according to the industry. Surely a comprehensive customs union, which has been described by the director general of the CBI as a “practical real-world answer”, would solve such complex problems.

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman might see the approach to this as one of managed decline—

Alex Cunningham: It is.

Stephen Barclay: Well, indeed he does, clearly, so he does not see the rich opportunity of an independent trade policy that backs our businesses to go out in the

world and succeed, or the opportunities that they would have through a trade policy. In a way, this really goes to the crux of the issue, because there is a lack of vision among Labour Members. They cannot see the benefits of an independent trade policy, and are therefore willing to contract that opportunity out to the European Union and have no say in it.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Like the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), the Secretary of State has no doubt seen the comment by Tom Enders, the chief executive officer of Airbus, that the Government's handling of Brexit is a “disgrace”. More than 6,000 good-quality jobs in Alyn and Deeside are dependent on Airbus. What share of the blame does the Secretary of State take for this?

Stephen Barclay: The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that those are good-quality jobs. We see that in the potential of things such as the ring for the future, the research and development centre at Airbus and the apprenticeship programmes that we see in industries—

Mark Tami: What about now?

Stephen Barclay: The answer to that is, again, to listen to the voice of business. It is clear that business wants an implementation period, not just for the certainty that it would deliver, but because, from a regulatory position, it does not want to have to take two steps and have two changes.

Second EU Referendum

18. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): If he will make an assessment of the implications for his Department's policies of a second referendum on the UK leaving the EU. [908767]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (**Chris Heaton-Harris**): The Government have been clear all along that we will not hold a second referendum. A clear majority of the electorate delivered an instruction to the Government to withdraw from the European Union, with 17.4 million votes cast in that manner.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the Minister for his unwavering commitment to that position, which my constituents will be very pleased to hear. A clear majority of people in Redditch—62%—voted to leave. That is nearly 29,000 people who voted to leave in that historic vote. Does he therefore agree that to go back on that vote and on our manifesto commitment would cause massive damage to our democracy?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend—[*Interruption.*] I hear some murmuring from Labour Members that they refuse to deliver on their manifesto commitments that were made in exactly the same manner. I guess that a fair question to ask those proposing a second referendum: should they not come clean and admit that they are not really after asking the British people, and that they just want to prevent us from leaving the European Union in the first place? That would be a much more honest position for them to take.

Topical Questions

T1. [908769] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): Since I last updated the House, the Government have suffered a significant defeat in the meaningful vote, and I think it is right that we recognise that. The Prime Minister has responded to that by listening and engaging—[*Laughter.*] Well, the Leader of the Opposition has not engaged, but the Prime Minister has. She has engaged with the leadership of the party of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and other parties, and today she is engaging with trade union leaders. Yesterday she engaged with the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales. The Government have also responded to some immediate concerns of the House, such as by waiving the settlement fee and responding to the concerns of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) by looking at how we can have more targeted engagement with the House in the next phase of negotiations. We are continuing the process, and we look forward to further discussions.

Mr Carmichael: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. The “Whitehall Monitor 2019” report, which was published on Monday, revealed that the overall number of civil servants is up by 19,900 since the referendum, that the cost of civil servants leaving stands at £74 million a year, and that a third of the entire civil service is now apparently working on Brexit. Despite all that, the Government have passed only five of the 13 Bills necessary for Brexit, and less than a fifth of 133 major projects are likely or probably to be delivered and completed on time and on budget. Is the Secretary of State satisfied with the progress that his Department is making?

Stephen Barclay: The right hon. Gentleman will recall from his days as deputy Chief Whip that a range of legislation needs to be passed for various scenarios. Significant progress has been made with the statutory instruments, with over 300 being passed, so he is cherry-picking with his comments about legislation. For example, the Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill passed through this House this week. That key piece of legislation will enable us to make bilateral payments in the event of no deal. Considerable work has been happening over the past two years, and I pay tribute to civil servants across Whitehall for that. Significant progress has been made, but not all the issues relating to no deal are within the Government’s control, because some are reliant upon responses from business, third parties, EU member states and the European Commission.

T2. [908770] **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): My right hon. Friend has heard the huge concerns from both agriculture and manufacturing about leaving without a deal, but 80% of our economy is services. What impact would leaving without a deal have on not only services within the UK, but our services exports, regarding which we have substantial surpluses with the EU and around the world?

Stephen Barclay: Understandably, we have big debates in the House about goods, but 80% of our economy is services, so my hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention

to that. The political declaration contains the opportunity to have a good and constructive relationship that reflects the dominance of the UK position on financial services, for example. That is why the package of the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration together is so important.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): There are 64 days until 29 March, and the deal has gone down. On Monday, the Prime Minister made a statement about what she is going to do now; to put it politely, she was vague about her intentions. She said that she would “take the conclusions” of any discussions with MPs “back to the EU”, as if she is in a parallel universe in which we are somehow at the start of the process. I have a simple question: when the Prime Minister goes to the EU, will she be seeking legally binding changes to the withdrawal agreement, simple reassurances or, still less, clarifications?

Stephen Barclay: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is always polite, so I will reciprocate and say that there are 64 days to go but we still do not know what Labour’s position is. It appears—

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): He asked you a different question.

Stephen Barclay: I will come on to that.

If we are talking about parallel universes and the 64 remaining days, it is worth clarifying that I genuinely do not know what the Labour position is. An amendment has been tabled that would change the operation of the House’s Standing Orders without any proper debate about the constitutional implications, which go way beyond Brexit, and extend the article 50 process until December, which would mean that elections to the European Parliament would have to happen in May. Three years after the people asked to leave, is it now Labour party policy to ask the people to vote for Members of the European Parliament? Everyone else is engaging with the process—even Len McCluskey is joining us for discussions in No. 10 today—yet the Leader of the Opposition is sitting alone in a parallel universe, unwilling to engage with anyone. We are listening to the concerns of Members on both sides of the House, including our confidence and supply partners, and we are working constructively to address the concerns of the business community. The question for the shadow Secretary of State—I hope he will clarify this for the House—is about Labour’s policy. Will he confirm that Labour is no longer committed to its manifesto?

Mr Speaker: I always listen to the Secretary of State with the keenest possible interest and attention, but I must say to him in all courtesy that he is filibustering his own right hon. and hon. Friends, who might not get in on this session. It must be clear that he is culpable, because the Chair is not.

Keir Starmer: The Secretary of State gives the definition of a non-answer. [HON. MEMBERS: “What’s your policy, then?”] Our policy is a comprehensive customs union and single market deal—[*Interruption.*] It is in our manifesto, and I think that there would be a majority for it in this place, if it were put to a vote.

I look forward to tomorrow's headlines, but I doubt they will say that Len McCluskey and the Prime Minister have agreed on the way forward. I asked the Secretary of State a question, and I would like an answer. Does the Prime Minister intend to put her deal to the House again and, if so, when?

Stephen Barclay: Self-evidently, whatever deal we bring forward will need to secure the confidence of the House, and that will entail a vote. The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about his policy and actually, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, he has been quite clear. His policy appears to be to remain in the European Union by triggering a second referendum, and he has indicated his personal view that, following that vote, we should remain. His policy is not consistent with the Labour manifesto, so I ask him again: is his policy the Labour policy, or is his policy different from that of the Leader of the Opposition?

T4. [908772] **Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): In the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal, will my right hon. Friend consider using the provisions of article XXIV of the general agreement on tariffs and trade to maintain existing arrangements until a free trade agreement can be concluded, and thus avoid any imposition of tariffs or quotas?

Stephen Barclay: As I would expect, my right hon. Friend asks a detailed, precise and interesting question. I have looked into this issue, and paragraph 5 of article XXIV allows only interim arrangements that are necessary for the formulation of a new free trade area where the parties have "a plan and schedule" for doing so. It does not allow the continuation of previous arrangements under an agreement that no longer applies.

T3. [908771] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): A small business owner from my constituency emailed me before Christmas. His business had won its first EU contract, requiring him to hire four extra people to deliver it. However, he has just been told by the EU that the business will lose the contract in the event of a no-deal Brexit. What would the Secretary of State say to my constituent? Will he please set out what the Government would say to my constituent, rather than what the Opposition would say?

Stephen Barclay: I say to the hon. Lady—that this applies to many Opposition Members—that I do not doubt her commitment to the business concerned or to trying to protect jobs. Indeed, that is one of the driving forces that led many Opposition Members to come into politics, but part of that is about listening to what business groups are saying. What they say is that, in the withdrawal agreement, things like citizens' rights and our security relationships matter. Above all, businesses say that the flow and supply of goods matter, and that not having two sets of regulatory changes matters. That is why the business community says that it wants the certainty of the deal. When the Leader of the Opposition will not even enter into discussions, we are happy to engage with the hon. Lady and others, but this needs a two-way process.

T8. [908776] **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): Extreme weather events have cost the global economy more than half a trillion pounds over the past few years, and the scientific consensus is that, unless we halve our greenhouse

gas emissions, such events will only become more frequent. Currently, EU institutions monitor and enforce how we in the UK implement our policies. Can the Minister outline his plans for future regulatory oversight?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The UK wants to continue to be at the forefront of environmental leadership and tackling climate change. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has set out plans for a green Brexit. With the environment Bill, we will make sure that we have the institutions set up to police that and to monitor our progress on protecting our environment.

T6. [908774] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): When I met representatives of Doctors of the World yesterday, they told me that the EU workers on the Government's new 12-month visa scheme will not qualify for the immigration health surcharge scheme. Will the Secretary of State confirm that that is the case and tell us what provision will be made for those people?

Stephen Barclay: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to remind the House of the £20.5 billion extra that the Government are investing in the NHS. In terms of workforce and recruitment, which is key, I remind him that the Government have lifted the tier 2 visa for doctors and nurses as part of increasing recruitment. What matters is not just recruitment from the EU—we have already had an exchange about EU recruitment since the referendum—but the recruitment of doctors and nurses globally. We are very committed to doing that as part of a skills-based immigration system.

T9. [908777] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): How much VAT will we no longer pay to the EU after Brexit?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): I honestly cannot give my hon. Friend the exact answer, so I will happily write to him about that. Arrangements will be needed for paying various taxes and tariffs in the event that we leave without a deal, and they are in progress.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is in danger of rivalling the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), but they both believe in healthy competition, after all.

T7. [908775] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I welcome the fact that EU citizens will no longer have to pay a fee to obtain settled status, but they will still have to make an application, which implies that some may be refused, as has happened already with citizenship. After the shame of the Windrush scandal, does the Minister not think that EU citizens should be guaranteed the right to stay in their own homes?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I humbly suggest to the hon. Lady that that is what UK nationals across Europe, in just about every EU state, do when they reside there. We

have offered a very generous package—more generous than that which the EU is currently offering in return regarding citizens' rights.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I have been contacted, as I am sure many colleagues have, by UK citizens living in the EU who are concerned about their future voting rights locally after we leave the EU. Will the Minister update the House on the progress that the Department has made on that?

Mr Robin Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that this is a concern for UK citizens living across the EU. The UK sought to raise the matter in negotiations, but the Commission was clear that that was outside its competence. It agreed to let us take it up bilaterally with member states, which we have done. I am pleased to say that earlier this week, I signed the first reciprocal voting rights treaty with Spain to guarantee the voting rights of UK citizens in Spain, and Spanish citizens in the UK, in local elections.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Many businesses, particularly small ones, have yet to calculate, or do not want to publicise, the impact on them of a no-deal Brexit. Does the Minister recognise the scale of the sense of betrayal at the idea that a Tory Government should use those businesses' balance sheets, employees and hard-won market expertise as leverage in an act of economic betrayal and blackmail?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, although the premise behind it is completely incorrect. Small businesses across the country are getting ready for a Brexit with a deal and a no-deal Brexit. She gives me the opportunity to highlight the partnership pack that is online for all businesses to look at, so that citizens, individuals and businesses, small and large, can prepare appropriately for a no-deal Brexit. The partnership pack can be found on gov.uk.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): In every answer that the Secretary of State and his Ministers have given this morning, they have declined to recognise that they lost the vote on the deal by 230 votes—by more than two to one. Exactly how are the Government going to listen to Members of this House so that we can agree a deal and move forward?

Stephen Barclay: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman came in partway through topical questions, but I opened my response to the first question with a recognition of the result. I have referred in a number of answers to the engagement that the Prime Minister and ministerial colleagues are having. Indeed, in my exchange with the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), I mentioned meetings with trade union leaders today, and I spoke about meeting the SNP First Minister. Listening to the hon. Gentleman's question, it is almost as though the last hour has not happened. We accept that the result of that vote was significant, and we are listening to the result. We have taken a number of measures as a consequence.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At the start of today's business, the Annunciator was showing that Question Time would be followed by the urgent question, which would then be followed by a Justice statement and the business statement. I understand that that has been corrected during questions, but for the benefit of the House, will you clarify the order of business that will follow?

Mr Speaker: Yes, I am happy to do that, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. After this urgent question, we will have the business question, and after that there will be a ministerial statement on the management and supervision of men convicted of sexual offences. That is the order, so business questions come after this urgent question. I hope that that is helpful to colleagues.

EU Free Trade Agreements

10.40 am

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade if he will make a statement on maintaining EU free trade agreements after the UK leaves the EU.

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery):

As a member of the European Union, the UK currently participates in around 40 free trade agreements with more than 70 countries. These free trade agreements cover a wide variety of relationships, including economic partnership agreements with developing nations; association agreements, which cover broader economic and political co-operation; and trade agreements with countries that are closely aligned with the EU, such as Turkey and Switzerland. Of course, more conventional free trade agreements are also part of the package.

Businesses in the UK, EU and partner countries are eligible for a range of preferential market-access opportunities under the terms of the free trade agreements. Those opportunities can include, but are not limited to, preferential duties for goods, including reductions in import tariff rates across a wide variety of products, quotas for reduced or nil payments of payable duties, and quotas for more relaxed rules-of-origin requirements; enhanced market access for service providers; access to public procurement opportunities across a range of sectors; and improved protections for intellectual property.

For continuity and stability for businesses, consumers and investors, we are committed to ensuring that the benefits I have outlined are maintained, providing a smooth transition as we leave the EU. The Department for International Trade, the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development are working with partner countries to prepare to maintain existing trading relationships.

Mr Leslie: With just 64 days to go, will the Minister confirm that not only is there the well-known Brexit risk of catastrophic disruption to 44% of our country's trade, but now, on top of that, a further 12% of our trade could be thrown into chaos because of the Government's failure to roll over our 40 trade agreements with 70 countries around the rest of the world in time for exit day?

Does the Minister recall the promise made by his Secretary of State at his party conference in October 2017, when he boasted:

"I hear people saying, 'Oh, we won't have any'"

free trade agreements

"'before we leave.' Well, believe me, we'll have up to 40 ready for one second after midnight in March 2019"?

Was that bragging not made worse when the former trade Minister Lord Price tweeted falsely in October 2017:

"All have agreed roll over"?

Will the Minister explain why expectations were raised so high back then, when today's reality is so dangerously disappointing? Can he confirm that the leaked memo reported in the *Financial Times* was accurate, and that he has been warned by his officials that most of the deals Britain is covered by will lapse because there is no

transition period to keep Britain under the EU umbrella once Brexit occurs? Does he agree with the Government official quoted in the FT that

"Almost none of them are ready to go now"?

As well as the 40 free trade agreements, there are more than 700 other trade-related treaties and mutual recognition agreements, so when will we get an accurate update from the Government on how many of those will lapse in March as well? Some 2% of our trade is via the European economic area free trade agreement, with Norway and Iceland, which has still not been settled for roll-over; Canada accounts for 1.4% of our trade; Turkey, with which we currently have a form of customs union, accounts for 1.3%; South Korea accounts for 1%; and Switzerland accounts for 3.1%. All these and more add up to £151 billion of export and import markets. Will the Minister confirm that if we do not roll over the trade arrangements we enjoy by virtue of our EU membership, the full range of World Trade Organisation tariffs will start to apply?

What is the real situation in respect of Australia and New Zealand? Are the press claims that a full free trade agreement has been signed accurate, or are these just mutual recognition agreements being passed off as FTAs? On Switzerland, can the Minister place full details of the allegedly initialled agreement in the Library of the House? It is still not clear which aspects of the existing UK-Swiss relationship are due to be replicated. Will UK-based firms continue trading into Switzerland on exactly the same basis, including the free movement of people, or are there differences? For example, can he rule out tariffs on imported Swiss goods from March?

If British cars are exported, could they face 10% WTO tariffs? What will the tariffs be on Norwegian salmon, Canadian maple syrup, and food and veg from Turkey? When will the Government start telling Parliament about these things? Is it not the truth that all these countries first want to know what the UK's relationship will be with our largest trading partner, the EU, and that we have little hope of pinning down brand new agreements until we have pinned down that agreement? Will the Minister face reality, slay these fantasy unicorn promises, and admit that Brexit is not going well and presents a clear and present danger to the free trade agreements our economy desperately relies on?

George Hollingbery: That was a pretty long shopping list, and I am not in a position to answer all the hon. Gentleman's questions, but I will make one point. I told him in Committee back in November that there was a wide range of reasons why some of these agreements had been challenging in many instances. For example, there have been changing incentives. If this House cannot make up its mind on what Brexit looks like, it will obviously be difficult for some of our interlocutors to decide whether we will be leaving the EU on 29 March. That said, a responsible Government make plans for any eventuality, and we are working extremely hard to make sure that the 40 agreements we have in place are available to those companies that use the preferences they guarantee.

I told the hon. Gentleman earlier that I believed the majority of these agreements would be in place by 29 March, and I continue to believe that, but it would not be appropriate to go into further details on an individual country basis, because these conversations are necessarily

[George Hollingbery]

confidential, and our partners wish them to be confidential. To go into them, therefore, would not be proper. I am very happy to tell the House, however, that I believe we will have the majority of agreements rolled over, and it is absolutely our objective to have them all rolled over.

Finally, one small detail worth clearing up—it has been a matter of some press speculation—is that the Swiss agreement does not include any provisions on free movement.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): It has always been very likely that the counterparties to these deals would want to keep them operable, as it is in their interests to do so, but may I highlight the stinking hypocrisy of the Labour party on this? It voted against adopting many of these deals in the first place—it voted against adopting the comprehensive economic and trade agreement in February 2017 and against adopting the EU-Singapore agreement in September 2018—and now Labour Members complain that the deals will no longer be operable next month. Does my hon. Friend agree that this shows the Labour party at its absolute worst on Brexit, with its members unable to agree among themselves, and unable to do what is in the UK national interest?

Mr Speaker: The Minister at least pays obeisance to, and I think has genuine respect for, etiquette, protocol and the principle of parliamentary courtesy, so it would not occur to him for a moment to descend into the swamp, disregard his ministerial responsibility to the House, and start prating on about the policy of the Opposition, but let us put it to the test and hear from the Minister.

George Hollingbery: First, let me pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) for all the work that he did in preparing this country for striking new trade deals, and indeed in maintaining the continuity of our existing free trade deals. He points out an inconsistency in the Opposition's position on this matter. I agree with him that it is a fairly pointed one, and ask them to contemplate a bit. Yes, he is correct in his assessment.

Mr Speaker: The tiger that was previously in the library has now been removed, and the immediate danger has been averted. I think the Minister will be familiar with the *Merchant Ivory* film in which that exchange occurs. [Interruption.] It is fairly obvious, if one applies one's mind to it.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) asked a very simple and sensible question. The Minister's long and rambling answer had a simple summary—clearly, it was no. The Secretary of State repeatedly told us that it was a simple matter to roll over deals on trade with approximately 70 countries, which constitutes 13% of our exports and 12% of our imports—it would be a cut-and-paste job. The Government would be ready on day one after Brexit, he told us. That was never true, was it? Those deals are entirely separate and independent from any deal that we may have with the EU.

If we leave with no deal, can the Minister confirm that these arrangements with third-party countries will fall away, as we have consistently warned? Will he confirm that, without new agreements in place, we could, in the absence of a deal with the EU, have no basis of trade with these countries after 29 March, and would fall back on World Trade Organisation rules? That is an argument for taking no deal off the table if ever there was one.

Will the Minister confirm that many of the terms of those agreements will need to be amended, and could be changed substantively as countries seek to improve on the terms that they have with the EU? Will he also confirm that agreements with countries that have economic partnership agreements are often regarded as being not fit for purpose and are alleged to have been signed under economic duress? The Minister will do well to listen to some of this, as this is the reality of what is going on in his Department. For example, North African countries want to sell their oranges and olive oil to us in far greater quantities than is allowed by the EPAs with the EU, which protect southern European producers.

In the Trade Bill debate in the Lords yesterday, the Minister conceded that the Department had no idea how many countries were ready to roll over their free trade agreements, how many would not, how many would have to adjust their constitutional arrangements, and how long that might take. Will the Minister for Trade Policy confirm that his colleague was right to say so?

The Secretary of State is busy socialising in Davos. Is that not a reminder of the incompetence and overconfidence that he has shown over the past two and a half years?

George Hollingbery: The hon. Gentleman opened his question by expressing his view that I had given a long and rambling answer. I am pretty confident that the question was longer and more rambling than my previous answer.

Will there be no basis of trade if we fall out without an agreement? No. There will continue to be the basis of trade that exists for everybody, which is the World Trade Organisation. [Interruption.] Indeed, I do confirm that. That is why we are putting such an enormous amount of effort into transitioning these agreements. Will the terms be amended? Yes; plainly, the bilateral partners with whom we are negotiating have different motivations. That is something that I have made very clear to members of the International Trade Committee when I have talked to them. That has led to some extension of the discussions that we are having, but many of those discussions are going extremely well. I reiterate to the House that I am confident that the majority of these trade arrangements will be put in place by the time we leave the European Union.

The hon. Gentleman also treated us to his analysis of EPAs, saying that they were not fit for purpose. He gave us the example of oranges. The last time I stood opposite him in a debate, he gave us the example of the difficulty that EPAs cause Ghana and its chicken, and indeed Tanzania and its fish. On the Ghana agreement, the fact is—I remember this—that chicken had been completely excluded from the EPA. The point about Tanzania and fish is not entirely relevant to EPAs, as there is no EPA with Tanzania.

My confidence is strong on this issue. I believe that we will have the majority of these arrangements in place. Yes, some of them are challenging. One or two of them are even more than challenging; they are close to impossible. Turkey has clearly been identified as an area where the issue of a customs union makes a deal with it very difficult indeed. I have made these things absolutely plain to the House before. However, I believe that we will have the vast majority of these other arrangements in place. We will protect our consumers and our businesses, which will be able to carry on using preferences.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Obviously, behind the debate about the concept of trade are jobs. What assessment has the Minister made of the number of jobs at risk if these agreements are not put in place? Has he identified the companies that will struggle? Is he working with the Department for Work and Pensions on contingency plans for those communities that might be particularly affected by any failure to roll over the agreements?

George Hollingbery: We are in constant contact with all the businesses that trade on these preferences; we have written to them many times. We have issued technical notices advising businesses on the steps they need to take to ensure that they are prepared for that scenario. Plainly, it is much better to have these agreements in place than not, but as I have just discussed with the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), a change in the arrangements does not mean that trade with those countries will stop; it simply means that the terms will change. I believe that we are doing all we can and should to prepare businesses for some of the deals potentially not being passed, and we continue to do that.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The EU has 14 service agreements with third-party countries and blocs, which UK professional services companies benefit from. Notwithstanding potential tariffs, non-tariff barriers and other regulatory burdens, can the Minister confirm for professional services companies whether there is even the legal basis for that trade with third-party countries and blocs to continue?

George Hollingbery: I am sorry to duck the question, but that matter should be referred to the Department for Exiting the European Union.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): We trade very successfully with our largest bilateral partner, the United States. We do not need trading agreements, do we?

George Hollingbery: As we have already made clear, it is entirely possible to trade on WTO terms. However, it is far more preferable to reach trade agreements with third parties, because then we can trade on a preferential basis that allows us access to markets, the lowering of tariffs and the reduction in non-tariff barriers behind the border, which makes life much easier for our companies.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I want to ask the Minister a very simple question, to which I would appreciate a direct answer. How many of the 40 or so agreements on which an arrangement has been reached to roll them over have been signed as of this morning?

George Hollingbery: The answer is that there is not much more that I can say at this stage. *[Interruption.]* There are no deals that have yet actually been signed, but I want to make it absolutely clear—

Mr Speaker: Order. A question has been asked. The Minister is an unfailingly courteous fellow, and we must hear his answer.

George Hollingbery: I want to be absolutely clear with the House that although it is possible to interpret my last answer as meaning that there has been absolutely no progress on the agreements, that would be an entirely, completely and utterly unfair interpretation of where we find ourselves. There are agreements that have had initialling; there are agreements that are very close to having initialling; and there are very many agreements that we believe will have a signature at the appropriate time. There is not an agreement that has had a formal signature yet, but to focus only on that is to misunderstand, or at least mispaint, how these agreements work. I have said to the House that we believe that we will transition the majority of the agreements by exit day, which necessarily means that they will have a signature, and I have every confidence that they will.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): To put this into perspective, is it not right that just five countries—Switzerland, Canada, Korea, Norway and Turkey—account for three quarters of UK exports to the 70 countries that the Minister mentioned? Does he agree that it is just a little tiresome that the Opposition are always revelling in highlighting problems and it might be more constructive if they wanted rather to help to work on some of the solutions?

George Hollingbery: My hon. Friend is correct in his analysis of the scale of these deals, and of course we are putting the most resource into the deals of the largest size. However, I want the House to be clear that we are also signatories to a great many development agreements—EPAs. While those agreements may not be of the greatest importance to the UK economically, they are enormously important to the participant countries with whom we have signed them, and we are putting effort into making sure that they are also transitioned.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I think that people outside this place listening to the Minister's remarks will be troubled to hear him refer to a "shopping list" of countries. Many people's livelihoods in this country rely on those countries. People will also be very concerned to hear that he has not today committed to honouring the promise that was previously made on each of these 40 trade agreements. Will he now confirm to the House that he will not be able to honour the promise of every single one being signed by exit day?

George Hollingbery: I am sorry that this is slightly like "Groundhog Day", Mr Speaker, but I will repeat what I have said before. We are confident that we will roll over a majority of these agreements. We are working to try to ensure that they are all rolled over by exit day. There are clear indications that in some cases that is going to be challenging. Let me be absolutely clear: if I used the term, "shopping list", and that was deemed in any way pejorative about any of these important deals, I wish to withdraw and rephrase it. It was simply shorthand

[George Hollingbery]

for saying that there are a great many of them and they are all important to us. As I just said, EPAs are as important to us as the largest deals, simply because we understand that we have a role in the world in development and understand the importance of these deals to those countries. We also understand the number of jobs and businesses that rely on these preferences. That is another reason why we are so keen to get as many of the transition deals across as we can.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Shopping lists are actually quite important, as are people's livelihoods. Is it not the case that these 40 roll-over countries represent just 12% of our trade? Can I tell the Minister that we are the biggest nation in Europe, and second in the world only to China and the United States, for investment, and we are the largest export market in the world for German cars and for French agriculture? Unlike remainers, who tend to be rather pessimistic sorts, I and most people are very optimistic about our future outside the European Union.

George Hollingbery: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. It is interesting to observe, and the House should understand, that a good proportion—I do not have the exact number in my head—of the 12% of trade that is represented by the countries with which the European Union has existing free trade deals is not carried out under preferences in any event because the particular lines in which they trade are not covered by the agreements, so the figure is actually quite a lot less. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) says from a sedentary position, “So it's all just fine.” No, of course that is not the case. I have tried to make the point again and again that we regard this as extremely important.

On my hon. Friend's reference to inward investment, Deloitte recently pointed out that the UK is the leading location in Europe for foreign direct investment. In the three years from 2015 to 2017, we enjoyed £140 billion-worth of direct investment from overseas—more than France, at £44 billion, and Germany, at £50 billion, combined.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): What is the Minister's definition of the term, “majority”, which he has used several times? Does he mean 21 out of 40 or 39 out of 40?

George Hollingbery: Perhaps I am being stupid, but I do not really understand the last part of the question. A majority is more than half; we can be clear about that. I do not think I have anything more to add.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): We now know that we will not have 40 of these deals ready to roll over on the stroke of midnight. Some of these deals will be worth proportionately more than others, so it could be said that we have a majority ready to go, but they might be ones of very low value. Can the Minister give us more clarity about the most valuable of these trade deals?

George Hollingbery: I can report to the House that we are making good progress on a whole range of these deals, including those of high value and those at the other end of the scale.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Donald Rumsfeld's words spring to mind in relation to roll-overs. We have the known knowns: the countries that are up for a deal, such as Switzerland. We have the known unknowns: the countries that have said yes to a roll-over, but the Government will not give us their name. And we have the unknown unknowns: the countries that will not tell our Government whether they will roll over the deals. For the sake of clarity, is the Minister willing to publish the names of countries that fall into those three categories?

George Hollingbery: To publish an unknown unknown seems challenging. I regard the Department's job as putting all the effort it can into rolling these deals over. That is one of the many things we do, but it is a very important part of what we do. It is equally important that we allow British businesses to understand when and if there may be a real and present danger to the preferences that they use. When we judge that we are in a situation where that information needs to be disseminated, we will do so.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) was quite right to point out the seriousness of this issue. I am most grateful to the Minister for tackling this with equal seriousness. Can he clarify whether it makes a difference to the roll-overs if we leave with a deal, as I very much hope we do, or without a deal, which I could never support?

George Hollingbery: The Government policy, as my hon. Friend knows, is to leave with a deal, and I very much agree with that; it is by far and away the most sensible thing to do. I think most of the House will understand that if we have a deal and an implementation period, it takes the time pressure off and allows us to negotiate these deals in a more orderly fashion. Order has been created, and we are making progress, but if we have a deal and an implementation period, which is crucial to that, it will make negotiation of these deals a great deal more straightforward.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I feel sorry for the junior Minister. This must be one of the worst cases of neglect of duty since Nero fiddled while Rome burned. His boss is in the fleshpots of Davos, rubbing shoulders and having a lovely time, while he is slaving here at the Dispatch Box, on a day when the media tell us that many more companies are fleeing to Holland, Ireland and France. He is not trying to mislead the House—I am not saying that—but he is being very careful with his answers in terms of how many of these agreements have been signed. He is not giving any information to the House or our constituents, while his boss is having a lovely time in Davos.

George Hollingbery: I anticipated that that subject might arise, and I speculated that the timing of this urgent question was quite deliberate, for that very purpose. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman exactly what the Secretary of State is doing in Davos. Believe me, he has not taken his ski suit; he has taken his business suit. He met yesterday with the Israeli Government, from whom he elicited an agreement that our arrangements with Israel will be rolled over. He met the Egyptians, from whom

he had a very positive reaction. He met with the Peruvians and the Colombians, and he further met with the South Korean Government. Today he will meet with the Ecuadorian Government, the Canadian Government and the South African Government, and later today—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman pretends to be playing a violin; I suppose he is saying that it is a sob story.

Mr Sheerman: I'm fiddling while Rome burns!

George Hollingbery: What I am trying to tell the hon. Gentleman is that the Secretary of State is in Davos doing exactly what this House would want him to do. He is at the negotiating coalface, ensuring that our partners in these countries who have not necessarily taken a no-deal Brexit seriously do so. He is incentivising them to sit down around the negotiating table, and he is making good progress. Later this afternoon, he will attend the trade stewards committee, where he will meet nearly every single trade Minister in nearly every single jurisdiction where we are attempting to create continuity in our trade agreements. I hope the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his implication that the Secretary of State is not doing his job, because that is exactly what he is doing.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): There is a deal on the table that the Government have negotiated with the EU, and it provides a transition period that would provide certainty for all these trade agreements to be completed in time for our exit. It is my understanding, although I have not checked his voting record, that the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), who has posed this urgent question, voted against that deal.

Mr Leslie: Which one?

Rachel Maclean: The meaningful vote.

Mr Leslie *indicated assent.*

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Gentleman voted against having a transition agreement because he voted against the deal. Does the Minister agree that it might be better for the hon. Gentleman to pose his urgent question to the leader of his own party and ask him why he did not engage in talks with the Prime Minister to get through the deal that would provide certainty for our businesses?

George Hollingbery: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and as we have already discussed, there is plainly some very real inconsistency in the Opposition position. I point out to my hon. Friend that the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) is a champion of free trade and actually spoke in this House in the debates on the EU-Japan EPA and CETA back in June, when I have to say he voted with the Government and, indeed, for the deals in that case, unlike his Front Benchers.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Businesses, including one in my constituency, are already moving operations to mainland Europe because of doubts about whether they will have market access to places such as South Korea. There are hints that we will focus on the higher value trade agreements and at least get them in place come Brexit day. However, if an SME's trade is with one of the smaller countries, that is every bit as

important for it and for the people it employs as the trade deal with South Korea. We need all 40 in place, and the Minister did assure us that that would happen. Has he not completely let down those people?

George Hollingbery: We have staff in post in all the markets where we are attempting to transition these deals. An enormous amount of internal resource has been applied to what we in the Department call TAC—trade agreement continuity. Indeed, we have taken resource out of parts of the other workstreams we do to concentrate on exactly this issue. We have been negotiating on all these agreements, not just the larger ones. There is of course a financial incentive to concentrate on the larger ones, for the sake of our own businesses and for the sake of employees and families who want to put food on their table. At the same time, however, there are small businesses, as I know perfectly well, that trade under the preferences enjoyed through EPAs. There are also developmental reasons why we want to continue those arrangements, because it is the right thing to do, and the hon. Lady may be reassured that we are putting effort into all these agreements.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I must say that I welcome the work the Secretary of State is doing out in Davos to push forward the UK's trade policy. His work is certainly far more welcome than the pontification of the former Member for Sedgefield there. To put these deals into perspective, will the Minister confirm that the Swiss trade deal on its own is worth 21% of the value of all trade done under these 40 agreements?

George Hollingbery: Indeed, I can: that is the correct figure. There are two or three other agreements that will add substantially to that if we manage to transition them, and I am very hopeful that we shall be able to do so.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): The Minister waxes lyrical about foreign inward investment into the UK. May I remind him that, in north Wales alone, we have had two devastating announcements in the past seven days? Last week, Hitachi said that it is pulling out of Wylfa Newydd, a £16 billion project in north-west Wales, and today, Tom Enders, the CEO of Airbus International, said that it will pull out of the UK, including out of its Airbus factory in north-east Wales, if there is a no-deal Brexit. What type of message does it send out to current and future international trading partners and investors when the UK Government cannot successfully engage with some of the most successful businesses in the world?

George Hollingbery: It is a complex web we weave, and there are clearly incentives in many different directions for many different companies. I have every sympathy with workers in Wales and others who find their jobs threatened by the decisions that companies make. The UK Government continue to engage with those companies, and to try to mitigate any moves they may make. We engage widely through POST with the parent companies of many of those organisations, and we are doing everything we can to ensure that foreign direct investment continues in the UK. Indeed, the United Nations Conference

[George Hollingbery]

on Trade and Development announced a week or two ago that the UK remains Europe's primary choice for foreign direct investment.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): For the avoidance of doubt, will my hon. Friend confirm at what point we will be able to sign our own independent free-trade agreements with countries around the world?

George Hollingbery: The withdrawal agreement and political declaration are clear: we will be able to negotiate with third-party countries once we have gone through the process of withdrawal and after Brexit day, but we will not be able to sign and implement those agreements until the end of the implementation period.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Some 24 countries have lodged their opposition to the schedules on goods and services that we have placed with the World Trade Organisation. Does that indicate how complex it is to deal under WTO rules, and was it always misleading to suggest that it would be easy to have 40 trade deals ready on the day we leave the European Union?

George Hollingbery: There are, give or take, some 165 members of the World Trade Organisation, and if 24 object to new schedules laid by a new partner, that is a relatively small number and there is a well-understood formal process through which those objections will be dealt with. Most objections are on the basis of loss of privilege through the existing relationship with the EU—and therefore access to the UK—being changed, and such things are not unusual. Indeed, the EU operated on uncertified WTO schedules from 1995 until the present.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Minister tries to reassure us by saying that a majority of these deals will rollover on Brexit day, but that is as reassuring as knowing that the majority of my constituents will not lose their jobs, or that a majority of businesses in my constituency will not shut down. For every deal that stops on 29 March, a business or businesses somewhere in these islands will suffer, and each deal that does not continue in its entirety after Brexit means that businesses lose money and go bust, and people lose their jobs. Is that the cost of this chaotic Brexit?

George Hollingbery: Nobody wants any family to be affected or anybody to lose their job as a result of us not being able to transition these free-trade deals, and that is why we are making every possible effort to ensure that all deals are transitioned. I have explained to the House why, in some cases, that is extremely difficult, but the

Department is ensuring that every effort goes into ensuring as few adverse consequences as possible, and I am confident that the majority of the deals will be passed. It would help to ensure smooth continuity if Opposition parties were not so resolute in trying to vote down the Trade Bill.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Previously, the Secretary of State said that he would robustly defend the UK steel industry, yet a bombshell report today says that only half the steel bought by the UK Government comes from Britain. What is the Department doing for the UK steel industry, given that there is insufficient support from the Government at home?

George Hollingbery: The Department for International Trade will be responsible for the Trade Remedies Authority, when established. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the principal job of the TRA will be to ensure a level playing field internationally for products where there is potential for unfair international competition, as there is from several source countries. We are clear that the TRA must be in place as soon as possible, and as I said previously, it is not helpful for the terms of the Trade Bill to be blocked by all sorts of manoeuvres in both Houses. The Bill will allow us to establish the TRA, which will produce a robust defence of our industries, and particularly those that are most vulnerable, such as steel. I encourage him and his colleagues who represent areas of steel manufacturing, or indeed car manufacturing and ceramics, to get behind the Bill and put the TRA on a statutory footing, as it is there to help exactly those industries.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Bearing in mind that the EU has 36 other free trade agreements with non-EU countries, coupled with the £40 billion divorce settlement we look set to pay, could the Minister outline why he believes that we will not have access to those free trade agreements, other than some of the bitterness we have heard in this Chamber today, and how does the Minister intend to turn this bitter lemon into sugar-free lemonade?

George Hollingbery: I will be completely straight with you, Mr Speaker: I am not entirely sure that I totally understand the hon. Gentleman's question, but I shall give it a go. There are a number of agreements that are negotiated exclusively between the European Union and third-party countries. Those are between the European Union and those countries, and we will not be a member of the European Union, and therefore will not be able to benefit from their preferences. The whole point of the trade agreement continuity programme is to transition those into a UK-only form, such that we can continue to benefit from those preferences.

Business of the House

11.20 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 28 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, followed by a debate on a motion relating to proxy voting.

TUESDAY 29 JANUARY—Debate on a motion relating to section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Crime (Overseas Production Orders) Bill [Lords].

THURSDAY 31 JANUARY—Debate on a motion relating to settling the debt owed to victims of the Equitable Life scandal, followed by a debate on a motion relating to the sustainability of maintained nursery schools. The subjects for both debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 1 FEBRUARY: The House will not be sitting.

Sunday will mark Holocaust Memorial Day—an opportunity to remember the 6 million Jews murdered in the holocaust, and the millions of Roma, Gypsies, disabled people, political prisoners, homosexuals and others murdered under Nazi persecution, just for being who they were. We also remember and mourn all those murdered in genocides around the world.

We should also pay tribute to the wonderful work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, which enables 100,000 people every year to hear a survivor's testimony. The trust has taken more than 38,000 people to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of its holocaust education programme.

Colleagues will recall that the independent complaints and grievance policy, which was established last summer, was to be reviewed after six months. I am pleased to inform the House that an independent reviewer has been identified by the Clerks, and we expect the six-month review to start next week, following final sign-off by the House of Commons Commission on Monday 28 January.

Finally, I wish everyone enjoying haggis, neeps and tatties and a wee dram of whisky tomorrow a very enjoyable Burns night, in celebration of the life and legacy of the great Scottish poet.

11.22 am

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for the business for next week. I note that there is no Opposition day debate, but I am pleased that she mentioned proxy voting. Mr Speaker, I think you and the Leader of the Opposition have signed the certificate to ensure that proxy voting can take place as soon as possible, and I hope that leaders of the other parties will also sign those certificates as soon as possible.

Can the Leader of the House confirm that the House will rise on 14 February and return on the 24th? I ask that because the Foreign Affairs Committee has actually cancelled a visit to India during that time, and I understand that builders working on restoration and renewal have been told that they will not be able to carry out their planned programme of work. Could we also have the May recess dates?

Can the Leader of the House confirm that Parliament will not be prorogued? There are some noises off to suggest that that might happen. I know that the former Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has got a new job; we know that he has access to heavy machinery, but I hope that is not what the Prime Minister meant by chaos and threats to “social cohesion”.

In her statement on Monday, the Prime Minister did not say whether her deal would be brought back to Parliament, but the Prime Minister's spokesperson made it clear that the vote that is due to be held on 29 January is not the second meaningful vote. Is it the Government's intention to bring back a second meaningful vote to the House? I do not know when the Leader of the House intends to lay the business motion for the debate next Tuesday, but will she ensure that it will be a full day's debate in protected time? Also, when will the votes be expected?

We need to pass an approval resolution and the EU withdrawal agreement Bill, which obviously has not yet been introduced, before 29 March. The Leader of the House might not be able to tell us today, but will she come back next week to say whether that will be scheduled before 29 March, which it needs to be?

Last week, I raised the issue of the size of statutory instruments. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) and other MPs co-signed a letter to the Chief Whip, because their constituencies will be affected by an SI tabled to replace the REACH regulation—I will set this out because it is important—on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals. Right hon. and hon. Members have met industry representatives, who have serious concerns about the legislation and the effects that it might have on the chemical industry. Those industries are staying in the UK, so it is important for all Members to have a chance to debate that. Will the Leader of the House ensure that that statutory instrument is brought to the Floor of House for debate and proper scrutiny?

Many hon. Members have been to see the Prime Minister. The Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee said—yes, I am going to say it again—that the Prime Minister's door was open but her mind was closed. However, did anyone check whether she was wearing headphones? Perhaps she was listening to the Everly Brothers, “Problems”, or Chumbawamba, “Tubthumping”. As it is Neil Diamond's birthday today, perhaps she was listening to “Everybody's talkin' at me”, or all the greatest hits of MP4.

I was going to describe the situation as chaotic, but I suppose “confused” and “reckless” are better words. The Secretary of State for International Trade admitted that preparations for a no-deal Brexit, by falling back on World Trade Organisation rules, are impossible unless the Trade Bill passes through Parliament. I heard the very able Minister, the hon. Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery), say just now that the House of Lords has blocked the Bill: it has not. The Lords found that the Trade Bill gives wide powers to Ministers, does not include Parliament or the devolved Administrations, and has no process for making international trade agreements. When will the Government publish the White Paper to set out their policy and proposals for making such agreements?

That is chaos and confusion on the EU, but there is also some domestic confusion. The Prime Minister said that employment in the west midlands has gone up but,

[Valerie Vaz]

in fact, unemployment has gone up. The west midlands is the only region to show a fall in employment. It is important to get statistics and facts right in the House.

Will the Leader of the House clarify policy, because the Government have been saying different things? Parliament passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 with an amendment on public registers. The Act said that such registers would be introduced by 2020 if the overseas territories had not done so voluntarily, and yet a Minister has said that the Government will have

“a requirement for an operational public register by 2023”.

That is three years later than the House agreed and five years after Parliament voted to take action on the issue. Will she clarify that?

What are the Government doing about leveraged debts? The Bank of England has raised a red flag over that new breed of sub-prime loans. Ten years on from the financial crash, banks are doling out those risky loans to indebted companies. May we have an urgent statement from the Chancellor on leveraged debts before it is too late?

Our much admired and efficient justice system is in meltdown, causing the Attorney General to say that the Crown Prosecution Service cannot take any more cuts.

I join the Leader of the House in celebrating—if that is the correct word—or remembering Holocaust Memorial Day. We think of all the survivors and remember that the EU was born from that—people wanted peace. Let us remember the resilience of the survivors, who have lived without hate throughout their lives.

I, too, of course will celebrate Burns night tomorrow. I thought that alcohol was banned on the premises, but still I am happy to have a dram of whisky. Last year, there was delicious haggis in the Terrace café. It is on the menu tomorrow, and I encourage all hon. Members to have a go. I hope that our talented chefs will also give us a vegan option.

Andrea Leadsom: A vegan haggis would be an interesting thing to try. Haggis is certainly a delicious meal, and I join the hon. Lady in encouraging all Members to give it a go.

The hon. Lady asked about the proxy voting certificate. I can tell her that it will be in the Prime Minister's box this evening. I am grateful for the speed with which Clerks and Mr Speaker's Office have been able to deal with the matter, and I look forward to our ensuring that proxy voting can take place next week.

I announced in October that

“subject to the progress of business, the House will rise...on Thursday 14 February and return on Monday 25 February.”—[*Official Report*, 18 October 2018; Vol. 647, c. 800.]

That remains the position, but, as the hon. Lady will know, it is for the House to agree recess dates. I will of course come back to the House with proposed May recess dates as soon as I am able to do so.

The hon. Lady asked whether there would be a second meaningful vote. She will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explained the current situation and next steps in her written statement on Monday, but I can tell her that this morning we tabled a further

statement under section 13(11)(a) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and have consequently tabled a joint motion in accordance with the procedure allowed under section 13(1)(b). That means that Tuesday's debate will be on a motion relating to both the statement tabled on Monday under section 13(4) and the statement tabled today under section 13(11)(a). We will seek the House's agreement to a full day's debate, and the House will then give its preferred options. The Government will of course listen carefully, and next steps will be set out in due course.

The hon. Lady asked about the EU withdrawal agreement Bill. As she will know, it cannot be introduced until the House has approved its introduction in a meaningful vote, or in accordance with future next steps as agreed by the House. She asked about Brexit statutory instruments, and, in particular, asked for the statutory instrument on REACH to be dealt with on the Floor of the House. It is a parliamentary convention that when a reasonable request for a debate has been made, time should be allowed for that debate. However, as the hon. Lady knows, it is expected that in addition to raising the matter during business questions, Opposition Members should outline what they are requesting from the Government through the usual channels.

The hon. Lady asked about employment figures. I am sure that she, and indeed all Members, will be delighted to know that more people are employed than ever before, that the unemployment rate is the lowest that it has been since the 1970s, and that well over 3 million more people are employed now than in 2010. That is good news for people who will have more opportunities to provide for their families, which is absolutely vital.

The hon. Lady asked about the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. I should be grateful if she would write to me about that, so that I can respond to her directly. She also asked about Bank of England lending limits. I suggest that she should raise that issue during Treasury questions on 29 January.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the sentencing rules relating to convictions for dangerous driving? A judge in Bradford recently jailed a man whom he described as a “complete menace” on the roads for dangerous driving, driving while disqualified, failing to provide a specimen, driving while uninsured, and possession of a small bag of cocaine. The man had 18 previous convictions for 33 offences. The judge complained about the fact that he was only able to sentence this individual to a maximum of two years in prison. He said that he would have sentenced him to four years if the law had allowed it, and urged Parliament to address the issue. Dangerous driving is a massive problem in the Bradford district. Will a Minister come to the House to explain what the Government will do to give judges the power that they need to take these menaces off the roads and put them in prison, where they belong?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. Dangerous driving has appalling consequences for far too many people across the country. Questions to the Attorney General will take place next Thursday, 31 January, and it would be appropriate for my hon. Friend to raise the issue then.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week, and may I thoroughly share her comments on Holocaust Memorial Day?

It is, of course, Burns night tomorrow, Mr Speaker, and we know how much you like your haggis. We can never forget the unforgettable Selkirk Grace that you gave at an SNP Burns supper a couple of years ago. Burns summed up Brexit perfectly when he said:

“The best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men
Gang aft a-gley,
An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain,
For promis’d joy!”

For those of my colleagues unschooled in 18th century Scots, “aft a-gley” means “gone to pot,” and nothing can better sum up this self-defeating, isolating, ugly disaster than Burns’ profound words.

On Tuesday we have the joys of Brexit amendment day. The selection of the amendments will be a matter exclusively for you, Mr Speaker, but I am sure the Leader of the House will want to confirm that it will be the Government’s sole objective to facilitate the will of the House on Tuesday: no tricks, no attempts to defy the will of the House, and all that will happen is that the Executive arm of this Parliament will be defeated once again.

Many people are under the misapprehension that Tuesday might mark the end of this nightmare, but unfortunately, of course, that is not the case. There is still to be “meaningful vote 2”—meaningful vote from beyond the grave on whatever form of a dead deal is brought back and resuscitated. So can the Leader of the House explain a little more and say what the process will be beyond Tuesday, and is there any truth in some of the rumours today that the Government now intend to drop the backstop entirely to get this through? I am sure it will delight the rest of the European Union if that is indeed the case.

Will the Leader of the House please confirm that we will be having our February recess? It was suggested—by, I think, Government Whips—that it would be withdrawn as some sort of punishment to a recalcitrant House for not agreeing their Brexit plan, and we would be delighted if that is no longer the case.

With the sheer numbers of all this Brexit delegated legislation there are not enough Members to facilitate that and serve on some of the Committees. Will the Leader of the House have a look at some of the arrangements for these DLs and see if more can be done to bundle them together to ensure that we have enough Members to serve on the Committees? As always, Mr Speaker, best laid plans, best laid plans.

Andrea Leadsom: I was going to perhaps borrow that quote from Robbie Burns myself, but what I will say back to the hon. Gentleman is:

“Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing”.

That was perhaps not said with the superbness of the hon. Gentleman’s accent, but we all love the poetry of Robbie Burns and I am grateful to him for raising it in this place.

The hon. Gentleman asked a series of questions about the next steps for next week. We will take a decision on the next steps following Tuesday’s debate. It

is very important that we see what the House wishes to bring forward for discussion. Any keen readers of the excellent reports produced by the Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) will be well aware that when a motion is agreed to, with or without amendment, it becomes either an order or a resolution of the House. Using the words of the Clerk of the House to that Committee:

“an order is when the House orders one of its officers or sometimes...itself to do certain things that are within its ambit of power...A resolution is an expression of the House’s views”

on a particular issue. It is very important to understand the ramifications of Tuesday’s debate and I hope that that clears things up for the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Prime Minister’s deal will be revived, and I can say to him that while the negotiations with the EU have yielded an agreement, that agreement has not yet been agreed by Parliament, so our focus continues to be on what is needed to secure the support of this House in favour of a deal with the EU. The Prime Minister has spent the past week listening to colleagues from across Parliament from different parties and with different views, and she will continue to do so.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about Brexit statutory instruments and the capacity of the House to deal with them. He will be aware that over 300 Brexit SIs have been laid now. There are potentially up to 600 of them. That figure moves, as I have explained in this House a number of times; clarifications on policy issues and so on mean it is impossible to set out exactly how many SIs there will need to be in total, but we are confident that there will be enough time to pass all of those Brexit SIs that need to be passed by the date of leaving the European Union.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the future for animal welfare after we leave the European Union? Our standards of animal welfare in this country are second to none, and it would be good if we could spread that message throughout the world so that Japan stopped killing whales, Lithuania stopped breeding animals for their fur and 25 million songbirds were no longer netted and eaten throughout the Mediterranean.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a matter that is of huge interest to many Members on both sides of the House. The Government have been clear that leaving the EU will not lead to a lowering of our high animal welfare standards. The UK already has some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world, and we are looking at what more we can do in the context of our future agriculture policy. He is also right to raise the issue of what more we can do around the world to encourage others to take the same or a similar attitude to our own preference for high animal welfare standards.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement and for announcing the two debates next Thursday, on the Equitable Life scandal and on the sustainability of our nursery schools. I should also like to express my gratitude to her for announcing that the recess due to start on 14 February—Valentine’s day—will go ahead. That is very welcome,

[*Ian Mearns*]

and it just goes to show that romance is not dead. May I also suggest that if Members want to put in to the Backbench Business Committee for debates on departmental estimates, they do so by Friday 8 February? They should not wait

“till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear, and the rocks melt wi’ the sun”.

They should get their requests in by 8 February.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his update to the House. As ever, I will facilitate Back-Bench business whenever I can.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Will the Leader of the House clarify the situation in relation to Friday sitting days? Obviously, many Members had expected this Friday to be a sitting day, and my Creditworthiness Assessment Bill was on the list of many private Members’ Bills that could have been debated. It would be helpful to MPs, and to the campaigners who use these Bills and want to see them progress through the House, to hear a bit more about when we can get them debated, as they are an important part of the business of the House and clarification would be worth while.

Andrea Leadsom: I am glad that my right hon. Friend has raised this issue, and I absolutely share her enthusiasm for the importance of legislation being brought forward by a number of private Members’ Bills. Examples are the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018, the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Act 2018 and the Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Act 2018, which have already received Royal Assent and will make a significant difference to people’s lives in our country. It is important that we continue to make progress with private Members’ Bills. There have been conversations in the usual channels, and my right hon. Friend will appreciate that, given that amendments had been tabled to yesterday’s motion, we had to take the decision not to move it so that further discussions could take place to ensure that all Members are given an equal opportunity to bring forward their own important private Members’ resolutions. We believe that consensus can be found, and I expect a further motion to be brought forward next week.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House be able to secure time for a debate on knife crime and the public policy responses to it? This is a big issue not only in London but in many of our cities, including Nottingham, and many people are facing challenges in the community. This is not just about the need for tougher sentencing for possession of a knife without just cause; I would also ask her to convey to Local Government Ministers that Nottingham’s bid to the troubled families programme for diversionary activity support to help to reduce exclusions from schools is part of the prevention package that we need.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this incredibly concerning issue. Across the House, we are all worried about the increase in the use of knives as the weapon of choice in lots of gang problems and in the appalling attacks that we have seen in recent days and months. I commend him for raising

the matter. He will be aware that there is a three-hour debate on knife crime in Westminster Hall this afternoon, which he might well wish to take part in, but I can also assure him that the Government’s serious violence strategy, our Offensive Weapons Bill and our many investments in community schemes to encourage young people away from this appalling activity are top priorities for us.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The political and economic crisis in Venezuela means that 90% of its citizens are living in poverty. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Foreign Secretary met Venezuelan diplomats yesterday, but I understand that they did not discuss the crisis. May we have a debate in Government time to demonstrate that the Government are taking seriously their responsibility to ensure that we undertake soft-power relations across the world?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. We have seen an appalling economic crisis in Venezuela, and the Foreign Office is carefully following the situation. Juan Guaidó has widespread support among Venezuelans, and the political crisis has gone on long enough. We want a way forward that leads to a peaceful solution for all Venezuelans, and I encourage my hon. Friend perhaps to seek a Westminster Hall debate, so that all hon. Members can discuss their views.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): At this time of year, I always feel a bit envious of the Scottish poet and, as chair of the John Clare Trust, I wish that we could have John Clare suppers all over the country to celebrate the greatest English poet of the countryside.

On a more sombre note, has the Leader of the House seen the recent evidence about the quality of air that our children are breathing in? Not just in London, but up and down the country, all of us, including pregnant women and even people rowing on rivers, are absorbing high levels of poisonous atmospheric content, and it is causing real health problems. Is it not about time that we had real measures to clean up the filthy atmosphere that our children and our people are breathing in?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious issue. This Government are committed to doing everything we can to try to improve the quality of our air. He may be pleased to know that the World Health Organisation has praised our clean air strategy as an example for the rest of the world to follow, with particular regard to our tackling of a range of issues, such as domestic stoves, open fires and so on. He will be aware that we are making available a significant £3.5 billion fund to reduce harmful emissions from road transport, including big investments in cycling and walking, supporting the uptake of ultra-low emissions vehicles and helping local authorities to develop and implement local air quality plans. There is much more to do, and I commend the hon. Gentleman for raising this important matter.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): May we have a debate on local services? Yesterday, the SNP-led Moray Council announced that it was closing two swimming pools, six public libraries and every public toilet and axing every school crossing patroller as part of a series of swingeing budget cuts. Will the Leader of the House join me in

condemning those SNP cuts in Moray and urge Moray's representatives to speak to their party at Holyrood and ask Nicola Sturgeon to give Moray a fair deal to stop the cuts happening altogether?

Andrea Leadsom: I am disappointed to hear about the cuts in my hon. Friend's constituency. As a result of our decisions at the most recent Budget, Scotland will benefit from a £950 million funding boost, so it seems extraordinary that the council is unable to continue to maintain services that are significant for his constituents.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the earlier question about Venezuela, will the Government make an early statement to clarify their position on the interim President Juan Guaidó? Given that the Organisation of American States, Canada, the United States, a large number of Latin American countries and now some European countries are beginning to recognise him as president, may we have an urgent clarification of the UK Government's position?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point. All hon. Members will be worried about what is happening in Venezuela, where we want to see not only stability, but an end to the appalling crisis that is leaving so many people starving. I will certainly take up his request with the Foreign Office.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): May we have a debate on recruitment to the judiciary? Our judges are renowned the world over for their calibre and integrity, which underpin the success of our legal sector, but it is proving increasingly difficult to recruit those judges, so can we have a debate to ensure that this important issue for UK plc gets the attention it deserves?

Andrea Leadsom: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his long-standing service on the Justice Committee. I gather that he has just retired from that Committee—he seems far too young to be retiring from anything, doesn't he? He makes a serious and important point. We have Justice questions on 5 February at which I encourage him to raise his point directly with Ministers.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): James Douglas, who died this week aged 30, was your constituent, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am aware that you have no voice in this House to talk of your constituents. James made a huge impact on both of us in the short time we knew him. He leaves a wife and a 14-month-old son. He died, tragically, having contracted motor neurone disease. His benefits assessment gave him zero points, and only days later he received a DS1500, which is given to people who are terminally ill.

James was the inspiration behind my Access to Welfare (Terminal Illness Definition) Bill, which would alter legislation to remove the six-month terminal illness definition. We have no more sitting Fridays, as far as we know. Could we therefore have an opportunity in Government time to debate removing the six-month rule on terminal illness so that we can move things forward?

Andrea Leadsom: I send my sympathies to James's family, and I think the whole House would want to send their condolences. This is a very sad story, and I pay

tribute to the hon. Lady for her efforts to get her Bill through. As she may have heard me say in response to a previous question, I hope to be able to table a motion next week, or at least as soon as possible, to provide further private Members' Bills days. There are discussions through the usual channels to ensure that I can do that, and I hope her Bill will be able to make progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and the Leader of the House for their comments, which I know will be very much appreciated by James's family. He was a remarkable, inspiring and very kind young man.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Yesterday, the Labour Towns group sponsored a debate on a town of culture award, and 20 Back-Bench Members spoke in just 40 minutes, which is possibly a record. May we have a debate in Government time on encouraging our national museums and galleries to loan their artefacts and paintings, some of which have never seen the light of day, to pop-up galleries and museums in the poorest towns of the United Kingdom?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent suggestion that I would be pleased to support. We will have Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions on 31 January, and this would be a good point to raise directly with Ministers.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): What has happened to the Agriculture Bill? The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said at the Oxford farming conference that he hoped that the Bill would be with us by the end of January.

In late 2017, the Government fought off a rebellion on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill in relation to article 13 of the Lisbon treaty by saying that they would introduce an animal sentience Bill. What has happened to that?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that the Agriculture Bill is going through the parliamentary process as we speak. It will make a decisive shift in support for farmers and ensure that their contribution to maintaining our countryside and producing healthy food is greater than ever before. She will no doubt also be aware that we have committed to a future Bill that will set out the requirement agreed during the passage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill to establish a new body to ensure that we keep environmental standards high to meet our ambition to be a world leader. That Bill will also include a statement and confirmation on the subject of animal sentience.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Public and Commercial Services Union has launched its booklet "Social security: the case for radical change". Can we have a debate in Government time on issues such as universalism versus conditionality and a radical overhaul of our social security system?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are seeking to roll out a vastly improved system of support to help people to get into work, and also to provide greater support for those with disabilities to

[Andrea Leadsom]

enable them to lead more fulfilling lives. We have had a number of debates, urgent questions and statements about our social security system. I encourage him, if he would value a further debate, to talk to the Backbench Business Committee and seek the views of colleagues from right across the House.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Thirteen years on from the collapse of Farepak, it is good to see the Government finally responding to the Law Commission's proposals to protect consumers in such things as Christmas savings schemes. On behalf of amazing Farepak campaigner Councillor Deb Harvey, may I ask the Leader of the House to find out when the Government might introduce much-needed legislation in this area?

Andrea Leadsom: I pay tribute to Councillor Deb Harvey for her work—she has, as the hon. Lady suggests, contributed a huge amount to pushing this issue forward. I do not know the answer to the hon. Lady's specific question, but if she would like to contact me after business questions, I will be happy to take the matter up with the relevant Department on her behalf.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): We had a little sprinkling of snow on Wednesday, and of course transport chaos ensued. My constituents are mystified as to why, two days later, we still have no trains running on the Ellesmere Port line. Ellesmere Port is a wonderful place, but it does not have its own microclimate, so we do not know why trains all around us are running while we are still without a service. We get the feeling that we are being treated as second-class citizens. Can we have a debate, please, on more accountability and competence in the rail network?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sorry to hear about the experience of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. It is appalling when train services are not running, and I completely sympathise. He will be aware that the Government are spending £48 billion—more money than at any time since Victorian days—on the railways to maintain, modernise and renew them so as to deliver better journeys and fewer disruptions. I am genuinely sorry to hear about the problems that he is experiencing, and I encourage him to take the matter up directly in an Adjournment debate so that Ministers can look into those specific problems.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): The Leader of the House will recall that hon. Members, including myself, have raised serious concerns on a number of occasions about foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Most recently, I tabled early-day motion 1911 highlighting the results of research into FASD by Bristol University, which found that up to 17% of children in its research sample of more than 13,000 could have symptoms consistent with FASD.

[That this House is deeply concerned at the new research undertaken by Bristol University which has concluded that up to 17 per cent of children could have symptoms consistent with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder; notes the results of the research that up to 79 per cent of children in the research sample of 13,495 were exposed to alcohol consumed in pregnancy and that up to 25 per cent of those children were exposed to binge levels of alcohol in

pregnancy; and therefore calls on the Government and the health and education services to take urgent steps to reduce and eliminate alcohol consumption in pregnancy so that children do not suffer irreparable alcohol-related lifetime damage that would diminish their chances of leading healthy, happy, successful and fulfilling lives.]

In the light of that, and much other evidence, will the Leader of the House press her colleagues in government to introduce effective means of addressing this scourge in view of the damage it is doing to millions of lives and its enormous social cost across all of society?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this incredibly troubling issue. We have had a number of debates on the subject. He may be aware that the Prime Minister has asked me to chair a cross-Whitehall group to look at what more can be done to support every family with a new baby in the early days, and this issue is in scope of that review.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): May I ask the Leader of the House to join me, my constituents, our Cardiff City football club family and fans across the world—especially in Nantes and Argentina—in desperately hoping that our young striker Emiliano Sala and pilot David Ibbotson have survived, as the search for them continues?

Andrea Leadsom: We have all been really shocked to hear of this potential loss of life. I know that everything is being done to try to find out what has happened. I absolutely share in the hon. Lady's tribute to the football player and the pilot, and I share in the sadness of all those football supporters.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Is the Leader of the House aware of the recently published "Preliminary report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland", by Sir John Gillen? It highlights some startling concerns, including the "lengthy delays in the court process in Northern Ireland compared with other parts of the UK"

and the fact that 40% of complainants in Northern Ireland who raise a sexual offence with the police drop out of the process because they are so harassed in the lead-up to the trial, with those cases never reaching trial.

Given that we have no Assembly in Northern Ireland to make progress on the important recommendations identified by Sir John Gillen, will the Leader of the House ultimately provide time for a debate here and then ensure that procedures are put in place that will allow the enactment of the recommendations for the justice system in Northern Ireland, so that we can bring about good, effective justice for victims of sexual crime in Northern Ireland?

Andrea Leadsom: I was not aware of the particular report that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but I know that there would be enormous concern across the House about a failure in any part of the United Kingdom properly to consider issues relating to sexual offences. He will be aware that we have Northern Ireland questions on Wednesday 30 January, and I am sure he could seek an Adjournment debate so that he can take up the matter directly with Ministers and discuss what more can be done.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I want to talk about the B-word, but thankfully it is not Brexit today. I want to know why funding for bus services has been halved in the past eight years. It has had a huge impact on my constituents, particularly those who live in semi-rural and rural areas. Social isolation remains a big issue, yet bus companies seem constantly to put profits before people and passengers. May we have a debate on the demise of local bus services?

Andrea Leadsom: Should we do such a thing, I would be tempted to join in. Bus services in my constituency have really been cut. I have been looking at community bus services, with some success, and I know that lots of parish councils and communities are seeking to take matters into their own hands and provide themselves with a bus service. I really do pay tribute to all those who do that. The hon. Lady is right to raise this issue, which is of grave concern. The taxpayer is spending £1 billion every year on free bus travel for older and disabled people, and £250 million to keep fares down and maintain an extensive bus network, but there are clearly problems, and I encourage the hon. Lady to seek a Westminster Hall debate or a Back-Bench debate so that she can discuss the issue with Ministers.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House may have noted Santander's announcement yesterday that it plans to close 140 of its branches around the UK, with up to 1,200 jobs at risk. Those planned closures include 15 branches in Scotland, among which is Santander's Springburn branch in my constituency. I thought the justification that the bank gave was rather dubious, because it suggested that many people were transferring to using mobile and internet banking technology, but in fact the majority of the users of the branch in my constituency do not use internet or mobile banking, and it is the only branch available without their having to get an exorbitantly priced bus ride into the city centre. The closure will clearly have a massive impact, particularly on elderly people and those who are less able readily to use new technologies. We had a debate on this issue a year ago and clearly nothing has changed, so will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate in Government time on the community impact of large-scale bank branch closures? It is clearly having an impact and we need to consider legislation.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there are quite strict rules regarding consultation and the provision of a proper evidence base before bank branches are closed. He will also be aware of the agreement with post offices such that they can provide basic banking services, which enable small businesses and individuals to fulfil most of their banking needs. Nevertheless, we must recognise that such services are commercially provided and that the banks have certainly seen a significant drop in footfall. The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue for his local communities and I am very sympathetic, so I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss the matter directly with a Minister.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): The Department for Education is consulting on proposals to allocate up to £910 million in additional funding to schools and colleges

in England to cover higher teacher pension scheme costs in 2019-20. Can we please have a statement clarifying the basis on which this figure was calculated, and whether a Barnett consequential of it will be sufficient to cover the costs in Wales? Given that schools and colleges in Wales will also be impacted by these changes, the UK Government must ensure that funding is made available to them, so that they can fully cover the increased costs.

Andrea Leadsom: I am very sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's question. I can well understand it. Schools must be able to cover all the incidental costs arising from changes in pensions policy and so on. He will be aware that we have invested significant sums in schooling to ensure that schools can meet those incidental costs. With regard to his specific question, I would encourage him either to seek an Adjournment debate or to send parliamentary written questions to Ministers.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Planned changes to eligibility for pension credit have recently come to light. They will amount to a loss of up to £7,320 per year for mixed-aged couples, could have a devastating effect on the health and wellbeing of some older people, and could push more pensioners into poverty. It is yet another financial blow to women born in the 1950s, who have had little notice of their delayed pension pay-out. Will the Leader of the House make a statement setting out why the UK Government believe these changes necessary and how they will improve the lives of some of our poorest pensioners?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this issue. It is incredibly important that we consider all the issues around pension changes. She will be aware that the Government have sought to ensure fairness between pensions for different types of workers, while recognising that as we live longer, affordability needs to be taken carefully into account. She may be aware that there is a debate next week, on Thursday 31 January, on pensions, and she might like to participate in that.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Tomorrow is the third anniversary of the disappearance in Cairo of the Cambridge PhD student Giulio Regeni. His body was subsequently recovered. He had been brutally tortured and murdered. The case has attracted international attention to issues of human rights and academic freedom. Can we finally have a debate in this place on the work the Government have done to put pressure on the Egyptian authorities to reveal the truth about what happened to Giulio?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sorry to hear that it is nearing the third anniversary—it is extraordinary how fast time passes—and I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's request for further clarification. I would encourage him to raise the matter directly with Ministers at the next Foreign Office questions, so that they can prepare an update for him on exactly what steps they have taken.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The Holmes review explored how to further open up public appointments to disabled people, and recommended a target of 11.3% disabled public appointees by 2022, with a review by the end of this year. Can we have a statement about how this goal might be achieved?

Andrea Leadsom: I think all hon. Members would support a target to ensure that those with particular needs are catered for in our housing policy. He will be aware that we have Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on Monday 28 January, and I would encourage him to raise that question directly with Ministers.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): My office was recently contacted by a young woman who had fled domestic violence elsewhere in the UK. She was preparing to sleep rough on the streets of Glasgow that night, having been asked to leave a temporary accommodation centre in my constituency and turned away from every other temporary accommodation centre because she was on a student visa and had no recourse to public funds. It was only through the diligence of my caseworker that a charity was found that was able to offer her shelter, and she has now successfully applied for asylum. Can we have a debate in Government time on the gap in support for women in that situation?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a horrible case. It is awful to hear of someone fleeing domestic violence and being unable to find shelter overnight, and he is absolutely right to raise it. He will be aware that the Government are committing more than £1.2 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, including by looking at provision in different areas, but I would encourage him to raise his specific question at local government questions on Monday 28 January.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Last Friday, I joined students at Ellis Guilford School in my constituency as they took part in a “Be Internet Citizens” workshop, hosted by Google and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. The day helped those young people learn about fake news and about hate, on and offline. It will really give them the skills to thrive, on and offline, in their daily lives. Can we have a discussion in Government time about the importance of teaching our young people those skills at the earliest possible age?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a really valid point about teaching young people how to better protect themselves, and he is absolutely right to do so. There is so much that we can do both in terms of encouragement and legislation to ensure that the big social media companies take responsibility, but nothing could be better than encouraging more young people to understand that they themselves need to challenge what they are seeing online. I commend him for raising that point, and I encourage him perhaps to raise it again at Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions next week on 31 January.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): May we have a Government statement on reports that the Ministry of Defence is considering destroying the files relating to the RAF helicopter disaster on the Mull of Kintyre in my Argyll and Bute constituency in June 1994? It is still

the RAF’s worse peacetime loss of life. Given the controversy surrounding the tragedy, does the Leader of the House share my concern that if the RAF does destroy those files, the MOD could actually be destroying the only future pathway to establishing exactly what happened on that awful night?

Andrea Leadsom: I was not aware of the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. I strongly encourage him to write to MOD Ministers directly or, indeed, if he wants to write to me following business questions, I can take it up with the Department on his behalf.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Reports from Yemen say that members of the Baha’i religious community are increasingly being persecuted by Houthi rebels. Many Baha’i leaders are facing spurious criminal charges, and the Houthi leadership has refused appeals to release Baha’is who are imprisoned for their faith. In a televised speech just last year, the leader of the Houthis nullified and denounced the Baha’i faith, further intensifying the ongoing persecution of the Baha’is in that country. Obviously, it is a very important matter. Can we have a statement or a debate on it?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an issue of great concern, which is the religious persecution of minorities. On this occasion, it is in Yemen, which is, in itself, the world’s worst humanitarian catastrophe. What we all want, and what this Government are working towards, is success in the peace talks, and to be able to provide a long-term resolution to the problem in Yemen. He raises a very serious point about religious persecution, and I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise it directly with Ministers.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance, which will benefit a number of constituents who have emailed me this morning, following the publication of the amendments for next Tuesday’s business on section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. When will we know Mr Speaker’s selection of amendments? When he has made his selection, can you advise me on whether the amendments will be moved, spoken to and voted on in the order in which they appear on the Order Paper, or in alphabetical order, because there is a difference between the two?

Will you indulge me further, Madam Deputy Speaker? When we know about the selection of amendments, will there be guidance on whether, if one amendment is successful in the Division Lobby, subsequent amendments can stand, or whether they must fall, before we debate the substantive motion?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The selection will be made on the day. The further point that he raised with regard to whether one amendment will fall if another succeeds will obviously depend on the amendments themselves. Mr Speaker will announce his selection on the day.

Joint HMI Prison and Probation Report

12.14 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the findings of the report into the management and supervision of men convicted of sexual offences.

First, let me begin by acknowledging this incredibly important report by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation and, secondly, by passing my apologies to the House, particularly to the shadow spokesmen, for the fact that they were not able to receive advance notice of this statement.

Sexual offences are among the most horrifying and tragic of all the incidents with which we have to deal in this Chamber, or indeed in public law. They inflict unspeakable harm on the victim at the moment at which the offence is created, and lasting harm throughout the individual's life, leading to trauma, which, in the worst cases, can even extend to that individual committing suicide. No one should underestimate in any way the seriousness of this type of offence, or the obligation on the Government and their agencies to protect the public from sex offences.

This is a journey that begins in custody, but needs to go right the way through probation into the community. We are deeply grateful to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation for the work that they have done to look into this specific issue. I have spoken to both inspectorates this week. I spoke to the new director-general of prisons and the new director-general of probation, and asked them to look carefully at these reports.

At the end of the statement, I will go point by point through the major issues raised, but in essence, the central issues relate to: first, the accommodation provision for sex offenders on release; secondly, the risk assessment process for sex offenders; thirdly, the way in which professional training ties into that risk assessment process; fourthly, the opportunities for rehabilitative programmes; and finally, the question of home visits, and, in particular, issues of children.

Before we move on to those, I want to take this opportunity to reassure the whole House about the overall approach that we take to managing sex offenders, and in particular to public protection. There has been a huge shift over the past 20 years, as hon. and right hon. Members will be aware, in the way that we approach sex offenders. Many more people are now brought to justice for sex offences than were 20 years ago. That does not mean that more people are committing sex offences today; it means that more people are being brought to justice. This is driven by two things in particular: the rise in access to pornography, particularly on the internet; and the prosecution of individuals for historical sex offences—in some cases, committed many, many years ago—and the additional priority that the police have put on bringing those individuals to justice. We therefore have far more people in prison and on probation who are convicted sex offenders than 20 years ago.

When running through this very difficult and unpleasant subject, it is important to be aware of the range of people we include in the term "sex offender". Some have committed a contact offence; some have not. Let

me illustrate for the House what the range could be. Let us look at a recent case: a 50-year-old autistic man in the north of England who became addicted to internet pornography was driven to ever more extreme sites, and was eventually convicted—because we can detect people doing this—of sex offences. He served time in custody and has now come out. In that case, it was possible to work with the individual to get them off the internet and to reduce their offending. It is possible to protect the public from that kind of individual.

However, the range of sex offences goes right the way through to the most extreme high-risk cases, which would be dealt with through particular multi-agency protection arrangements. They would include an adult who was convicted of raping their partner, or an individual who had been in a position of authority, perhaps decades ago, and abused vulnerable children in their care. In thinking about how we deal with sex offenders in prison and on probation, we need to take into account the fact that they are very different individuals. Some of the oldest prisoners are now over 100 years old, and clearly the measures put in place for them will be very different from those put in place for others.

We must consider three things in particular—I would be grateful for an opportunity to discuss this in more detail with right hon. and hon. Members—that we do to protect the public: first, the multi-agency protection arrangements, meaning the way we work with the police and the probation service to ensure that we have a real focus on knowing where an individual is and on ensuring that they adhere to the conditions imposed; secondly, the licence conditions, which are imposed by the Parole Board mostly in cases of high-risk sex offenders; and thirdly, the sex offenders register, which has its own specialised requirements on what can be done with a sex offender.

Given the limited time available, I will focus on the issues raised in the report. The first, which has attracted a great deal of media attention, relates to the accommodation provided to offenders. As right hon. and hon. Members will have seen in the media, the inspectors highlighted cases in which sex offenders were placed in hotel accommodation. The first thing I want to say is that this is something we will work very hard to avoid in future, and I will explain how we will do that shortly. This is a very small number of cases. Every year, over 10,000 people are released from prison under that form of supervision, and of those only 54—sometimes it is 55 or 56—will end up in some type of emergency accommodation.¹ Of those individuals, only a very few—perhaps half a dozen—will end up in hotel accommodation. Before that can happen, the police and the probation service will conduct a detailed risk assessment to ensure that the individual does not pose a risk of a contact offence against a stranger. The individual will have committed a sex offence of the sort I explained at the start of my statement, or will have risk factors that do not impose that kind of risk on the public.

Nevertheless, we should still not place those individuals in that type of accommodation. With the director-general of the probation service, we are doing two major things to address this. First, we are providing the resources to build over 200 additional places in approved premises, so that individuals have such accommodation to go to. Secondly, in the interim, we will work with organisations such as Langley House Trust to provide alternative

1. [Official Report, 12 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 1MC.]

[Rory Stewart]

accommodation. My objective will be to significantly reduce, if not entirely eliminate, the possibility of anyone going to that form of hotel accommodation in future.

The second issue raised by the report relates to the risk assessment mechanism. Criticisms have been made about ARMS—active risk management system—which is the monitoring and assessment process that considers the risk factors when dealing with an offender. There is more that we can do on that in professional training. I have asked the director general of the probation service to look at moving the ARMS process, if possible, out of the community, where it has generally been located because of flexible changes in risk, and back into the custodial prison environment at an earlier stage in the process.

The third issue that the inspectors raised relates to approved accommodation. In relation to both approved accommodation and home visits, we must ensure that individuals are visited in their home, and that no gaps emerge between the police and the probation service. There are many other issues that we need to touch on, but I am aware that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, wish me to restrict my comments to 10 minutes, on a subject that I could speak about for an hour. I hope that in the questions that follow this statement, we can go into the subject in more detail.

In conclusion, we owe the inspectors a huge debt of gratitude for the work that they have done. We need to acknowledge that they have rated our national probation service as good, and that our public protection mechanisms, which I have mentioned, are among the very best in the world and have been praised by the inspectors, but they have also raised four areas of concern. We will tackle them one by one, because in public protection there is nothing more important than protecting people from the horror and trauma of a sexual offence.

12.25 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): I have not had advance sight of the statement, but the Minister, in his courteous manner, explained the reason to me shortly before the statement. I am somewhat astonished that, during his 10-minute deliberation, he failed seriously to consider and concede the true, damning nature of the joint report, which has public protection at its heart. We expect our criminal justice system to keep us safe, to keep our children protected, and to ensure the effective management and supervision of offenders, but it is clear from this damning report into the state of the management and supervision of sex offenders that this is not the case.

The report reads like a catalogue of failures in public protection. All five areas inspected had cases that presented safeguarding concerns, most often in relation to children, and around one in three of the intervention plans made paid insufficient attention to keeping children safe. Almost one in five plans failed to address sufficiently the need to keep the public, known adults and staff safe. Overall, inspectors found that there was poor release planning for sex offenders: many cases failed to present a comprehensive risk management plan and many initial offender assessment systems in prisons were missing. That created a situation in which proper restrictions on the access of sex offenders to children could not be

applied, putting those children in real danger. Those are severe failings by the Ministry of Justice, and the public have a right to know that they have been put at risk by the Government.

Can the Minister tell me how many sexual offenders released since the beginning of the transforming rehabilitation programme have gone on to reoffend? How many adults and children have been put at risk by the serious failures identified in the report? Of particular note is the threat to the public posed by the inadequate and unsafe resettlement of sexual offenders after release, which he has today acknowledged.

The report identifies two instances, in the small sample, of offenders being released into budget hotels or other temporary accommodation instead of approved premises. The inspectorates have said that it was hard to see a defence for that decision in relation to protecting the public. How many offenders have been released into non-approved premises, how long did they stay in such premises, and what supervision and monitoring arrangements were in place? Does the Minister believe that such a decision was defensible? Following the Government's privatisation of night-watch staff at approved premises, despite repeated warnings, what assessment has he made of this privatisation of public safety, and does he agree with the unions that that, too, will put the public at risk?

It is also evident that the failings found in the report have been caused and aggravated by the Government's ill-judged and poorly delivered transforming rehabilitation programme, and their relentless, ideological cuts to the Prison Service. The transforming rehabilitation programme has dangerously and recklessly fragmented the probation system, creating a vastly increased and distressing workload that many staff find difficult to manage, with one in four NPS staff saying that they were not properly prepared for sexual offender work, and supervisors in both prisons and the probation service receiving little or no training. Without sufficient support, we risk losing committed and experienced staff in the probation system, just as we have seen in the prisons system.

What assessment has the Minister made of the transforming rehabilitation agenda on the ability of probation officers to monitor at-risk sexual offenders effectively and protect the public? What assessment has he made of the loss of experienced probation officers and thousands of experienced prison officers, and the impact of these losses on the MOJ's ability to manage and supervise offenders? Ultimately, does he agree with the probation inspector that

"the public are not sufficiently protected" from sexual offenders?

Rory Stewart: I thank the shadow Minister for his questions, which essentially focused on three separate issues: the transforming rehabilitation programme, reoffending rates, and accommodation. On accommodation, I absolutely share his concerns. He asked for the absolute numbers. As I said, the current numbers suggest that across the country, of the more than 10,000 people being released, 56 are being put in emergency accommodation—so a very small number. The number of those going into hotels would be a fraction of that—something in the region of half a dozen. However, as I said, we are doing all we can to eliminate this entirely. One of the ways

in which we are aiming to do so is by building over 200 additional places in approved premises, of which half will be delivered next year.

The hon. Gentleman's second question was on reoffending rates for sex offenders. Any reoffending by any offender is a tragedy; reoffending by a sex offender is a horrifying tragedy. The reality is that reoffending rates among sex offenders are significantly lower than reoffending rates among the population as a whole. At the moment, reoffending rates among short-term prisoners are running at about 60%, while reoffending rates among sex offenders are about eight times lower than that. In the case of low-risk sex offenders, the re-conviction rate is 0.8%. That means that 99.2% of people are not re-convicted. But 0.8% is still too high a figure, and there is much more that we can do to try to drive it down.

Where I would disagree slightly with the hon. Gentleman is in connecting this matter to the transforming rehabilitation programme. The question of the management of sex offenders is not about the community rehabilitation companies. Almost every sex offender is managed by the national probation service—in other words, managed by the Government, by civil servants, by a public agency. It has nothing to do with a move towards the private sector or the decisions that have been made to bring in the charitable sector. The report is absolutely explicit—both inspectors are clear on this all the way through—that it is on the performance of the national probation service, not the CRCs. The CRCs are not engaged with in this report. There has been investment in the national probation service since the beginning of the transforming rehabilitation programme. There have been many challenges for the national probation service in terms of its caseload and the types of offences that are coming forward, but, when all is said and done, there is a 9.7% budget increase in the resource going into the service.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that we have two very well-subscribed debates this afternoon, particularly the one on Holocaust Memorial Day. I therefore ask colleagues to make their questions, and the Minister to make his answers, as brief as possible.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome the Minister's frankness about the extent of the problem. Dame Glenys Stacey is a highly regarded and robustly independent inspector, and what she says is grave.

The Minister has rightly highlighted a number of specific areas that need to be looked at, and I have no doubt that the Justice Committee will wish to take this matter further. In addition to the specifics that he is going to work with, what is to be done to deal with an underlying problem highlighted in the report—the disconnect between what the leadership of the national probation service perceives is being done and what is actually delivered on the ground, with the lack of face-to-face contact, the over-reliance on emails, and the sense that staff are not fully supported? That is a systemic problem, and it is not the first time that the Select Committee and the inspectors have found it to exist. What steps will he be taking to deal with that underlying issue?

Rory Stewart: Resolving that problem is partly about resources. We need to make sure not just that we are putting in the 9.7% extra funding but that we are able to recruit the additional staff to reduce the caseload. It is partly about processes and management systems in order to make sure that we really record any contact with offenders. It is also absolutely about picking up on any issues where our national policy is not being followed at a local level.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Over the past two years in Scotland, we have had the lowest recorded crime for almost 45 years. In particular, violent crime has been halved in the past 10 years because of the work of the violence reduction unit. However, exactly as across the rest of the UK, we have seen an increase in sexual offences. As the Minister said, this has been for different reasons. Some of it is about exposure to pornography and some of it is about new crimes—digital crimes—but, in particular, it is about victims coming forward, which everyone should welcome. We now have the challenge of reducing the re-traumatisation they often face in the criminal justice system.

The report highlights that the national probation service is managing over 100,000 offenders, one in five of whom need supervision. The treatment programme that was being used failed: it increased reoffending and has had to be changed. How will the Minister ensure that there are sufficient staff and that they have training in the new programmes and, particularly, support, because they are often dealing with very harrowing cases that can take a toll on them? How will he improve integration—in the courses, the approach, and the IT—between custody and community? How will he ensure that the MAPPA—multi-agency public protection arrangements—level that offenders are given is consistent across England? How will he provide monitored accommodation where required?

Two years ago, Scotland got the power to introduce sexual harm protection orders and sexual risk orders, but amendment is required so that they can be recognised across the UK. We cannot have it that people can offend and move. I know that the Minister recognises that and that our Cabinet Secretary has written again this week. When will this be changed so that we can take forward these protection orders in Scotland?

Rory Stewart: To take the hon. Lady's last point first, we will look very closely at that. I am very happy to have a meeting with her as soon as possible in order to do so.

The hon. Lady raised some very serious points, and I agree with all of them. We already have in place a lot of procedures to ensure that staff dealing with traumatic cases are given proper breaks and proper support. However, there are ongoing challenges, particularly around IT, data management and information-sharing between different databases that we are trying to address by making the tools simpler and by making sure that the databases speak to each other properly.

The hon. Lady's questions about MAPPA and accommodation are absolutely on the nail. Because of the limited time, it is difficult to go through all the policy areas in detail, but she made five very strong points, and I thank her.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): May I join in the general welcome for the inspectors' report in this extremely difficult area? I acknowledge that this is a growing area of criminal justice interest because of the public anxiety behind the nature of these offences, for all the reasons the Minister gave about the growing burden on the service. In order to understand the nature of the cause of the offending behaviour—for the probation officers overseeing it and for offender managers generally, but also for the offenders themselves so that they can manage their behaviour in future—it is critical that the investment in forensic psychology is appropriate to the demand placed on the system. Is he satisfied that sufficient resources from the national health service and from elsewhere are going into the criminal justice system in order for it to manage the scale of the problem that it is having to manage?

Rory Stewart: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who was a prisons and probation Minister. The connection with the NHS is central. Additional funding has gone into the NHS, and we need to ensure that that focuses on the most vulnerable offenders in terms of mental health, addiction and the need for courses provided by the national health service. Getting that right will be essential in dealing with violent crime, sex offences and short-sentence offences. The NHS connection is vital. The most important thing, from my point of view, is ensuring that we have the treatment provision in the community for addiction.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I was really disappointed to hear the Minister's assertion that the transforming rehabilitation programme has had no impact on the results in this report, because most of these offenders are within the national probation service sector. Trade unions whose members work in this sector have long argued that transforming rehabilitation would damage public safety, and public concern about what it has done is strong. Surely he must now agree that those concerns were legitimate.

Rory Stewart: I agree that there are significant concerns about transforming rehabilitation, which is why we are looking at that seriously. We have issued a consultation on that and will be issuing reforms. My point is narrower: the issue of sex offenders is for the national probation service and is not affected by the CRCs.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): This time last year, John Worboys's release on parole was being planned. Many women in my part of London, including my constituent who was attacked by him, were extremely concerned about that decision. The report today underlines why people were so worried about the services' ability to manage him, had he been allowed out of prison. I welcome the steps that the Minister is setting out, but how will he keep the House updated on the success of those steps and whether he is satisfied with the progress being made, in the light of this important report?

Rory Stewart: I am happy to continue to update the House on progress. The Worboys case taught us some important lessons about pre-sentence reports and connections between the Ministry of Justice and the Parole Board, and we are conducting an extensive review of that. It is important to remind the House that in the

most extreme cases—MAPPA 3 cases—we have very significant protections in place for the public. I can hold forth on that in more detail if Members want to talk about the protection arrangements.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): This report is littered with shocking findings. One of the most shocking is when the inspector writes:

"in 40 per cent of cases there had been no work focused on reducing the risk of sexual offending at all".

How has that been allowed to happen? When will we have the trained staff to put it right? This is a matter of urgency.

Rory Stewart: The specific issue there is around the provision of accredited programmes, and there are two problems. The first is that accredited programmes are not suitable for all sex offenders. At the moment, we do not have programmes that are able to reduce the risk of reoffending significantly. In fact, some of the past sex offender treatment programmes can increase rather than decrease the chance of reoffending if they are delivered to the wrong type of sex offender. We have to distinguish between lower risk and higher risk sex offenders and ensure that we are delivering programmes in the right way. The Horizon and Kaizen programmes, which we have rolled out, are key to that, but they are not the key for everyone. I agree that we can do more to assess and to record, but I politely disagree with the inspector's implication that we should attempt to deliver accredited programmes to 100% of these cases.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): This report is largely about the risk of recidivism and the need to rehabilitate, but at the heart of the criminal justice system is the protection of the public. The malign and the malicious should be locked away, lest they do further harm, and the system can be simultaneously retributive and rehabilitative. Will the Minister look at the principle of just deserts, which has a long philosophical genealogy and is in tune with the opinion of the public, who believe that the vulnerable should be protected and the wicked punished?

Rory Stewart: Absolutely. In fact, if we simply look at the statistics, we see that we are much stricter now on sex offenders than ever before in British history—people are getting longer and longer sentences, and there is a reason for that. It is about ensuring that people receive indeterminate life sentences if necessary and are only released if the Parole Board approves, but it is also about ensuring that when people are released, they are on the sex offenders register, that the licence conditions are as strict and specific as possible, and that the multi-agency public protection arrangements are at the right level and properly enforced.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): In my experience of working with men who abuse their partners, the underlying attitudes of sexual offenders such as Worboys who repeatedly rape and abuse women are frequently misogynistic and women-hating. What will the Minister do in his review of treatment programmes to ensure that staff have the training, support and supervision they need to tackle those misogynistic and women-hating attitudes?

Rory Stewart: We are learning an enormous amount about how to do accredited programmes well, and we should do more on that. One lesson we have drawn from the past programmes is that we have to get the balance right between not focusing too much on people's past behaviour and trying to focus on coping mechanisms for their future behaviour, to identify their risks and avoid them. One problem with past programmes was, unfortunately, that focusing on past behaviour seems to encourage people to reoffend more. We must get the balance right between these offenders accepting the shame and guilt for their past performance, understanding the drivers and, above all, thinking about what happens when they come out, to ensure that they do not put themselves in a position to do it again.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is, of course, welcome that more victims are getting justice, even if it is many years after the abuse they suffered. As the Minister rightly outlined in his statement, this puts pressure on the system. Can he confirm that there will be a move towards supervised accommodation where possible for those who are released from jail following these offences, not only for their rehabilitation but to reassure their victims?

Rory Stewart: Yes. One reason that we have committed to building more than 200 additional places in approved premises is to provide what my hon. Friend requests.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): This morning I was contacted by residents near Bedford Prison, who say that the screens that prevent prisoners from seeing into neighbouring gardens have been smashed, and prisoners shout and intimidate them day and night. Will the Minister act immediately to protect my constituents from that continued disturbance and protect their right to privacy?

Rory Stewart: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, I visited Bedford Prison last week. I will immediately raise that with the governor and prison group director and attempt to address the problem.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): My constituency is home to North Sea Camp Prison, which is a category D prison, colloquially known as an open prison. My constituents are concerned that people are put into such a prison before they are ready for that level of responsibility. Can the Minister reassure me that he will continue to do everything he can to ensure that people are only put in open conditions when they are ready for it?

Rory Stewart: This is a central point. We actually put very few people into open conditions. The number of prisoners in the category D estate is quite small. That is because a serious risk assessment process is conducted before someone is put in those conditions, involving the governor, the offender management in custody model and probation officers. We can continue to learn lessons when things go wrong, but by and large, we are confident that our open prisons are well managed and that the correct prisoners are in them.

Backbench Business

Holocaust Memorial Day

12.48 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day 2019.

In the middle of the night on 14 March 1939, a 10-year-old Jewish boy in a town called Ostrava, in what was then Czechoslovakia, was woken up by a noise in the street outside. Peering out of the window, he saw German soldiers marching into the town square. It was the night that Hitler invaded, and four days later, the boy was put on a train to England by his mum and teenage sisters. He was the only member of his family able to leave, and it was the last time he would see them. They were forced into a ghetto, then sent to Theresienstadt, and then to Treblinka, where they were murdered on 5 October 1942. He escaped to the UK. He grew up to become the youngest grammar school headmaster in the country, and he was honoured with an MBE for his contribution to education and his work for charities. He adopted four children, of whom I am the second, and I suppose that makes the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day this year—Torn from Home—particularly appropriate, and it is an honour for me to introduce this debate.

Right at the outset, I want to pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust and the brilliant work its fantastic team do to teach young people about what can happen if hatred and racism become acceptable. Thanks to their hard work and Government grants—launched in 2006 and continued, I am delighted to say, by every Government since—the trust takes two students from every sixth form in the country to Auschwitz-Birkenau. I have seen young students from Dudley go on those trips, come back and campaign in their community against racism.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the House and the Backbench Business Committee for this debate, and I thank all the right hon. and hon. Members who supported the application for this debate or who are here to take part in it. I also thank the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for everything everybody is doing this week to commemorate and remember those killed—the 6 million people killed—in history's greatest crime.

There is a particular group of people to whom I want to pay tribute today: the survivors—men and women like Eva Clarke BEM, whom many of us heard speak here in Parliament on Tuesday about the horrors that her family faced during the holocaust; or Zigi Shipper BEM, who at the age of 89 will travel to Dudley tomorrow to speak to hundreds of local people at our annual holocaust commemoration; or Mala Tribich MBE, Sir Ben Helfgott, Hannah Lewis MBE, Susan Pollack MBE and Eve Kugler—who all spend so much of their time travelling around the country to tell communities like ours where racism and prejudice can lead. I think it is extraordinary that these heroes, many of them now in their late 80s and 90s, use their direct personal experience of these terrible events to help us build stronger communities and a more tolerant, united country. I am sure everybody here will want to salute them and pay tribute to them all.

[Ian Austin]

Listening to those survivors and visiting Auschwitz or other sites of mass murder is a truly life-changing experience. I thought I knew what to expect when I first visited Auschwitz with the Holocaust Educational Trust and students from Dudley, but nothing can prepare you for seeing the place for real. I will never forget seeing a mountain of human hair—two and a half tonnes of it—shaved from the heads of inmates to be shipped back to Germany and made into cloth, or the huge piles of shoes, glasses and suitcases.

Last year, I spent a week touring Poland with a brilliant project called March of the Living, along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan). We visited the sites of ghettos and concentration camps, before marching—thousands of us—from Auschwitz to Birkenau, but I will never forget visiting Belzec. It is a tiny site, about as big as two football pitches, where hundreds of thousands of people were murdered. Imagine this: at the peak of the killing in 1942, three or four transport trains arrived every day. In one month, August 1942, 130,000 Jews were murdered in Belzec. Imagine that: 130,000 people slaughtered in a place the size of two football pitches in just one month.

What also brings home the horror of the holocaust is visiting towns and cities where whole communities were wiped out. A few years ago, my dad and I went back to Ostrava. We found the flat that he had lived in and the site of his school and his synagogue. In 1937, 10,000 Jews lived in Ostrava. The town had several synagogues and Jewish schools and businesses. In the single room that serves as its synagogue today, there are seats for 30 people—30 people. In Poland, we went to a place called Nowy Targ, where we found what had been my dad's uncle's shop. There is a mass grave of the 500 Jews butchered in a day, including at least one of his cousins. Some 3,000 Jewish people lived there before the war. "How many live here now?" I asked the local historian who was showing us around. She looked at me as if I was mad. She said, "None"—none.

A few weeks before Christmas, we met in Speaker's House to commemorate the anniversary of the Kindertransport. We remembered how, when other countries were rounding up their Jews and herding them on to trains to the gas chambers, Britain provided a haven for thousands of refugee children. Think of Britain in the '30s: the rest of Europe was succumbing to fascism—Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain—but here in Britain, Mosley was rejected. Imagine 1941: France invaded, Europe overrun, America not yet in the war and just one country standing for freedom and democracy, fighting not just for our liberty, but for the freedom of the whole world.

It is true that Britain did not do enough during the holocaust and could of course have done more, but it was British troops who liberated Bergen-Belsen, rescuing thousands of inmates from certain death. So when people say to me, "What does it mean to be British? What is special or unique about our country?" I say that it is because of who we are as a people and what we are as a country that British people stood up to the Nazis and laid down their lives for freedom. What makes you British is not what you look like, where you were born or how you worship, but the contribution you make and

your belief in the timeless British values—values British people have fought and died for—of democracy, equality, freedom, fairness and tolerance.

No one embodies these values more than Major Frank Foley. He was an MI6 agent at the British embassy in Berlin in the 1930s, working undercover as a passport control officer. He provided papers to let Jewish people escape, forged passports and even sheltered people in his own home. He went into concentration camps to get Jewish people out and enable them to leave the country. Last September, His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge visited Stourbridge in Dudley to unveil the statue that we produced of Major Foley. It was a huge honour for the people of Dudley, and a wonderful tribute to a great British hero. I think it was so impressive to see our future monarch taking such a close interest in these events, as we saw with his recent visits to Stutthof and to Yad Vashem.

Frank Foley sheltered people in his own home and, as I said a moment ago, even rescued people from concentration camps, including the father-in-law of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. However, the really extraordinary thing about Frank Foley is that his courage, decency and determination were matched by his modesty. He retired in complete anonymity—never telling anybody about what he had done, never boasting about his heroism—to a quiet street in Stourbridge, where he lived out his retirement until his death in 1958. When people are singled out or extremists try to divide our communities on the grounds of race or religion, we should remember this great hero's example and find it within ourselves to stand up for decency, fairness and tolerance.

I was flicking through *The Daily Telegraph* a couple of years ago when I came across the obituary of Rose Evansky, who had died aged 94. She pioneered modern hairdressing and became one of most famous and influential hairdressers ever. The amazing thing about her, however, is that she had been born in Germany in 1922 and when, in 1938, her Jewish father was imprisoned in Dachau, she managed to escape on the Kindertransport and she arrived in Dudley as a refugee. She was able to escape only because a local family, who were not related to her and had never even met her, heard about her from a refugee committee and put up the £50 guarantee—a lot of money in those days—that had to be paid before she could escape.

A few months later, in 1939, a 14-year-old German refugee called Kurt Flossman arrived at Dudley Grammar School aged just 14. His father had died in 1937, and he made his way across Europe on his own. His classmates—I think this is brilliant—clubbed together to fund his expenses, and local firms paid for his clothes. Stories like this show that Dudley, like the rest of our country, has always worked to help those in need and to build a tolerant community. Over the years Dudley—Britain—has welcomed refugees from around the world, so when our country opens its doors to what we now call unaccompanied minors or to others fleeing persecution, let us remember that this is what Britain has always done: this is who we are and it is what we do.

I grew up learning about the holocaust from my parents and hearing stories about the suffering, the appalling cruelty and the scale of the slaughter, and that left me with a conviction that I have held ever since. It is a conviction that prejudice leads to intolerance,

then to victimisation and eventually to persecution. It is a conviction as well that we have a duty, every single one of us, not to stand by, but to make a difference and to fight discrimination, intolerance and bigotry wherever we find it.

One of the reasons I joined the Labour party as a teenager in Dudley 35 years ago was to fight racism. I believe that just as passionately now as I did then, and I am shocked that a party with such a long tradition of fighting racism has caused such offence and distress to the Jewish community. The first thing I did when I became an MP was lead a campaign to drive the British National party, which had a councillor in Dudley, out of the town. Since then I have stood with Muslim constituents who have been targeted by the English Defence League, but that would all be completely meaningless if I ignored antisemitism in my own party. It is easy to oppose racism at events or in meetings where everyone agrees with you. It is easy for those of us in politics to criticise our opponents, but that is completely meaningless if we are not also prepared to criticise when it is more difficult. Labour Members must understand that we will have no right to criticise our opponents on such issues if we do not first get our own house in order.

I wish to finish on a more positive note and say how pleased I am that we will soon have the new national holocaust memorial and learning centre next to Parliament, at the very centre of our democracy and national life. It will enable future generations to remember the victims of the holocaust, and learn the lessons of history through individual stories of survival, bravery and courage. For me, the importance of remembering the holocaust is to remember history's greatest crime, and to pay our respects to all who suffered at the hands of the Nazis, as well as in more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur and the rest. We must remind ourselves that what makes us the people we are, and Britain the country it is, is the unique response to the holocaust and the Nazis. Let us use this debate to rededicate ourselves to the timeless values of democracy, equality, freedom, fairness and tolerance. Let us pledge again to fight prejudice and racism wherever it is found, because that is the best tribute any of us can pay to the memory of those who were killed in history's greatest crime.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Colleagues will appreciate that there is pressure on time because this debate is well subscribed. I therefore impose a five-minute time limit on speeches, starting now.

1.2 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): This House, and the memory of those who died in the holocaust, have been honoured by the speech that we heard from the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), and I thank him for the way he introduced this debate. On a separate day, and in a separate way, I would like to engage with him and the whole House on the question of whether the proposed learning centre in Victoria Tower gardens is the appropriate place, but that is for another day.

I wish to concentrate my remarks on what happened on Sunday at Bushey New Cemetery. A number of us were present at the service and burial of the remains of six people whose ashes and bones had been given to the Imperial War museum which, once it knew what it had, and after analysis, quickly provided them for burial as soon as possible. Each of the five adults represented 1 million people who died in the holocaust, and as the Chief Rabbi reminded us at the service, the child represented more than 1 million children who died.

Most of us do not know quite who we are. As J. B. Priestley said, if someone can name their eight great-grandparents, they will have a better clue about who they are than he had about himself. My family has always known we had a Jewish ancestor, and we now know that many of my grandfather's cousins died. Indeed, if we include the extended families, more than 100 people died, including 45 at Auschwitz, 45 at Sobibór, and others in other places. I mourn those who died who have no people to remember them, or those who do not know their family links and cannot provide a living memory of those who went before and who suffered.

The question I put to my constituency in my article this week concerned which would have been the right year to have intervened, with force, against Mr Hitler. Would it have been 1933, when *The Economist*, and Douglas Jay, were writing articles about the threat that existed for people? Would it have been 1934 or 1935, and so on through to 1939, when we did the things that the hon. Member for Dudley North referred to, or 1940, 1941, or ever, or never? There would never have been unanimity in the country.

I hope that Conservative Members will not make remarks about the difficulties faced by the Labour party. We ought to concentrate on why Mr Hitler thought that he might get support in this country, giving him a free hand to do what he wanted in continental Europe, eliminating Jews throughout the continent, and leaving Great Britain aside. He did that because he thought that there were people who might sympathise with his view. If one reads Iain Wilton's very good biography of Charles Burgess Fry—one of the greatest sportsmen this country has ever had—one sees that he made the mistake in 1934 of flirting with fascism, and of going to see Mr Hitler and discussing issues with him. He was not the only one. Charles Burgess Fry was not a Conservative, but there were Conservatives in the late '30s who would probably have been reasonably happy to have stayed out of conflict.

I want people to remember those who helped to save many and those who failed to save more, but the biggest worry of all is the idea that pacifism is the right approach. My wife's grandfather was sacked as Secretary of the League of Nations Union in 1938 by the appeasers.

The League of Nations was not set up to be pacifist; it was set up to bring peace, and the United Nations needs to do the same thing. When we consider holocausts that have taken place, not on the same intended scale as Mr Hitler's, but those involving Muslims in former Yugoslavia, or what is now going on in some countries where oppressive regimes bully and beat people to death, we should reflect on how we can enforce a duty to protect on Governments, so that they cannot with impunity slay their own people and bully them, especially if people are picked out on grounds of race, colour or religion.

[Sir Peter Bottomley]

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dudley North for introducing this debate, and I hope that at some other stage we can have that debate about the national holocaust memorial and learning centre.

1.6 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for the moving, thoughtful and inspirational way that he opened this debate. Last spring, as he said, we had the honour to join the annual March of the Living which, alongside holocaust survivors and young people from around the world, took us from Auschwitz to Birkenau. During the week, we stopped in places such as Belzec and the forest of Zbolytowska Gora, where 6,000 Jews, including 800 children, were murdered. It was a very moving experience.

Those memories are very much in my mind today as we mark Holocaust Memorial Day and the tearing of people from their homes under the threat of persecution and genocide. Once again, I am reminded of lives cut tragically short, communities uprooted and destroyed, and the sheer depravity of the systematic attempt to slaughter the Jews of Europe. I am also reminded of something else from that journey last spring, and the fact that even in the midst of places of great horror and suffering, we celebrated life.

Before travelling to Poland, we were encouraged to read the stories of some of those who survived the Shoah. They were stories of tragedy and loss, but also of bravery, love, and the endurance of the human spirit. They were about men and women such as Freddie Knoller, who fought in the French resistance, but when captured chose to confess that he was a Jew rather than denounce his comrades. Eve Kugler—she has already been mentioned—wrote after the second world war that “we started again with nothing except the Jewish beliefs and values that the Nazis could never take from us.”

Their stories recall the words of the late Martin Gilbert who said:

“Even in the darkness of the Holocaust, there were sparks of light.”

Our journey also gave us the opportunity to celebrate the life of the Jewish people’s homeland, which was reborn in the aftermath of the holocaust. We recalled the contribution of the survivors to the state of Israel, and all that many of us admire so much about its achievements, its values, and its resilience.

However, remembrance and celebration alone are not enough to truly honour those who died in the holocaust and those who risked all to save the lives of others; we must also learn from the holocaust. Tragically, the flames of racial and religious hatred continue to be fanned around the world. Antisemitism remains a scourge of the modern world. Hideous antisemitic tropes, repugnant conspiracy theories and malicious examples of holocaust denial are all used by populists and demagogues for political ends throughout the middle east and in Europe.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that so much more needs to be done to tackle the scourge on social media? It is an absolute cesspit on sites like Facebook and Twitter—the degree

of antisemitism that we see. As we remember the holocaust today, we remember also that it did not happen in a vacuum; it happened because of the context—prejudice and the dehumanisation of people. We see that today on social media. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must see more, both in terms of legislation and from the social media companies themselves, to deal with this scourge?

Joan Ryan: My hon. Friend makes an important point, with which I absolutely agree. Much is said, but not enough is done, about this pernicious form of hate crime.

Here in the UK, on campuses, in trade unions and even, sadly, as we have heard, in the Labour party, pernicious comparisons have been drawn between Israel and Nazi Germany. In the United States, we see neo-Nazis, racists and white supremacists tolerated, excused and encouraged by those at the highest levels. We must stand up with courage against antisemitism and racism each and every day, wherever we find it.

One of the greatest weapons at our disposal in this fight is education. As Sir Ben Helfgott—also a holocaust survivor—has suggested, we must all do our

“utmost to help create greater harmony, mutual respect and understanding amongst people”.

So I commend the vital work of organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust, March of the Living and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. By teaching younger generations about the horrors of the past, they are working for a future that is free of hate. Let us remember, too, the moral duty that each of us has to play our part in this struggle. That duty was best put by Elie Wiesel, who wrote:

“The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.”

1.11 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is a real privilege and pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan).

In November, I had the opportunity to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau to participate in the Holocaust Educational Trust’s “Lessons from Auschwitz” programme. I had heard previously from students and teachers in my constituency that it was a personal and educational experience like no other, so I am grateful to the trust for giving me the opportunity to see how that important educational programme is delivered.

Auschwitz-Birkenau is a place of fascination. The architecture, the gateway, the railway line have become immediately recognisable symbols of the holocaust. It draws visitors by the thousands every week. It features in the Lonely Planet guide under “attractions”. It also remains one of the world’s largest crime scenes—a place of proof and evidence—even as some continue to promote theories, whether through vile cartoons or pseudo-academic papers, that these events never took place.

Auschwitz is also, for many, a deeply spiritual place. For some, it is a place where God did not intervene—where He turned His back. For others, it is the place where faith found new depths and new heights, even in the midst of a visitation of pure evil on an entire people group.

I have had the privilege to meet several survivors of Auschwitz and of other death camps. One cannot fail to be moved by the grace and depth of these remarkable

individuals. Last October, Susan Pollock MBE, who survived both Auschwitz and Belsen as a young girl, gave probably the most meaningful talk I have ever heard at a Conservative Party conference. She left the whole room stunned; there were tears running down our faces as she shared her memories and experiences and spoke of forgiveness and of breaking down barriers. I thought, what an incredible, humbling privilege it is for us, as a society, to have these people still living among us. The precious twilight years of so many such survivors are now devoted to educating and informing younger generations about the past—what they saw and what they lived through.

Holocaust Memorial Day this Sunday is about honouring the survivors, as well as reflecting on the devastating losses and the destruction of a whole culture in central Europe. It is also a day about the present and the future. That is what makes it so vital that the Government should continue to support the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust.

What is the message? What lessons cry out to us today from these darkest of events? For me, the lesson is that the roots and origins of the holocaust run very deep. It was not a quirk of history. It did not just happen by accident in the chaos of warfare. Visitors learn something similar when they go to the Genocide memorial and museum in Kigali, Rwanda, which I have visited several times. Genocides require planning, organisation, equipment, supplies. That needs effective management and leadership. However, to undertake something so horrific on such a vast scale, something else is required. Yes, genocide requires a large number of people to carry out tasks, but it requires an even larger number of people to turn a blind eye—not to question, not to resist. It requires a population to stay silent, out of fear or assent.

In all examples of genocide we see the same pattern, where the violence and killing has been supported by years of conditioning the population to really hate the group that is being targeted for elimination. It starts with what we now call stereotyping—generalisations, mockery, blame, lies, bullying, verbal abuse, victimising, conspiracy theories. That is what provides the deep soil from which grow the hideous and vile acts of genocide. That is the very essence of antisemitism. Who can say that we are not living with that in our very midst in 2019? That is the lived experience of some of our colleagues, and some of our constituents, right now.

So this week—a week when many of us have signed the Book of Commitment downstairs, and when we shall be remembering Holocaust Memorial Day on Sunday—is about pledging to act; to label and call out the acts that we come across daily for what they are. As a new MP in my first term, I was in the Tea Room talking to a colleague about a forthcoming Conservative Friends of Israel trip to Israel. A rather grand colleague, who is no longer in this place, said to me, “Be careful, young man. You wouldn’t be the first gentile to be taken in.” I am ashamed to say that I let that remark go. The remark reflected the dark stereotypes of the Jewish people, drawing on ideas of conspiracy, manipulation and deception. I am ashamed that I did not stand up to it on that occasion. We have an opportunity, on this memorial day, to reflect on what we can do and to renew our commitment to act.

1.17 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I hope we are not just “considering” Holocaust Memorial Day, with our antiquated practices in this place, but endorsing it.

I pay tribute to my team of Danny Stone, Amy Wagner and Ally Routledge, who put together the Sara conference in November—“Sara” after the Nazi name forced on Jewish women in 1938 to show that they were Jewish. That conference looked at misogyny and antisemitism; I bring to the House just one nugget from it. In this country, in the past year, there were 170,000 anti-semitic internet searches. Since last year’s Holocaust Memorial Day, searches on “Holocaust hoax” are up 30,000. We have talked in previous debates about holocaust denial. Let me put another term on the record, because it is the pertinent one in this country for some at the moment—holocaust revisionism. Some people want to twist and turn what happened for their own ends; they would like to give some lip service, but only some, while twisting the facts and minimising the consequences and the implications.

We have seen it in the past few days, with the TV personality, Rachel Riley, and the abuse that she has received from many for standing up to antisemitism, in this week. Well, I stand, and I hope we all stand, with Rachel Riley, recognising the bravery of that young woman—one amongst many, one of the better known, and therefore the more abused—for standing up against modern antisemitism.

My parents died very young, but I only ever saw them both angry once. That was in 1972, seeing the television footage of Israeli athletes being murdered in Munich. That meant so much, in terms of understanding the realities of the Jewish people at the time. That was the only time I ever saw my parents angry together in their lives but, if they were alive today, that would not have been the only time that they were angry. Holocaust revisionism is the current-day plague that we have to challenge and fight, rather than the ignorant and thick holocaust deniers of the past, who were quite easy to challenge. There are far too many around.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

John Mann: If I may, I will continue.

The problem is not just a British one, and we do not like talking about some of these things, but I am quite hard-nosed about some things now. When I went around Majdanek, I observed it in detail. In an hour, at every major exhibit and in the gas chambers, one could go around without even realising that the Jewish people were the target of the Nazis in the holocaust. I went to the cathedral, up the tower, and I did not need binoculars—one can see Majdanek from the centre of Lublin now, as people could at the time. Yet there is still not a single reference in the exhibitions to the fact that the target there—the mass murders—were primarily the local and Polish Jewish population.

Holocaust revisionism—it is a problem all over Europe, it is a problem in my political party, it is a problem in this country and it is a problem that we are not facing up to sufficiently robustly or successfully. That is why Rachel Riley gets all the crap that she gets at the moment. Holocaust revisionism is not understanding

[John Mann]

the realities of what happened and what that means today. That is why I am angry. I endorse, as I am sure we all endorse, Holocaust Memorial Day today.

1.22 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow such a powerful speech by my neighbour and the excellent chair of the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann).

I join others in paying tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust—to Karen Pollock and her team, which includes one of my former staff members, Robert Lingard, an east Yorkshire boy who has no Jewish ancestry, but has very much been drawn into this issue. I pay tribute to him and all the team at the trust.

My community and I are proud to be associated with a new holocaust memorial in Brigg. Our area has no real Jewish history; there is some in east Yorkshire, Grimsby and Hull, but not particularly in my constituency. Brigg Town Council has had a small memorial for many years, but given what has happened in recent times, it wanted to show its partnership with and commitment to those who were murdered in the holocaust by creating a new and bigger holocaust memorial in Brigg, which I am pleased will be unveiled this year.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The holocaust is what happened to the Jews of Europe, but we should recall that the genocide that the Nazis inflicted on Europe took a great number of other people. For example, it is said that 3 million Christian Poles were killed for “Lebensraum”. For me, Holocaust Memorial Day means them, too; I am quite sure that the Holocaust Educational Trust would not mind that association.

Andrew Percy: Of course. That is patently true. Brigg has a long Gypsy and Traveller heritage, going back centuries. Sometimes the problem is that some of those arguments are used by revisionists who seek to undermine the fact that the real target of the holocaust was the Jews of Europe.

I am proud that a memorial is to be unveiled on Millennium Green in Brigg, and I am proud of the young people from Sir John Nelthorpe School and the Vale Academy in Brigg who entered the competition to design the memorial. I pay particular tribute to Izzy Roberts, a year 10 pupil from Sir John Nelthorpe School, whose design won out. I also thank the town council, which committed £5,000, and local businesses Keyo, East Coast Surfacing and Turnbull, which put their hand in their pocket to fund the memorial. My constituents, despite the area not having a big Jewish population, have seen what has been going on recently in this country in terms of antisemitism and hate. The community wants to show that it will not allow anyone to forget or downplay the suffering and horror of the holocaust.

I refer to what is going on at the moment because it is a cancer in our politics, on both the left and the right. In recent days and weeks, I have been appalled to see references made to the Jewish ancestry of Mr Speaker or other colleagues. They might have a different perspective from me on the Brexit debate, but to have their Jewish ancestry brought into it was truly disgusting. Those who did that do not speak for people like me, and the

near 77% of my constituents who voted leave in the referendum. Antisemitism is an issue on the far left and on the far right.

I will tell a story about why I think that there is something peculiarly evil and different about Jew haters. Some colleagues might know that I converted—I would say converted back—to Judaism some time ago. I had never really faced any racism before that, apart from once at a cash machine in Edinburgh, when I was told to eff off back to England by someone who had obviously had too much to drink. I had never really given racism a thought, but I converted to Judaism and was then subjected to two incidents, by the same people on different occasions. Sadly, one incident started with them chanting the Leader of the Opposition’s name at me, and then screaming that I was “Israeli scum” and responsible for killing Palestinian children. This is not a political point, because those people do not speak for the vast mass of Labour members. Indeed, I suspect that they were not Labour members. That first incident was bad enough; it was reported to the police, but no action was taken, unfortunately.

The second incident happened in a shopping centre in Doncaster. The same people again screamed at me for being “Israeli scum”. This is where Jew hate is somewhat different: the incident became more sinister when one of the individuals said, “You should tell people before an election that you’re a Jew.” Obviously, I was taken aback by that; it was a nasty incident. I was then told to eff off and “eat my Jew halal food,” so we could say something about the education levels of such people. The interesting point, however, is that they started with Israel and moved on to my own Judaism. A few years ago, when I responded as a Minister to the Holocaust Memorial Day debate from the Dispatch Box, I talked about that Israelification of antisemitism, which we have to be very careful about. I was tempted to use parliamentary privilege to name those individuals because, I am sad to say, due to the failings of Humberside police, the trial which had been set has unfortunately not taken place; the police failed to follow certain procedures. However, I will not name those people today, because I am better than them.

This is a particular hate that is different from some of the other hate that we see in politics, though all of it is unacceptable. Since I converted to Judaism, I have understood the peculiarly evil element behind antisemitism. I am disgusted by it, and I am ashamed that it is on both sides of politics at the moment—on the far left and the far right. Days such as Holocaust Memorial Day are vital to remind us all of the role we have to play in preventing its spread.

1.29 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who spoke with great passion, and shared with the House his personal experience of the modern manifestations of antisemitism.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on the way in which he opened the debate, the tone that he set for it, and the fact that so many Members on both sides of the House are gathered here today. That is also a great testament to the valuable work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

I think it important to reflect on what Holocaust Memorial Day actually is. Why do we commemorate it on 27 January? The answer is that it marks the date on which the Red Army liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945. That was the site where nearly a million people were murdered, but, as we know, it was just one of the many terrible death camps across Europe.

I reflect on my own family experience. On my mother's side alone, we know that more than 100 members of her family, aged between four and 83, were sent by the Nazis to their deaths in the gas chambers of not just Auschwitz but Treblinka, Sobibór, Mauthausen and Bergen-Belsen, for no other reason than that they were Jewish.

It is beyond our comprehension that humans are capable of inflicting such horrors on other humans. It questions the very nature of humanity, and leads us to the contemplation of evil. Yet we have continued to witness horrors in our own times, in Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia, and the House recently debated the plight of the Rohingya in Burma, driven from their homes, their villages in flames.

Humanity never seems to fully learn the lessons of history. That is why Holocaust Memorial Day is so vital and continuing holocaust education is so critical—so that we can do everything possible to ensure that it really does not ever happen again. It is why we celebrate the lives of survivors who are now in their 80s and 90s, such as Susan Pollack MBE, with whom I had the privilege to share a platform a few months ago at the Labour party conference in Liverpool. Susan was in Belsen when the British liberated it, and still visits schools to talk about her experiences. It is why we mourn the passing of so many holocaust survivors, particularly in the past year, such as Mireille Knoll, who lived through the occupation of Paris but was murdered this year at the age of 85 in a hate crime, and Gena Turgel, who survived four concentration camps. She tended to the dying Anne Frank in Belsen, and married a British soldier just six weeks after liberation. The testimony of every single survivor aids our understanding, adds to our history, and helps to educate the next generation.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way during such a moving and powerful speech. Like her, I was extremely moved by Ms Pollack's testimony, although that was at a Conservative party conference. Does she agree that the declining number of holocaust survivors is another reason why it is so important for their recorded testimony to have a central role in the new learning centre?

Luciana Berger: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention. I have seen the testimonies that are housed at Yad Vashem. That project, which is funded in part by Steven Spielberg, has done so much to capture the stories and the background. For every single person who perished, there is a whole history and a family who have been affected up to the modern day. It is critical for those testimonies to be at the centre of every holocaust memorial, however it may be presented—in particular, the new national memorial that we are due to have—in order to have an impact on the next generation.

It is important to recognise that the holocaust did not start with gas chambers. It started with ideas, with books, with newspapers, with films, with torchlight

processions, with speeches. It culminated in crematoria, but it began with words. It had its roots in the warped racial theories of the 1890s, and in conspiracy theories such as those in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The Nazis did not invent antisemitism, but they modernised it, made it the state religion, and turned an industrial state into a machine for killing every Jew in Europe.

We should ask how that happened. How was such a thing possible in a civilised European country? One answer lies in the compliance of the civilian population. In the past year we also lost the writer Primo Levi, who was in Auschwitz. He wrote:

“Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”

That is the aspect of the holocaust from which we need to learn the most: not the SS, who enjoyed the torture and killings, but the thousands of people in the civilian police, the railways and the civil service who never challenged what they knew to be happening, who never questioned the plans that they were helping to implement, who looked the other way. They saw those trains heading east, but they never wondered why no one ever came back, even for a day. At what point could it have been stopped? Surely the lesson for us today is that unless we challenge the words, it is much harder to challenge the deeds. We cannot be bystanders. We cannot walk by on the other side.

In the 1930s it was *Der Stürmer*, which ran from 1923 onwards with its unceasing antisemitism. It told its readers week after week that Jews spread disease, and the caption on every front page read “The Jews are our misfortune!”. Today it is social media, with all its manifestations of modern antisemitism: Jews secretly run the banks, organised 9/11, profit from wars, manipulate the media, and have loyalties to foreign powers.

When people deny the holocaust or claim that Jews exploit it, we cannot be bystanders. When people online draw up lists of Jews in the media, we cannot be bystanders. When people use the term “Zio” or “Rothschild” instead of “Jew” to cover their racism, we cannot be bystanders. Whether it is the neo-Nazis or those who think that they belong to the left, we must say no, and call it out as loudly as we can. Every single time, it must be challenged swiftly and without favour, no matter where it rears its very ugly head.

I will end with another quote from Primo Levi:

“It happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say. It can happen, and it can happen everywhere.”

1.36 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): No other episode in human history can match the holocaust for scale and depth of evil—an evil that sought to harness the technology of the modern world to deliver mass murder on an industrial scale, in an attempt to eliminate an entire ethnic group. The fact that it could have happened not in the distant past but in supposedly civilised 20th-century Europe still shocks me, and I still find it impossible to comprehend, so many years after I first learned the story of those terrible events. That so many people stood by when their Jewish friends and neighbours were torn from their homes and subjected to unspeakable cruelty is the most truly shocking part of that story.

[Theresa Villiers]

However, I think we should also remember those who did not look away when Jewish people and others were being attacked and rounded up by the Nazis: the people who stepped up and saved lives, even when that put their own life and those of their families in real danger. The example that I want us to remember today is Albania.

Following the German occupation, the Albanian population, in an extraordinary act of courage, refused to comply with Nazi orders to hand over a list of Jewish people living in their country. Albanian Government agencies provided many Jewish families with fake documentation to enable them to hide in the wider population. That remarkable assistance was grounded in Besa, a code whereby it was considered a matter of national honour to help Jewish people in their time of trouble. Sanctuary was offered not only to Albanian Jewish people, but to refugees from other countries. Albania, the only country in Europe with a Muslim majority, succeeded where others failed, and at the end of the war its Jewish population was larger than it had been at the start.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Theresa Villiers: No, I will not.

As well as producing stories of horror, brutality and pain, the events that we are considering today gave rise to the heroism of ordinary people in Albania, as well as people such as Frank Foley and Nicholas Winton, the voluntary groups and church groups who made the Kindertransport possible, and so many others who gave sanctuary and shelter to Jewish people fleeing Nazi atrocity.

Let me, like other Members, pay a heartfelt tribute to holocaust survivors in my constituency. There may be others, but those of whom I am aware include Hedi Argent, Harry Jacobi, Freddie Knoller and Mala Tribich. It is incredibly brave of survivors to be prepared to come forward and tell their stories—to relive those terrible years of suffering. We owe them so much for their role in explaining to successive generations the evil to which humanity can sink, and the importance of doing everything we can to make sure that this never, ever happens again. Like others, I thank the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Government for their financial support for holocaust education.

I have been campaigning against antisemitism for about 30 years. More or less the first day I set foot across the threshold of this building was to lobby my MP to highlight the plight of Jewish refuseniks in the Soviet Union, who were unable to practise their faith in freedom. I am sure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will remember the debate in April on antisemitism; it was one of the most moving debates I have ever been present for in this place. It was a chilling reminder that the menace of antisemitism is still with us. It is truly shocking that the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) has stated that the problem with antisemitism in Labour is now so severe that the party has passed the threshold for being deemed to be institutionally racist.

As colleagues have pointed out, this is a problem on many parts of the political spectrum, and it is completely unacceptable.

Antisemitism has mutated, taken on new forms, and gained a lethal new lease of life with social media. It has also been given new life by the militant anti-Zionism of the radical left, so today is a time for all of us to make a commitment once again to root out antisemitism wherever it emerges, and to say loud and clear that we will never, ever tolerate this vicious form of racism.

1.41 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate today in advance of Holocaust Memorial Day on Sunday. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for securing the debate, with others, and for his extremely moving opening speech.

The theme this year is Torn from Home, providing the chance to think about the impact that the holocaust and genocide has on those wrenched from the place they call home for fear of threat and persecution, and I wanted, in this year in which we are urged to be louder in the face of the rise in antisemitism, to use my contribution to pay tribute to my constituent Renate Collins. I am hugely privileged to have Renate as a constituent; she is an amazing woman who works tirelessly with groups and schools and at events to share her family's story to ensure that such things never happen again. I am very grateful to her for the work she does and would like to put her story on the record today.

Renate was one of the last children to be put on the Kindertransport which brought some 10,000 young Jewish children to Britain from Germany, Austria, the former Czechoslovakia, Poland and elsewhere. On 30 June 1939 her train was the last to leave Prague before the Nazi invasion. She was just five years old when her mother and family doctor put her on the train, her mother and father not knowing if they would see her again. Renate had a high temperature and chicken pox so her mother was reluctant to put her on the train, but the doctor said, "If you don't put Renate on this train, she will never go."

Renate, at just five and with her hair in pigtails, had no idea where she was going, thinking that she might have been going on holiday. Yet her two-day journey through Holland and London brought her to Porth and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). Here she lived with Reverend Fred Coppleston and his wife Arianwen and was brought up as their own. She arrived in Britain with her visa bearing a Third Reich stamp with swastika and spoke just two words of English: "yes" and "no."

Before going, her mother helped her write letters to the family she was travelling to. With the innocence only a child could have in such grave circumstances, she had written to the Welsh family:

"I hope there is no spinach in England. But I do hope there are many ice creams over there as I am terribly fond of it, and can be, throughout a whole day, the best girl in the world if I get plenty of it...I am thanking you for all you are going to do for me, and I will be a very good child to you."

In a letter Renate still has that her mother sent to the reverend and his wife she had written:

"I'm thanking you for your beautiful and helpful letter. I would call myself happy to know my little one in a surrounding of so much affection and love."

Tragically, both her mother and father were killed by the Nazis. In total, Renate lost 64 family members in the holocaust, Renate surviving because of the decisions her parents made 79 years ago. Over the last year Renate has discovered new information about the deaths of some of her closest relatives, coldly murdered in the open air by guards when their train to Treblinka was held up in bad weather.

I really wanted to get Renate's story on record today because it is so important that we remember the families, the homes and lives torn apart, the children who never saw their family again, and the dangers and devastating consequences of racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism.

Renate is an absolutely brilliant woman and she keeps going because, as she has always told me, this extreme hatred and intolerance can always "raise its ugly head again." The importance of Holocaust Memorial Day is that we learn these lessons and act to never see it repeated.

Alex Sobel: My hon. Friend is making a brilliant speech, and I would like to pay tribute to somebody who used to sit here on these Benches who has a similar story: Lord Dubs. He also came here on the Kindertransport, and this year's theme of Torn from Home is very apt, because he has done so much work for modern-day refugees and to bring modern-day children to this country. We should recognise his work and all he has done.

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. I also pay tribute to Renate and her family and to her continued commitment to educating and informing people about what she and millions of others went through within our lifetimes, as nothing can compare to the testimony of survivors.

1.45 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Today we rightly remember the victims of the holocaust. As many colleagues have said in several moving speeches, mourning is not enough to honour their memory. Holocaust Memorial Day should serve to re-energise our efforts to address mass atrocities whenever and wherever they occur, and to challenge us to do all we can to prevent future genocides from occurring.

Has the international community done enough in this regard in the last 70 years? Sadly, it has done nothing like enough. The UN convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide had its 70th anniversary on 9 December 2018. It is the first international document to define the crime of genocide and to impose obligations on states to prevent and punish it. The crime is defined as the crime above all crimes and as

"acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

But, tragically, the last 70 years have been an era of genocidal crimes: Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur in Sudan, Syria, Iraq and more recently Burma—and even today there are fears of this in Nigeria.

We should ask ourselves what has gone wrong when after each fresh atrocity we say, "Never again." Why have we not, both here in the UK and in the international

community, worked harder to implement an effective atrocity prevention strategy, rather than simply hoping that genocides will not cyclically reoccur?

Over recent years we have missed too many early signs of mass atrocities—too many red flags. These red flags are of the type that my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) talked about with regard to Rwanda—the encouraging of children in Rwanda to call those of another group "cockroaches." There were also red flags in Syria. In 2014 Daesh was committing mass atrocities in Syria and Iraq, but that was not the beginning; it is now clear that the persecution of Christians in Iraq probably began a decade earlier, and it was recorded in UNHCR documents. Similarly, the genocidal campaign in Burma against the Rohingya Muslims was the culmination of clear and consistent ethnic and religious persecution over many years before it began to be recognised in 2016.

The failure to recognise these red flags has meant we have consistently failed to call genocides by their name. Following the self-declared genocidal actions of Daesh in 2014 to 2017, UN convention signatories have failed still to declare it a genocide, have failed to collect court-worthy evidence of atrocities, and have failed to prosecute perpetrators. That is despite many Parliaments, including this House of Commons, recognising those events as a clear and obvious genocide. We voted by 278 votes to nil about two years ago to recognise that. Unfortunately, our Government have consistently relied on their long-standing policy of leaving the question of genocide determination for international judicial systems, but that is not good enough, because there is not an effective international judicial system to consider these situations.

I suggest that, in order to address that, we look again at the Genocide Determination Bill, which Lord Alton introduced in the Lords and which I have introduced in the Commons during this Session. It aims to give the power to the High Court to make a preliminary finding on cases of alleged genocide, and to enable the subsequent referral of such findings to the International Criminal Court or a special United Nations tribunal. Without such a mechanism, and in the continuing absence of Government referrals, I fear that we will continue to see no prosecutions for UK nationals committing genocide.

There are some signs of hope, however. The Foreign Secretary's recently announced independent review of the global persecution of Christians has been warmly welcomed, and Lord Alton's call for an ad hoc inquiry in the House of Lords into the fulfilment of the UK's obligations flowing from the UN convention is encouraging. Lastly, the UK-Iraqi UN Security Council resolution 2379 has provided a welcome, if overdue, beginning for evidence collection and the potential prosecution of Daesh crimes.

1.50 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on securing this debate. It is important that we mark this day so that we and future generations remember the atrocities that happened during the second world war and that have occurred in genocides since. I note that this year marks the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda and the 40th anniversary of the end of the

[Carolyn Harris]

genocide in Cambodia. I have always had an interest in the holocaust, having written my dissertation on the subject, and I am constantly shocked and saddened as I continue to read about the events that happened during that terrible time. I spent Christmas reading Primo Levi.

As many other hon. Members have shared, the theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is Torn from Home, exploring what it means to be taken from a place of safety and the trauma of the loss. It is important to reflect on the personal and emotive feelings that are generated when we try to imagine what it must be like no longer to have a place of safety or security to call home, and to live with the constant threat of violence and fear of the unknown. One of the most famous accounts of being torn from home during the holocaust is Anne Frank's diary, which shares her family's story of finding an alternative home. This is an extract from her diary, from 11 July 1942:

"I don't think I'll ever feel at home in this house, but that doesn't mean I hate it. It's more like being on holiday in some strange pension. Kind of an odd way to look at life in hiding, but that's how things are."

The diary abruptly ends on 1 August 1944, three days before her family were discovered in their secret annexe and torn from their place of safety. As Members will all be aware, Anne Frank was only a child and tragically lost her life at just 15 years old. In her diary, she describes how she felt as a child in hiding, saying:

"It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death."

I find it particularly difficult to comprehend the fate of children in the holocaust. Many Members will be aware that I have spent a lot of my time campaigning in Parliament for the rights of children, and when I read about the experiences of children in concentration camps, it truly breaks my heart. I understand that around 1.5 million children died in the holocaust—a number too great even to comprehend.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Like a number of Members, I visited the Auschwitz concentration camp many years ago. Most people who have done so will tell you that it is a horrendous thing to see and to remember. More importantly, does my hon. Friend agree that we should be keeping our eye on Europe at the moment, because the rise of the right shows that certain parts of Europe have not learned the lessons of the holocaust?

Carolyn Harris: I most certainly do agree with my hon. Friend. I would love to visit Auschwitz, but my own personal tragedy—my son would have been 38 today—has prevented me from doing so. I intend to rectify that, however, and I hope to go there this year.

Young children were particularly vulnerable and were often sent immediately to the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. One of the reasons for this was that, along with the elderly, children were unable to participate in forced labour in the camps. That was why so many lost their lives. As well as more than 1 million Jewish children being killed, tens of thousands of Romany children, German children with physical and mental disabilities living in institutions and Polish children lost their lives.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. I visited Auschwitz with the Holocaust Educational Trust in 2016, along with local students from my area, who were immeasurably moved by the experience. Does she agree that that is an incredibly powerful place to take schoolchildren if we are to teach future generations that we must all say, "Never again"?

Carolyn Harris: I most certainly do agree with my hon. Friend.

It has been estimated that only 6% to 11% of Europe's pre-war Jewish population of children survived, compared with 33% of the adults. Some of those who survived the holocaust have gone on to share their experiences of being a child in a concentration camp, and Gerda Weissmann Klein is one such survivor. She has described how she celebrated her birthday in the ghetto and how her mother had gifted her an orange on her birthday. Her mother got that orange by giving up a diamond and pearl ring in exchange for the piece of fruit. Every mother, and every parent, in this place will know that we are prepared to make any sacrifice for our children. That was the last birthday present Gerda ever received from her parents.

Gerda's experience was unfortunately shared by many survivors of the holocaust, who have gone on to tell the heartbreaking stories of their time in the concentration camps. We must never forget those stories. They must continue to be told so that we can learn the lessons for a safer future. Holocaust Memorial Day offers an opportunity for us all to take the time to stop and reflect on the dreadful acts that occurred all those years ago, and it is vital that we take these opportunities to listen to the stories and to individuals' experiences of being torn from home, so that we can work to make the future safer for all.

1.56 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), and indeed all the Members who have spoken so movingly today. The holocaust is a subject that is difficult to approach. It is tough to find the right words, but it is even more difficult knowing that this is not some distant event that is completely removed from how we conduct ourselves today. Even with the effects still so prevalent, antisemitism continues to raise its ugly head and is trying to infect the political mainstream once again.

For Holocaust Memorial Day this year, Parliament will play host next Monday to the production of "PUSH", a holocaust opera that was first performed in Chichester Cathedral to mark last year's Holocaust Memorial Day. The performance centres on the true story of Simon Gronowski, who, as the title suggests, was quite literally pushed from a moving train by his mother in Belgium in 1943. That train was destined for the Auschwitz concentration camp, and Simon was one of the 1,631 Jews selected for transportation to the gas chambers that day. It was only through the actions of three brave resistance fighters that the train transporting Simon was halted en route. That was the first and only time that a transportation train was stopped on its way to a concentration camp, and 223 people tried to escape the train, although only 108 were successful. They included Simon, thanks to

the courageous actions of his mother. Both she and Simon's sister, Ita, stayed on the train, and they died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

We will have the honour and privilege of welcoming Simon to the House when Howard Moody and his choir put on their production next Monday in Speaker's House. Members, peers and rabbis have been invited to come and watch the production, and it is particularly apt that the theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is Torn from Home. I would like to pay tribute to the Chichester marks Holocaust Memorial Day Committee, particularly Councillor Martyn Bell, the mayor, and Councillor Clare Apel, who have helped to put the production together.

Listening to Simon's story, and his interviews, we cannot help but be inspired by his faith in the goodness of humanity. In the years that followed the war, the collaborator who put him and his family on that train was racked with guilt. As he lay on his deathbed, he asked Simon for his forgiveness, and in an act of astonishing humanity, Simon forgave him. The holocaust has shown the darkest, cruelest aspects of the human character. I saw this for myself when I visited Yad Vashem. I was so moved by the actions of complete strangers who had risked their own lives to keep Jewish people safe from the Nazis and who are remembered there.

The mass graves of Auschwitz and the other concentration camps marked the end of a gradual process. The holocaust did not begin with the gas chambers; it started with the legitimisation of antisemitism in mainstream debate. It was instigated by making "different" wrong. The fact that Dr Joseph Goebbels and the other Nazis were able to spin lies and manipulate fact to legitimise their racist, tyrannical agenda should serve as a warning to us all today. The Nazis learned how to make the most of the new media capability of the day—the radio—and that is happening again. In so many ways, the advent of fake news on social media platforms today is a chilling echo of how a lie can be halfway around the world before the truth has its shoes on.

The holocaust began with hate speeches and radio broadcasts, but it then developed into legal discrimination against Jewish people through the so-called Nuremberg laws. Permission was given for violence to be visited on Jewish minorities across Europe. It was incentivised by the Nazis, who offered rewards for betraying Jews in hiding and then stole their property. It ended with the final solution: the gas chambers of the concentration camps.

We in the Chamber today have something that Jewish people and other minorities did not have during that period: a voice. We must use it and retell their stories to ensure that we call out antisemitism wherever we find it and to ensure that this tragedy never happens again. Simon's story shows us that we can be better as human beings, and that humanity, freedom, tolerance, forgiveness and respect are noble values that each one of us has a duty to uphold.

2.1 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak in this debate, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for securing it and my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for his opening speech. In Newcastle, we will mark Holocaust Memorial Day this year, as we did last year,

by honouring the memory of the victims of the holocaust and subsequent genocides, celebrating and listening to survivors, and remembering the acts of kindness, such as our city's welcoming of Jewish children from Germany.

We will also remember that much of the antisemitic hatred that preceded the holocaust was directed against poor Jewish immigrants from Russia, Poland and the other countries of eastern Europe and that that hatred was present not only in Germany, but in France and here in the United Kingdom. We must remember that at the core of so much of the hatred that prepared the ground for the holocaust was the idea that Jews were alien and could never truly be German, French or English. We must commit to fighting that invidious and corrupting lie wherever it raises its head.

Alex Sobel: On that point, I spoke in last year's Holocaust Memorial Day debate and the footage was put on Channel 4's Facebook page, where I was accused of all those things that my hon. Friend mentions. People said that I was a fifth columnist, that I was not fit to sit in the British Parliament and that I was not properly British. That is exactly what my hon. Friend is talking about, and we need to fight against it.

Chi Onwurah: I agree with my hon. Friend that such lies must be called out whenever they are heard.

As my Jewish constituents have made clear, the terror of the holocaust does not fade for our Jewish communities. Incidents that may seem marginal and inconsequential to some are experienced from the point of view of survivors and their children and grandchildren as harbingers of horrors too awful to think about. Fear echoes down the generations while many of us go about our business feeling safe and secure. Recent studies have revealed the degree to which the first antisemitic legislation passed by the Nazi party was modelled on the racist laws of the American south and of British colonies such as South Africa. Remembrance must mean eternal vigilance against the politics of hatred and dehumanisation and the recognition that they do not make their first appearance as mass murder, but as a climate of religious or racial intolerance and political expediency.

Nowhere is that recognition more important than in discussions about the middle east. Those of us who support the cause of Palestinian rights must recognise that we see antisemitic ideas surface time and again in debates over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There must be zero tolerance of antisemitism in such debates, just as there must be space for an honest appraisal of the actual issues and behaviours of those involved in the conflict.

There must be zero tolerance within the Labour party, too. I am sad to report that Jewish constituents have told me that they no longer feel welcome in our party. I have written to and met both our leader and our general secretary to discuss the matter, and I have also met representatives of Jewish groups in Newcastle and nationally. I have been assured that the party is developing policies and allocating appropriate resources that will provide demonstrable evidence that we are committed to rooting out antisemitism. Antisemitism cases will be heard more quickly and the backlog cleared, and anyone using antisemitic tropes must be called out and subject to appropriate sanction.

[*Chi Onwurah*]

However, we also need appropriate educational resources to help Members understand the history of antisemitism and antisemitic tropes, ensuring that we can express a wide range of views, particularly on Palestine and Israel, without implying any antisemitic views, either directly or indirectly. I have been assured that that will be developed and delivered soon.

In the party, in Newcastle and in the country, the holocaust must be remembered in words and in deeds.

2.6 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): On 27 April 1993, I stooped to pick up what I thought was a black rubber ball. I put it in my hand, looked at it and then dropped it in horror. I had picked up the blackened, burnt head of a baby. I was horrified and guilty. The day before, I found a whole family—a father, a mother, a boy and a girl—lying where they had been shot. From the way the bodies were arranged, it looked as though the little girl had been shot while holding her puppy. The same bullet had killed them both.

I was the British UN commander in Bosnia at the time, and my men were horrified. We took more than 104 bodies, mainly women and children, to a place called Vitez, where we dug a big pit in which to place the bodies. Someone said, “Take them out of the bags,” because we had put them into our body bags, which an infantry battalion always carries. “You cannot bury bodies in plastic,” we were told. One of my men said to me, “This is 1993, not 1943. This is genocide again.” And it was.

The Jewish genocide during the second world war, when two thirds of the Jews of Europe were destroyed by the Nazis, was appalling, but genocide’s shadow continues. We have heard about Cambodia, where between 10% and 30% of the population were murdered by Pol Pot. We have heard about Rwanda, where one million people were killed. We have heard about Bosnia, where 3% of the Muslim population was killed—most notably and horrifically when 8,373 men and boys were killed at Srebrenica in July 1995. Myanmar continues. So, too, does the genocide of the Yazidis in Syria and Iraq.

We still have this scourge in the world, and I believe that is what the Holocaust Educational Trust is all about. Goodness me, what is it that allows a man—it is normally men, not women—to do this? Sometimes it is the society they live in, sometimes it is custom, sometimes it is greed and sometimes it is because they are wearing a uniform. None of the massacres we have talked about today were carried out by civilians. Uniforms can encourage people to behave disgustingly.

I believe that the purpose of our debate today is to try to stop genocide happening again, and the way we can do that is by action. We sit in a cosy, warm Chamber, and we all say how disgusting genocide is and how appalling it is that it has happened. What can we do about it? Well, take it from me, there is only one way to stop genocide and that is to get in among the people who are doing it and stop it. Sometimes that requires us to be brave with our armed forces and with our police. Words work, but action to stop genocide requires men and women to go in there and run risks to stop murder, just like the individuals we have discussed today.

2.11 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is an absolute privilege to speak in this important debate and to have been among the cross-party Members who applied to the Backbench Business Committee to request parliamentary time to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. I particularly thank cross-party colleagues and the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), who led the application and who spoke so well. It is also a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who also spoke so well and so poignantly.

I am grateful for the excellent work of Karen Pollock and the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Danny Stone and the Antisemitism Policy Trust, and Danielle Bett who does such excellent work in Scotland via the Jewish Leadership Council.

Holocaust Memorial Day is the day we remember the millions of Jewish men, women and children murdered by the Nazis during world war two, the disabled people who were murdered and the many genocides since in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia. I declare an interest in that my husband served in Bosnia, which changed him by all that he saw and remembers to this day. It is also poignant for me as I have a Jewish family history, although I am a Christian.

The 2019 theme is Torn from Home as we mark the trauma of being wrested from one’s family, friends and all that is familiar and secure, and to feel that one belongs nowhere and that even one’s core identity is challenged. This is why I believe it is so important that we have an inclusive policy in this House and in the Scottish Parliament towards refugees, particularly lone children, the disabled and the most vulnerable in our society. I attended an event earlier this year on the Kindertransport and was overwhelmed when the whole hall stood up, as they owed their lives to that act of kindness. That is politics and policy at its very best.

It was also poignant to visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington last year with the Antisemitism Policy Trust. I will never forget taking the time to listen to the testimony of survivors now recorded for posterity. I will never forget seeing the pile of shoes left behind and the words on the wall:

“We are the shoes, we are the last witnesses.

We are shoes from grandchildren and grandfathers

From Prague, Paris and Amsterdam,

And because we are only made of fabric and leather

And not of blood and flesh,

Each one of us avoided the hellfire.”

Politics is important in this debate, and we must never ignore the fact that the holocaust occurred via politics. That is why we must never ignore antisemitism, because ignoring is condoning. Antisemitism may be on the fringes of today’s society and politics, but it continues to exist.

I had first-hand experience of antisemitism when I was “named and shamed” in 2015. I was put on an online list of Israel’s agents in British politics. The list described me and others as

“shameless British parliamentarians willing to sacrifice freedom of expression to please their paymasters. British politics must cleanse itself of this corrosive influence...Zionist corruption which has implanted its roots in pretty much every British Parliamentary party.”

Antisemitism was never an issue in the over 20 years that I worked as a doctor, but it has been since the year I was elected.

The presence of that list online caused me to be called to a local meeting in 2015, which I attended with my husband and children. The list was brought up on a computer screen, and I was challenged about it. Others were as surprised as I was that that had happened, but no concern was raised about the impact it might have on me, my security or that of my children. The only concern was that people thought and were saying that I was a Zionist and an agent of Israel.

As recently as last year, individuals tried to prevent me from marking world war two and attending a Remembrance Sunday service by calling a meeting at the same time and then pretending not to know it was Remembrance Sunday. I was the only local MP to be treated in such a way. Never did I think that I would be repeatedly excluded from local meetings or from speaking at scheduled events, but I do not mention those issues for myself, because I am thankful for the support of my party and its Westminster leader. These issues make me very concerned about the way ahead in UK politics. The message of the Holocaust Educational Trust is to “speak louder,” which can be difficult because antisemites want to silence victims. Those who speak out are frightened of then being targeted, but we must take courage and speak louder. We must support all those who come forward. Remembering means that we never turn away from, minimise, ignore or condone antisemitism.

2.17 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who made such a moving contribution.

Contemplating the systematic murder of 6 million people is beyond credibility, so the brilliant work of the Holocaust Educational Trust to highlight the testimony of survivors and the stories they have told is critical. I pay tribute to the fact that it educates 120,000 people every year about the awful horrors of the holocaust.

I pay tribute to holocaust survivors in my constituency, including Eve Glicksman, Henri Obstfeld and Herman Hirschberger, who all regularly go out to schools, despite being of advanced age, to bear testament to what happened during the holocaust.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) mentioned my late constituent Gena Turgel, who sadly died last year. I knew her as the best hostess in Stanmore, with the best apple strudel around, but her story epitomises what happened during the holocaust. She was born in Krakow, the youngest of nine children, and she was only 16 when the Nazis started their blitzkrieg on Poland. She had relatives in America, and the whole family intended to go there, but sadly the Nazis had closed all the doors before the family could get out, so the family moved just outside Krakow to the ghetto, carrying a sack of potatoes, flour and their other belongings.

The second brother fled the ghetto and was never seen again. Gena Turgel was eventually sent to the Plaszow labour camp on the edge of Krakow. She later discovered that her sister Miriam and Miriam's husband—they had married in the ghetto—had been shot after the Nazis caught them trying to bring food into the camp.

The camp was liquidated in the winter of 1944, and Gena and her family had to walk—they did not travel by train—to Auschwitz-Birkenau. They were sent on a death march from Auschwitz, leaving behind her youngest sister. They never saw her again. After several terrible days, they came to Leslau, where they were forced onto trucks. They travelled under terrible conditions for the next three or four weeks, eventually arriving in Buchenwald. From there they were sent on cattle trucks to Bergen-Belsen, where they arrived in February 1945. Gena worked there in a hospital for the next two months. In 1945, the British Army liberated Bergen-Belsen. Among the liberators was Norman Turgel, who became her husband six months later. Gena and her husband moved to the United Kingdom, which she made her home and where she brought up her family—her children and grandchildren. She wrote a book called “I Light a Candle”. Her light has gone out, but it will survive for ever.

I am very pleased that the Lessons from Auschwitz project involved Park High School, Canons High School and Bentley Wood High School in 2018. No one who attended the Holocaust Educational Trust reception recently could have failed to be moved by the testimony of the survivors.

I want to end by saying that I think there is real hope. Yasmin Mohamed, a student at Canons High School and a Holocaust Educational Trust ambassador, commented after the reception that she had

“seen first-hand where antisemitism, intolerance and hatred has led in the past and I'm now committed to ensuring that the Holocaust is never forgotten. I want to ensure that we learn from the past so that we can build a better future.”

I am pleased that we will soon witness the Holocaust memorial centre close to Parliament so that we can educate young people and have a memorial to the victims of this terrible disaster. The planning application was submitted in December 2018 and the site, as we well know, is Victoria Tower Gardens. I am pleased to be the co-chair, together with my friend the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), of the all-party group that is going to see that come to fruition.

2.22 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) said in his terribly moving speech, this year's theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is Torn from Home. As we all know, homes are much more than physical dwellings; they are everything that sustains us. They are our comfort, our security, our family, our friends, our community and our faith. They are the structure that helps us to live rich and meaningful human lives. Home is part of our identity; it is who we are. That is why being torn from home is so utterly traumatic.

Through the 1930s, everything that makes a place a home was stripped away from Jewish people, in Germany and then throughout Europe. It was a gradual, harrowing experience. In '33, the Nazi Government began the creeping exclusion of Jewish people from public life. Jewish people were no longer protected by the police or courts, and kosher meat was banned. In '34, Jews were barred from military service, banned from becoming doctors or lawyers and even prevented from being accountants and actors. In '35, the infamous Nuremberg laws defined Jewish Germans as non-citizens, depriving

[Lyn Brown]

them of their rights to vote and stand for public office, and legally condemning relationships between Jewish Germans and their non-Jewish neighbours.

Jewish Germans witnessed the destruction of their home with horror. One of them was John Fink, from Berlin. He said:

"The Nazis knew how to torture us...Every few weeks...other laws came. We had... to move...to a so-called 'Jewish House' which the Nazis controlled."

What a terrible demonstration of the difference between a house and a home. The marked-out houses and ghettos were a permanent reminder that John, his family and so many others were now homeless.

The trauma of being torn from home is powerfully illustrated by the story of the *St Louis*, which sailed on 13 May '39, carrying 937 passengers towards Cuba. Almost all were Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. They had paid the Cuban authorities for their landing cards, but they were turned away on arrival at Havana. The ship anchored there for a week, and then crawled north past Florida. The passengers came close enough to see the lights, but the USA refused them.

Liane Reif-Lehrer, who was only a child at the time, said to a journalist some 50 years later:

"I think it's...a symbol of what happened. The German government...were trying to show the world that nobody...wanted us".

And did they not succeed? The Jews were not just made homeless in Germany; they were portrayed as universally homeless—abandoned by everyone and a threat to the homes of all. Being put in that position must have been terrifying. The passengers on board the *St Louis* knew what they were going back to in Germany. They knew what it would mean to return, even if they did not yet know the sickening scale of the holocaust.

One passenger, Max Loewe, had already been to a concentration camp, and the trauma had completely damaged his mind. He must have felt as though nobody in this world would help him, and the Nazi threat—the terror he had experienced at first hand—was growing all the time. As the boat lingered near Havana, Max became increasingly terrified, believing that there were SS officers on board searching for him. He cut his wrists and jumped overboard into the water where, in full view of all the other passengers, he writhed and screamed. He ended up in a Cuban hospital, but his wife and daughter were not even allowed to leave the ship. I cannot imagine what state he must have been in. He must have felt as though, with no help coming, the only escape for him would be death.

In the wake of America's refusal to provide refuge, Britain was one of the four states who agreed to take some of the passengers in, and 288 of them, including Max, came here. However, there was a further tragedy. Of the 620 passengers who went on from here to Belgium, France and the Netherlands, 254 were murdered in the holocaust after those countries were invaded.

When we look at people who are seeking refuge in the United Kingdom today, I hope we will pause and remember. I hope that we will recommit ourselves to helping those who are fleeing in terror, torn from their homes and wanting to build a new home here. I hope we will act on the message "Never again".

2.27 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I have been deeply moved by all the speeches in this debate, but I particularly thank the hon. Members for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann), and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), for their outstanding contributions. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who brought back to me vivid memories of a visit to Yad Vashem.

I will dwell for a moment, if I may, on the spirit of remembrance. Richard Dumbleby filed a report after he had been in the concentration camp at Belsen. For several days, the BBC refused to broadcast it because of the horror of its content; only after he threatened to resign did it broadcast it. I would like to include some of it in my remarks, lest we forget.

Richard Dumbleby began his report with what he called

"the simple, horrible facts of Belsen",

and he went on:

"But horrible as they are, they can convey little or nothing in themselves. I wish with all my heart that everyone fighting in this war, and above all those whose duty it is to direct the war from Britain and America, could have come with me through the barbed-wire fence that leads to the inner compound of the camp...I picked my way over corpse after corpse in the gloom, until I heard one voice raised above the gentle undulating moaning. I found a girl, she was a living skeleton, impossible to gauge her age for she had practically no hair left, and her face was only a yellow parchment sheet with two holes in it for eyes. She was stretching out her stick of an arm and gasping something, it was 'English, English, medicine, medicine,' and she was trying to cry but she hadn't enough strength. And beyond her down the passage and in the hut there were the convulsive movements of dying people too weak to raise themselves from the floor.

In the shade of some trees lay a great collection of bodies. I walked about them trying to count, there were perhaps 150 of them flung down on each other, all naked, all so thin that their yellow skin glistened like stretched rubber on their bones. Some of the poor starved creatures whose bodies were there looked so utterly unreal and inhuman that I could have imagined that they never lived at all."

Dumbleby said:

"This day in Belsen was the most horrible of my life."

The Nazis classified people according to their perverse ideology of hatred, separating those they deemed sub-human and then cruelly murdering them. Continuing hostility, hatred, threat and violence against Jewish people has no place in this country or any other. Those who aid and abet the perpetrators of this persecution should be ashamed, and exposed for their cowardice. Those who deny or downplay the evil of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau are purveyors of a wicked lie.

What have we learned from this desolation? If we had learned anything, would we have seen the genocides of Darfur, Bosnia or Rwanda? Would we have done more to confront Myanmar over the treatment of the Rohingyas? The sobering truth is that genocide is still happening in our time.

We must each take responsibility for how we relate to our fellow human beings. We must remember our common brotherhood and sisterhood. We see the seeds of the thinking that led to the Nazis in all the places of the world where people are persecuted because of their faith or belief, their ethnicity, their sexuality or their convictions.

We are all our brothers' and sisters' keepers. It is one of the first lessons of scripture, and it is what defines our humanity, our need to exercise compassion for one another, and our responsibility to one another.

In my Christian faith, we are invited to practise love, one to another, and to treat other people the way we would want to be treated. Those behaviours begin with what we are thinking and feeling, and we are accountable for our attitudes and behaviours. When we spread deliberate lies, when we abuse other people, when we hate other people because they are different or see the world differently from us, and when we give expression to that hate, we are descending to an infernal pit of self-loathing and self-destruction.

Loving our neighbours as we love ourselves, respecting every human being without prejudice, and upholding the universal human right of individual agency—these are the values that elevate our common humanity. We must always remember what happens when we do not listen to what Abraham Lincoln described as “the better angels of our nature.”

We must individually live out our commitment and prayer of never again.

2.32 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What a privilege it is to have heard the speeches we have all listened to.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I wonder whether I might crave your indulgence and that of the Chamber and share an anecdote—a memory. Thirty-two years ago I was, believe it or not—it was a long time ago—the youngest councillor in Ross and Cromarty in the highlands. In those days, the link between the arts and local government was not particularly there to be seen, but we had a very forward-looking chief executive called Douglas Sinclair, who is sadly no longer with us. He really did catapult Ross and Cromarty into having a really enlightened arts policy. He was a great supporter of the Labour party. I put that on the record with some pleasure, because a man like that deserves to be remembered in *Hansard*.

Mr Douglas Sinclair got Julian Lloyd Webber to come and play in my hometown of Tain. He got in place a writer in residence and a poet in residence, and the arts flourished in the far north of Scotland. I particularly remember one cold winter's night, when we were bidden through to a concert in the town hall in Dingwall, the county town of Ross and Cromarty. When we sat down, the first thing I noticed was that there were two Mozart piano concertos on the programme, but for some reason the old upright piano in the town hall had not been exchanged for a rather more splendid grand. The upright piano had probably only ever had “Chopsticks” played on it for the previous 20 years. Nevertheless, in came the orchestra. If my memory serves me rightly, they were called the International Orchestra of New York, and they played with considerable verve. The poor old upright piano did not know what had hit it: moths came out of the top and we thought the sides were going to fall off. They dropped the odd note and the odd chord was wrong, but by gosh they put their hearts into it.

At the interval—it is not the way in the highlands to have posh glasses of champagne as they do in London or these splendid places down here; in the highlands we have egg sandwiches, shortbread and tea—the whole

audience mixed with the orchestra. Within minutes of my talking to the orchestra—you can guess what is coming, Mr Deputy Speaker—it became apparent that they were survivors of the camps. They told me that they had played for their lives in the camps, and now they were playing for us as a celebration of life. One of them rolled up his sleeve—he was wearing white tie—and showed me his tattoo. In those short minutes over our eats and our tea, we were all moved by these people being with us, and having come to the north of Scotland.

When we sat down again for the second piano concerto, which I remember very well was Mozart's 23rd, we hung on every note. Every mistake—they were rather elderly—was ignored. We cheered them to the rafters when they sat down at the end of the last movement and we encored them furiously. Somehow, our enthusiasm caught on with them and they responded. That piano has never since recovered.

That is my anecdote. In just one event in my life, the very people who had survived were there, and that brought home to me, more than anything else probably could have done, what the holocaust was. Those good people are probably no longer with us, because it was a long time ago and they were elderly then, but that is my memory, and it serves me strongly when it comes to remembering, as we shall do, the horrors of the holocaust, and never forgetting. I tell you this, Mr Deputy Speaker: I cannot listen to Mozart's beautiful 23rd piano concerto without remembering those good, noble and brave people.

2.36 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It really is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). I, too, shall speak to the House about one of my experiences.

On Sunday, I attended the funeral service at Bushey new cemetery. It was significant because it was the first and only interment of victims of the Holocaust ever to take place in the United Kingdom. It is remarkable that such a ceremony should take place more than 70 years after the death camps were discovered. The remains were originally given to the Imperial War Museum many years ago. They were acknowledged by a pathologist to be the remains of six people—five adults and one child—and because they were never going to be put on display, it was decided that they should be buried. That was certainly the appropriate decision.

I pay tribute to the Imperial War Museum for its efforts in seeking a resting place for these people. Such decisions are really outside most curators' experience, but having established that the remains did come from Jewish people at Auschwitz-Birkenau, they took action. The museum contacted the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, and they collaborated and decided that the remains should be interred at the cemetery at Bushey.

As with any funeral, I was not actually invited, but I decided to attend because I have several Holocaust survivors in my constituency—and, indeed, the Holocaust Survivors Centre. Not knowing how many people would turn up, I arrived in plenty of time, and as I travelled along the road, I realised that it was quite an important event. Unknown to me, in attendance were the Archbishop of Westminster, Israel's ambassador, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government,

[*Dr Matthew Offord*]

Baron Pickles, and Lord-Lieutenant Robert Voss as a representative of the Queen. In addition, I saw many hundreds of my constituents. I understand that more than 1,200 people attended.

The address given by the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis—who happens to be my constituent—moved many people to tears. I watched as several men carefully wiped their eyes when the Chief Rabbi spoke personally to the infant among the six. He said:

“Your childhood was robbed. You experienced such fear and dread, then the ultimate wickedness saw your life taken. We don’t know who you are, your name, if you were male or female or the details of your family. But we do know you were Jewish. All of us here feel a strong connection to you.”

One of my constituents, about whom I have spoken in previous debates, made an impact on me again on that day. I often visit her to eat her home-made cake, and I like to ensure that she is doing okay. I was proud when I saw her at the service on Sunday and witnessed her and other Holocaust survivors accompanying the coffin to the grave. Zigi Shipper, Harry Bibring, Renee Salt and Agnes Grunwald-Spier all placed their hands on the coffin’s blue velvet covering as they walked to where the remains were to be buried in earth brought over from Israel.

As prayers were said and the coffin lowered, people were invited to come forward to place earth in the grave. With such a large crowd, it did not take long for the space to be filled. What struck me as I stood by the graveside was the number of people who held pictures and artefacts of relatives whom I presume were victims of the Holocaust. For them, the funeral was very real, and it cannot be said definitively whether or not the grave contained one of their relatives. We will never know. In so many ways, these six people represent the millions who do not have a last resting place, and whose families, friends and relatives cannot mourn them because they do not know what happened to them.

As I turned away, someone indicated a small bag of earth and that I should place it on the grave, which I did. We undertake many activities as Members of Parliament, but this event was something completely different, and something I will not forget. At the Barnet Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony, we have heard from many speakers over the years, talking about atrocities in Rwanda, Cambodia and other countries, in addition to many local people whose lives have been directly or indirectly affected by the Holocaust. For me, the event has become more personal, particularly this year, as I have had direct contact not just with the survivors, but now with the dead.

2.40 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): No words—certainly none that I have—can describe adequately the horror of the Holocaust, the attempt to wipe out the Jewish population of Europe, the killing of Roma, gay people, trade unionists and many other victims of Nazi ideology. As this debate has shown over the last couple of hours, what brings it home are the human stories showing how real it was on an individual level. A life is a life.

Like many Members of this House on all sides, tomorrow I will take part in commemoration events for Holocaust Memorial Day, one in Wolverhampton and

one in Dudley. I pay tribute not only to the wonderful and moving opening speech today but to the tremendous work over a longer period of my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin). Year after year, he has organised a very moving and well-attended event in his constituency aimed at teaching today’s young generation about the horrors of the past. He has spoken up bravely against antisemitism and alongside a number of my hon. Friends has stood up for the best of what my party should stand for at a time when sadly that has not always been easy.

I also pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. These organisations do amazing work. The latter records the testimony of those who survived, arranges speakers in schools and enables pupils to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau in what is a life-changing experience for them. I am pleased to say that schools in my constituency—Colton Hills, Moseley Park, the Ormiston SWB Academy and the Royal Wolverhampton School—have all taken part in the past year. These events are valuable and important. They not only benefit those who take part directly but allow students to share the experience with others. Most of all, they show to a new generation the terrible and appalling consequences of where race hatred and the demonisation of those who are different can lead. I am pleased that support for the Holocaust Educational Trust is bipartisan and has survived several changes of Government. Long may that continue.

This is also a moment to reflect on our own politics. It is estimated that 70,000 refugees came to the UK from the rest of Europe in the years running up to the war, including children saved through the Kindertransport programme. Yes, the UK could have done more during the war, but surely today we have to ask questions about our own debate on refugees. It has become too easy to talk about refugees in a way that strips them of their humanity and ascribes to them some darker, ulterior motive, and it has become too easy to say they should go anywhere but here. No one has done more to emphasise the common humanity of refugees than our colleague Lord Alf Dubs, himself a child of the Kindertransport. He is an inspiration and has provided through his life and work and campaigning a timely reminder that every life matters and that we are all diminished if we look the other way.

This is also a moment to stand strong against the politics of hate, which seeks to demonise any group or community on the basis of race, faith or both. The antisemitic abuse that is routinely posted online, including to Members of this House, is not only unacceptable in itself but a warning of what happens when people ascribe great virtue to themselves and those who agree with them but show a closed and hostile mind to others, when people have a hierarchy of victimhood, where some are allowed to be victims but others are not. These are the permission slips for cruelty that have so scarred our politics and allowed hatred to grow. As we mark Holocaust Memorial Day, let us remember the common value of humanity. A life is a life, no matter a person’s colour, background, wealth or whatever else, and each life must be valued. That is the lesson of the events we mark this weekend.

2.45 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The opening speech by the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) in this important debate was powerful, moving and

appropriate. He is not only a colleague in this place but a friend, and he really did set the tone for all the speeches that followed. This has been an important and beneficial debate, as I hope will be recognised by people outside viewing it.

I, too, believe that it is fitting that the UK have a national memorial here in the Borough of Westminster, and I hope it comes to fruition soon. I have had the privilege of visiting the national Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. This moving and poignant memorial gives immense hope in reminding us of the strength of character amidst the hellish loss that people suffered. I hope that our national memorial will be similarly powerful.

As we have heard, the Holocaust is to be commemorated all over the UK. I am pleased that this evening in Belfast's city hall politicians and community leaders from Northern Ireland will come together to mark this moment. Northern Ireland is an exceptional community with a very strong connection to the Jewish community. To name just one, Chaim Herzog, the sixth President of Israel, was born in Belfast to the Chief Rabbi of Ireland. As many will know who follow Israeli politics, he played an amazing role. His son, who now works for the Jewish Agency for Israel, was a political leader in his own right, and recently his entire family came to Belfast and celebrated Chaim's contribution to the state of Israel and his connection to our city. It was hugely inspiring. We love to see that connection brought alive.

In last year's debate, I suggested that No. 10 honour the Holocaust Educational Trust's young ambassadors by inviting them to a reception at No. 10. The Minister responded very positively on the day, and I am delighted this week to have received a letter from the Prime Minister that reads:

"A reception is absolutely one option we are considering, but we are also looking at other ways in which we can support the work in the coming months".

Those young people will be inspired and encouraged by the fact that their work is marked by the Prime Minister of our nation. Those young ambassadors do an amazing job, and I encourage the Holocaust Educational Trust, led unwaveringly by Ms Pollock, to continue with the work that it is doing.

Northern Ireland was the last part of the kingdom to benefit from the Holocaust Educational Trust work, not because there was any lack on our part, but, sad to say, because of political disagreement. I am delighted that that was righted in 2016 when the two Government Departments came together, led by Ministers from my own party, and put in place the funding to allow for the trust's "Lessons learned" programme to be extended to Northern Ireland. It is sad that some misguided people think that that is some sort of front for something else and do not recognise how significantly important it is to put that programme in place for our young people.

I am delighted that the Government are extending that programme to our universities. I note once again on the letter that I received from the Prime Minister that a further £6 million of continued funding will go into the "Lessons from Auschwitz" programme, which will be extended to university students. I would love it to be extended to Queen's University and the University of Ulster. The first time that many young people in Northern Ireland come together in our divided community is, sad to say, when they get to university. I hope that the

programme will be extended there to encourage our young people at university. We need that programme; I am encouraged by it and I welcome this debate.

2.50 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is my pleasure to take part in this very important debate and to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for his very eloquent and moving introduction.

As we have heard, the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day this year is Torn from Home. I want to talk about this in the context of the genocide in Rwanda, which took place in 1994.

Last year, it was my privilege to lead a parliamentary delegation on a visit to Rwanda facilitated by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We were privileged to visit the Kigali Genocide Memorial and museum, which is run by the Aegis Trust, a British organisation based in Newark, which has worked with the Rwandans in creating a permanent memorial to the 1 million Hutus who lost their lives in the 100 days of genocide following decades of tension between Hutus and Tutsis.

The tension came to a head when the President's plane was shot down and extremist Hutu leaders blamed the Tutsis for killing the President, which led to genocide on a colossal scale, with Hutu civilians being told that it was their duty to wipe out the Tutsis. The state provided support for the massacres, which were carried out by civilian death squads, with local officials assisting in rounding up victims and making places available for slaughter. Even churches and places of worship were used—nothing was sacrosanct. Neighbour turned on neighbour, friend on friend, and relative on relative.

One of the most moving and disturbing parts of the memorial museum for me were the stories told of the children who were killed in the massacre. There were small children, babies and toddlers. Their short lives were chronicled: their likes, their dislikes and their favourite activities. Following this simple account of the normal things that children like to do and are preoccupied with came the violent manner of their death—attacked by machetes and clubs and thrown against walls. I defy anyone to visit that museum and not to come out thinking in a different way; it is one of the most shocking and humbling experiences that I have ever had.

It seems impossible to think that, out of this madness and inhumanity, anything good would ever come out of that country again, but, miraculously, Rwanda is in the process of rebuilding itself as a vibrant and rapidly developing place, which pays due respect to its traumatic past, and, most importantly, learns the lessons from it.

On our visit, we were immensely privileged to visit the Bugesera district. We were made welcome at the Village of Unity and Reconciliation where both survivors and perpetrators of the genocide live together, working together for peace and reconciliation. We heard incredibly moving personal testimonies from the villagers, which included a great deal of forgiveness and understanding and even marriages taking place between perpetrators and survivors. The villagers explained to us that survivors and perpetrators, finding themselves homeless, simply got together and started making bricks. With the help of a faith-based organisation, Prison Fellowship Rwanda, those bricks were used to build the houses, and the Village of Unity and Reconciliation was born.

[Liz McInnes]

One perpetrator explained how he had been poisoned by the venomous propaganda of the genocidal regime, which had convinced him that his Tutsi neighbours were his No. 1 enemy and did not deserve a place in the world. He said that the thought of having to go back to his village once he had served his sentence and live side by side with people whose loved ones he had killed was almost unbearable. Yet he was pardoned by the survivors and now lives in harmony alongside them, with his son marrying the daughter of the family whom he had killed in what he described as an astounding sign of our reconciliation.

Although those people were torn from their homes by the genocide and had loved ones and friends torn from their lives, it was amazing to see them rebuilding their lives together and finding their home again. For me, it was all summed up by one villager who said that they saw themselves no longer as Hutus and Tutsis, but just as Rwandans. Rwanda shows that, out of the madness of genocide and man's inhumanity to man, people can come together, can forgive but never forget, and can work together as neighbours to ensure that these shocking and dreadful events are never allowed to happen again. As Nelson Mandela said:

"It always seems impossible until it's done."

2.55 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), who made a powerful speech reflecting on her experiences in Rwanda. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) intends to speak about that later.

I have found being a Member of this place quite difficult over the past few weeks and months, given how incredibly divided we are and the volatile atmosphere, so it has been a refreshing change to see such consensus across the Chamber today, albeit for a debate on a very sad subject. If we conducted all our debates in such an atmosphere, we would probably be in a position that was a hell of a lot better. I particularly appreciated the thought-provoking speech made by the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr). It is certainly something I will consider next Monday, when we return for what I expect will be another volatile week.

I think that we all agree that on this, the 74th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration and death camps, it is more important than ever, particularly given the dwindling number of holocaust survivors, to take this opportunity to reflect not only on that awful atrocity, but on other genocides. That is why it is so important to place on the record our thanks to the Holocaust Educational Trust for its work in all our constituencies. In Scotland, over 3,000 pupils and teachers have had the opportunity to benefit from the "Lessons from Auschwitz" project, and I know that a number of Members have had an opportunity to take part in that. Many years ago, when I was a researcher in this place, John Mason, one of my predecessors, visited Auschwitz, and I remember that we could tell how incredibly moved he had been. I think that anybody who has been to Auschwitz has had that experience.

I also want to stand up today and make sure that the Jewish community in Scotland know how safe they should feel in our country. There is no doubt that in this country the Jewish community have had to endure

some utterly despicable behaviour, and hon. Members have placed some of that on the record today. A number of years ago I had the great fortune to attend the Garnethill synagogue in Glasgow, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss)—she and I both attended—and to look at some of the Jewish archives. It comes back to education, because it was only then that I began to learn about one of my predecessors, Myer Galpern, who was the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston from 1959 to 1979. In fact, he was a Deputy Speaker of the House from 1975 to 1979. Myer Galpern was not only the first Jewish Lord Provost of Glasgow, but the first Jewish provost in Scotland. I think that it is really important that I, as one of the youngest Members of the House, put that on the record today, to make sure that we never forget the contribution of the Jewish community, not just then but now, and that we embrace them and show them how much a part of our community they are.

I want, in my capacity as a member of the all-party parliamentary group on British Jews, to make some reference to current events, particularly in Hungary. I do not believe that the UK Government have done enough to confront the Hungarian Government about their state-sponsored antisemitism, as seen in the campaign against George Soros, for example. I also make a plea to the Minister to see that the UK Government do more to encourage other countries to promote the just and speedy restitution of property that was seized by the Nazis during the holocaust, much of which has still not been returned to the families of the original owners, despite promises to do so across Europe. I would be grateful if Her Majesty's Government, through diplomatic channels, could convince other Governments to take action on that.

Let me say again what an honour it has been to be part of a debate where we treat each other with respect. Parliament is all the richer for that today. I am not normally a fan of this place, but Parliament can be very proud of how it has conducted itself today, and I think that sets a good example to our constituents.

2.59 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I really wish beyond words that we did not have to have this debate today, but we do, because the holocaust happened—there are some who dispute that, but it did happen—and because of the heroic efforts of holocaust survivors, who, every time they give their testimony, are choosing to relive the horrors of their past to try to protect us from reliving those horrors in future. Despite all that, we are failing to see the same warning signs as those that were there in Germany in 1932 and 1933. We are failing to see them here today in these islands. They are sometimes on display in this Parliament, and all too often in parts of our society that no democratically credible politician should ever associate themselves with, but all too often we do because we think there might be some political advantage to ourselves from it.

The hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), in a deeply moving speech, referred briefly to the contribution that holocaust survivor Eva Clarke made to the event in Parliament earlier this week. One of his colleagues referred to a tiny spark of light in the darkness. Sparks of light in the darkness do not get much tinier than Eva, because she weighed just over three pounds when she was born. She is possibly the youngest of all holocaust survivors, because she was born after some of the

camps had been liberated. She was born on the cart that was taking her pregnant mum from the train to the death camp at Mauthausen on 29 April 1945. The reason that date was so significant was because if it had been 28 April, Eva and her mum would have been put into the gas chambers and killed, but on 28 April the gas chambers stopped their evil work because they had run out of gas. Twenty-four hours difference in the arrival time of a train meant literally all the difference in the world to Eva, and it means that we still have the benefit of Eva's testimony—and her mum's testimony, until she died a few years ago. Such testimony reminds us not only of the horrors of what happened but the immense power of good—of love—that was demonstrated all the way through. We have heard mention of some of the families who sheltered Jewish families, at enormous risk to themselves, for months and sometimes even years, taking complete strangers into their homes and hiding them in order to try to protect them from the evil that was about to be done to them.

As everyone else has done, I say thank you to Eva and to all the other survivors, who do not need to put themselves through this. They could just go away and live a quiet life, and try to come to terms privately with what they had experienced in their younger years. They choose to put themselves through it to try to give us the warning, again and again and again, of what happens when hatred becomes normalised—when it becomes normalised to spit at a child on their way to school just because he or she is Jewish, normalised to react to news of a killing by wondering which side of a divide the killers were on and which side the victim was on before we decide how we are going to react, or normalised for Christians to hound their fellow Christians out of their homes because they are the “wrong kind” of Christians. Within my lifetime, in parts of these islands, that has happened to Christians on both sides of the divide. When it becomes normalised for people to say that it is horrific that some of the families trying to cross the border from Mexico into America are carrying prayer mats—when the carrying of a prayer mat is a sign that somebody becomes a threat—we should all be concerned. That blatantly racist, Islamophobic attitude has not only become normalised—it got elected, because that was said in a tweet from the President of the United States of America.

A lot of this hatred comes not just from social media but from the front pages of newspapers that I do not need to name. I make a plea to all Members here and ask the Front Benchers on both sides of the House to relay this message back to their colleagues as well. When those same newspapers ask for an interview, when they offer 150 quid for an article, or when they invite us to celebration parties for their editors' achievements, we need to think about how we respond, because if we support, in any way whatsoever, the purveyors of hatred—whether it is antisemitism, Islamophobia or any other form of hatred—our words, “Never again”, will only be words, and hollow words at that. The 6 million murdered Jews of Europe and the millions of other murdered citizens of Europe deserve much, much more than hollow words.

3.4 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I thank the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for introducing it and all the Members who have spoken.

I am proud to be a friend of Israel. I am proud to remember the Balfour declaration and the role that the British played, along with their allies, in returning some of Israel to her people after the second world war. In 1920, Britain assumed responsibility for Palestine under a League of Nations mandate. During the next two decades, more than 100,000 Jews entered their home country. I am proud of the part that this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—always better together—played in ensuring that the Jewish people could return to their homelands.

I declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. The motivation for many of us to speak in this debate is our own faith and how we feel when we see wrongs that have to be righted and wrongs that have to be spoken about. This debate is one of those occasions.

We now have a part to play to secure the history of the Jewish people once again. In a world that seeks to whitewash and even begin to refute the evidence of a holocaust, it is more important than ever that we in this country take a stand about the true history of the Jews during the second world war.

I read an article by a writer who happened to be born into the Jewish faith regarding holocaust denial. He outlined how a friend's 88-year-old Jewish grandfather travels the length and breadth of the country to talk in schools of his experience of the camps. Many Members have referred to similar people they have met. He ensures that the children he reaches have heard with their own ears the tales of the horror that happened when people refused to question evil and inhumanity. That gentleman is a hero, but he is one of the few survivors, and with them go the first-hand experiences.

Those stories need to be told. My fear is that when we lose the first-hand experiences, it becomes simply numbers on a page, and now it becomes a number that umpteen people on Facebook deny, without measures being taken by the administration. I was brought up to learn in history classes of Bloody Mary's reign and her choice to kill by burning at the stake 300 Protestants. It is all very well to look at the historical context, but we must never lose compassion or thought for any of the families who lost loved ones in this horrific manner. The definition of compassion is feeling someone else's pain in our heart. Every one of us here has felt others' pain in our heart, and that is what we have tried to express.

Will the slaughter of 6 million human beings become a fact in a history lesson, or will it be a lesson that every generation learns regarding mankind's ability to be completely and utterly full of evil and madness? We must not allow the massacre of Jews during the holocaust to become something in movies and history classes; it must be a living, breathing lesson embraced by every generation. We must ensure that the names of those who were murdered are spoken and that children are afforded the opportunity to visit Auschwitz, to see the wedding bands and shoes that reach beyond the grave. We must ensure that schools retain in-depth teaching of this terrible period of history and do not simply pay lip service to it.

We must ensure that we live in a United Kingdom where our British Jewish citizens feel able and happy to recount the stories handed down through generations. We must ensure that the representatives in this Parliament play their part and stamp out the antisemitism and

[Jim Shannon]

misinformation that is not dissimilar to the propaganda that Goebbels was so proud of. We have a role to play in protecting not simply the history of the holocaust but its legacy: the promise from a horrified world that we will never let this take place again.

In my final minute, I want to mention the part that Strangford played, long before it was the constituency it is today. The Kindertransport children were transported from Germany to England and then on to other parts of the United Kingdom. Some of those children came to McGill's farm in Millisle in my constituency. The farm and some of the buildings that the children were housed in are still there. Some of those people stayed and married, and there are generations of them there.

I will finish with a line I read in an article, which said:

"One thing we all share: none of us can trace our families back more than a couple of generations. The Holocaust, as I've come to think of it, is history's loudest full-stop."

It should not be allowed to be a full stop. It must be an ellipsis that indicates an unfinished thought. We cannot draw a line under the holocaust as something that was done and is over. We must ensure that we continue to think about and consider the holocaust—the history and, most importantly, the humanity of it all—and we must ensure that the generations that follow do the same. That is what this debate is all about.

3.9 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a real privilege to sum up for the Scottish National party in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on securing the debate, and the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) on tabling an early-day motion for us all to sign to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.

This is the 18th Holocaust Memorial Day, commemorating the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and this debate has become an annual event in the House. In the book of remembrance that Members sign each year, we often see it written that we should "Never forget". Perhaps more than that, we should always actively remember. This debate provides the opportunity to renew that and to reflect on the holocaust, especially as the number of survivors continues to dwindle, as we have heard many times today.

This year also marks significant anniversaries of other 20th-century genocides: 40 years since the end of the genocide in Cambodia, and the 25th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda. If the number of survivors of the holocaust continues to dwindle, there are still many survivors of those genocides. The late 20th century is still with us, and the memory is still visible and raw. I took part in the same delegation that was led by the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), and it had an equally powerful impact on me. An estimated 1 million Tutsis were killed in just 100 days between 7 April and mid-July 1994 in Rwanda. The memorial garden in Kigali, which we visited, is incredibly moving. Over 250,000 victims are interred on that site.

I remember at the time in 1994 and indeed since, hearing of the Rwandan genocide almost as though it was a relatively spontaneous event, with the Hutus incited by their Government to rise up and take matters into their own hands. What that memorial and the visit

more generally made me realise is, in fact, how premeditated the killings were, how the roadblocks that sprung up had been co-ordinated, how weapons had been manufactured for months if not years, and how a decades-long propaganda campaign had demonised the Tutsi community. When the hon. Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), and others, said that the holocaust did not begin with killing, but with words, it strikes me that that is true of all the other genocides in the 20th century and throughout history, not least in Rwanda.

As the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton said, there are positive lessons from the aftermath in Rwanda, and if the theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is Torn from Home, one of the key memories for me was the reconciliation village, where perpetrators and victims together now make their homes. They have sought and exercised forgiveness, and they teach their children to learn from the mistake of their forebears. Such a first-hand opportunity to experience and witness the legacy of genocide is invaluable. It is one that we must find ways of extending to as many of the current and future generations as possible, including by hearing the kind of survivor stories that my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) spoke about, as have others throughout the debate.

I equally join in the tributes paid to the Holocaust Educational Trust and its "Lessons from Auschwitz" programme. Many Members have already taken part in that, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) spoke about one of his predecessors. The First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, visited in 2018, following the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, who accompanied 200 schoolchildren on their visit in 2017. The Scottish Government have committed to continuing to fund the "Lessons from Auschwitz" programme. I think the First Minister has said that, as long as she is in office, she will make sure that continues.

The national lottery has recently announced £296,000 for Scotland's first Jewish Heritage Centre, which will be based in the Garnethill synagogue, the oldest in Scotland—founded in 1879—which I have had the privilege of visiting. That will include a Scottish holocaust era study centre to provide public access to the important records held by the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, which document the experience of adult and child refugees who fled Nazi Europe before the outbreak of the second world war and of those who came after as survivors of the concentration camps.

I agree with all the sentiments expressed today about how we must continue to provide an environment where antisemitism is condemned and called out, and where it is unacceptable in any circumstances.

An undeniable rise in incidents has been documented by the Community Security Trust, and we have a particular responsibility as parliamentarians to lead by example and promote zero tolerance, even within our own parties, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) pointed out. Likewise, we should support positive initiatives that celebrate faith and diversity, and promote tolerance. I was pleased to attend an event at the end of Scottish Interfaith Week in November, and it concluded with a moving exhibition at the University of Glasgow of the work of the Glasgow Jewish artist, Hannah Frank, who died in 2008 aged 100. The theme of this year's Holocaust

Memorial Day is Torn from Home, and events such as the holocaust and other genocides tear us all from our comfort zone and our shared humanity. We must find ways of recovering that.

Holocaust Memorial Day takes place on 27 January, and on 25 January the memory is celebrated around the world of Scotland's great humanitarian poet, Robert Burns. He reflected on needless violence and murder in his 1790 poem, "I murder hate":

"I murder hate by flood or field,
Tho' glory's name may screen us;
In wars at home I'll spend my blood—
Life-giving wars of Venus.
The deities that I adore
Are social Peace and Plenty;
I'm better pleas'd to make one more,
Than be the death of twenty."

Global deaths due to genocide in the 20th century are far in excess of 20 million, so as we remember those torn from home by genocide, perhaps we can also reflect on those humanitarian values expressed by Burns, and on how much needless suffering could have been, and still can be avoided, if the deities we choose to adore are social peace and plenty.

3.16 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak in this debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for his passionate and eloquent speech, and for the work he does throughout the year in rooting out antisemitism and combating it whenever he sees it. I pay tribute to all hon. Members who have spoken—in these times of division it is good to see the House coming together, as I believe that is when the House is at its best. Like all hon. Members who have spoken, I thank the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, which work throughout the year to ensure that the horrors are never forgotten and that lessons are learned. I add my tributes to those for Lord Alf Dubs. He learned that lesson a particularly hard way, and he is assiduous in applying what he went through and how he felt to the refugees of today.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), the chair of the all-party group against antisemitism said, we must show solidarity in the face of antisemitism, because unfortunately that scourge is still very much part of the modern world. Social media has given it a new platform on which people can speak vile hatred and feel validated in their views by others. I am horrified that many British Jewish people to whom I have spoken are considering moving either to Israel or to another country. It is appalling that in this country, and this century, people are considering being "torn from home"—the theme of today's debate—but it is not altogether surprising. There has been an increase in attacks, and in my area of Greater Manchester there have been three attacks on the Urmston Jewish Cemetery. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) eloquently put it, home is community, family and friends, and we must support those in our community who feel threatened today.

We must tackle antisemitism wherever it is seen, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) said, there should be no bystanders. She has shown that many times through her actions as

well as her speeches. We must condemn antisemitism and root it out wherever it is seen, including in our own backyards, and that includes the Labour party.

The Labour party was formed to give a voice to the voiceless and to represent the oppressed. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) that it is the responsibility of us all to show that we have zero tolerance of antisemitism in the Labour party, or wherever it rears its ugly head. It is not only vile, but it refuses to recognise, indeed denigrates, the great contribution of the Jewish people to this country—indeed, any country in which they have settled.

I am proud that in Greater Manchester we have the largest community of Jewish people in Britain after Greater London; and they have been there for over 200 years. It has been home to individuals as diverse as Nathan Mayer Rothschild and Karl Marx. They were very different characters, but each saw Manchester as their home. They chose to come to Manchester. However, the theme today is Torn from Home, and that is people who have no choice. They had no choice, as children, to be sent to an area they did not know, to people they did not know. There was no choice for people torn from their home and sent to the death camps, torn from their families, their friends, herded into cattle trucks and often to their death. They were human beings like us, 6 million of whom were exterminated, and that is a staggering number. In fact, it is a number so big that it can hardly be comprehended, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) said.

We are also here to hear the testimonies and listen to people's stories, and hear about the contributions of the survivors, as my right hon. Friends the Members for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) and for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) reminded us. That is why the Holocaust Educational Trust does such great work in schools and colleges, taking in the recorded testimony of survivors, and taking students, such as those from Winstanley College in my constituency, to visit the death camps. There is no better way to try and comprehend that horror, as I know from my personal experience. I took my daughter when she was 11—20 years ago—to visit one of the camps, and she has never forgotten it, and neither have I.

Remembering the holocaust gives us a perspective on the world we live in today, and that is all the more important as we reflect on the genocides that have continued to occur in recent years, such as that in Rwanda, which my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) spoke about. She gave us a story of hope—hope that people can come together. However, we also need to be aware of the bigotry, the prejudice, the hatred, and the anti-democratic forces that are still here today. The holocaust may be a part of the past, but the causes continue to cast a dark shadow over the present, and we must remain vigilant and speak out, and be louder.

3.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler): I thank the Backbench Business Committee, and commend the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for securing this vital debate.

[Mrs Heather Wheeler]

It has been a real privilege to hear nearly 30 powerful speeches and contributions by hon. Members across the House. It was a particular honour to hear the personal stories of the hon. Members for Dudley North and for Bassetlaw (John Mann). I echo the pledge to fight racism and prejudice wherever it is found. To put the mind of the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) at rest, Lord Pickles is focused on the matter of restitution.

The holocaust remains an incalculable tragedy that has touched so many lives, including hundreds of refugees, kinder and holocaust survivors who now call Britain home. Every year we are privileged to hear their testimony. Some tell of their life before the Nazi occupation and the impact of Kristallnacht. Others give harrowing accounts of conditions in the death camps and the forced marches. Others were separated from their parents as children, to be brought up safely.

There are also stories of those who reached out and saved others. We can take pride in the fact that some of those extraordinary people were British. One such man worked for the Foreign Office. As we have heard, his name was Captain Frank Foley. Just yesterday, at a moving ceremony in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a bust of Captain Foley was unveiled by the Foreign Secretary, and holocaust survivor Mala Tribitch.

As we have heard, the theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is Torn from Home. It is especially poignant for me, as Minister responsible for housing and homelessness. Home usually means a place of safety, comfort and security. As I think about the holocaust and the subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and Srebrenica, I am mindful of the thousands upon thousands of people who never saw their homes again. It is also important to note that this year is the 40th anniversary of the genocide in Cambodia and the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda—in 2013 I had the honour to visit the memorial in Kigali.

Few events have had such a monumental impact on our democracy, our history and our values as the holocaust. That is why this Government are so proud to support the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and its vital work in communities across the country. I pay tribute to Laura Marks and the team led by Olivia Marks-Woldman who have ensured that Holocaust Memorial Day goes from strength to strength. Their incredible efforts will see more than 10,000 events take place up and down the country this year.

I acknowledge a number of others as well: Karen Pollock and the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, educating young people of every background about the holocaust and the important lessons it teaches us today; Dr Ben Barkow, his work at the Wiener Library and in setting up the Holocaust Explained website to help us all better understand that dark period of history; Lillian Black, who has worked tirelessly to create the holocaust centre at Huddersfield University, which will provide vital holocaust education for young people; and, finally, the amazing work at the holocaust memorial centre in Newark, which is ensuring that survivor testimony is preserved for future generations.

I will also reflect on the historic task given to my Department to build a national holocaust memorial and learning centre, which we are doing with a cross-party

foundation headed by the right hon. Lord Pickles and the right hon. Ed Balls. There can be no more powerful symbol of our commitment to remember the men, women and children who were murdered in the holocaust, and all the other victims of Nazi persecution, including Roma, gay and disabled people, masons and others. It will draw on the history of the holocaust and subsequent genocides. It will stand as a memorial, yes, but equally it will stand as a warning—a warning of where hatred can lead and a warning that when we say, “Never again”, we have to mean it.

After the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau—which I was privileged to visit privately in 2017—the world said, “Never again.” Yet exactly 30 years later, in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge claimed the lives of a quarter of the population through mass murder and starvation, and we said, “Never again.” Twenty years later, almost 1 million Rwandans were murdered in 100 days, in a conflict in which friend turned against friend, and neighbour against neighbour. Once more, we said, “Never again.” We then witnessed the murder of 8,372 mostly Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica—I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for his amazing speech—and we said, “Never again.”

Rather than despair at the world's collective failures, however, we must reaffirm our ongoing responsibility as citizens, as a nation, to do everything we can to stop such atrocities happening again. We must remember, too, that tolerance and reconciliation begin at home. The rise in the number of antisemitic incidents in the UK is shameful. It saddens me that Jewish communities in the UK should ever feel a sense of threat.

Each year that passes, I am mindful that living witnesses to the tragedy of the holocaust are becoming fewer in number, so I will conclude by remembering two incredible women we lost last year: Gena Turgel, who survived the Krakow ghetto, a death march, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, as we have heard; and Sabina Miller, who was born in Warsaw, survived the Warsaw ghetto and spent most of the second world war on the run from the Nazis. In later life, Sabina worked closely with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, receiving the British Empire Medal in 2017 for services to education. Both lives are a warning of the dangers of hatred but, equally, they are profound examples of tolerance, kindness and respect. They are examples we should do our best to follow—and never forget.

Again, I thank everyone for this debate. It is the right thing to do. It has been an honour for me to be the Minister replying today.

3.28 pm

Ian Austin: This has been an amazing debate. We have heard moving and powerful speeches, and had some amazing contributions. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us to have the debate, and every Member who supported the application for it and who took part in it. It has given us the opportunity to pay our respects to the victims of history's greatest crime and to dedicate ourselves to opposing racism and prejudice wherever we find it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day 2019.

Appropriate ME Treatment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I call Carol Monaghan to move the motion. She has up to 15 minutes. Given that so many Members wish to speak, I shall be very grateful if they do all that they can to help each other.

3.29 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): This debate is long overdue and much anticipated, and I thank the Members who have remained in the House on a Thursday afternoon to contribute to it.

There have been previous debates on ME, including one called by the then Member of Parliament for Great Yarmouth, Anthony Wright. That debate took place 20 years ago, and in 20 years little has changed for those living with ME. There is currently no cure, and many with the condition experience inadequate care and support. An estimated quarter of a million people in the UK suffer from it, and we are letting those people down. Many adults with ME cannot maintain employment or relationships, while children frequently fall behind at school. The ignorance surrounding the condition makes it harder for people to access benefits, and assessors from the Department for Work and Pensions often decide that sufferers are fit for work.

ME has specific characteristics—severe fatigue, debilitating muscle and joint pain, and extreme sensitivity to light and sound—but an important marker for the condition is that mental and physical activities can make the symptoms more acute. Some people with severe ME spend their days in darkened rooms, unable even to watch TV or listen to music. Touch is intolerable. Many are tube fed. For these individuals, ME is a life sentence, but it is a life spent existing, not living.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Carol Monaghan: Very briefly.

Mr Cunningham: I fully support the motion, because it alludes to some of the complaints that ME sufferers have brought to my surgeries. This is a timely debate, and what the hon. Lady has said so far is quite right.

Carol Monaghan: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

This condition is largely unknown, because those affected are often hidden away. I commend the ME community for lobbying so successfully to ensure so many Members are here this afternoon. Ultimately, what that community wants is better treatment and care for people with ME.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way, on that point?

Carol Monaghan: Again, very briefly.

Paula Sherriff: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her sterling work on this issue. It is my privilege to represent Lucy, a lovely teenage girl in my constituency who has ME. Her parents have requested me to ask the House to ensure that biomedical research shapes all aspects of support—in which case it must be funded—and to

reiterate that ME is a physiological condition, although it is often treated as a psychological condition. Lucy was asked if she needed to get around. She was told to just get up and walk, but she needs a wheelchair. Much more awareness is needed generally.

Carol Monaghan: Yes, ME receives far less research funding than other similarly prevalent conditions. That, I fear, reflects the attitude of some in the medical community who consider it to be behavioural rather than a pathological condition.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Carol Monaghan: I shall have to keep going. I apologise, but a great many Members want to speak.

The psychological view of ME led to the controversial and now debunked PACE trial—PACE is “Pacing, graded Activity, and Cognitive behaviour therapy; a randomised Evaluation”. The researchers reported that with cognitive behavioural therapy and graded exercise therapy—in which patients were encouraged to attempt increasing levels of exercise—approximately 60% of patients “improved” and 22% “recovered”. The treatments were labelled safe. Patient groups, however, were saying the opposite. Many who were able to walk when they embarked on a course of graded exercise dropped out of the treatment in wheelchairs or bedbound. Furthermore, patients were pressurised to describe improvements that they did not feel. As the trial progressed and the results did not meet the authors’ expectations, they simply lowered the threshold to define improvement. In some cases, those whose condition had deteriorated were classed as “recovered”. That is simply not good science.

The recommendation of graded exercise has caused untold physical damage to thousands of people. In fact, a 2018 survey found that 89% of ME sufferers experienced worsened symptoms after increasing activity. If graded exercise were a drug, it would have lost its licence.

The blatant ongoing refusal to accept ME as physiological doubtless explains the lack of proper research. Of course it is the Medical Research Council that allocates funds, but the Government can demonstrate their true commitment to improving the lives of ME sufferers. The Scottish Government have committed £90,000 for a PhD scholarship to support research into the causes, diagnosis and treatment of ME, and I would ask that the UK Government follow this lead.

During the debate in June, the Minister for public health, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who is in his place, said that £2.62 million had been spent on ME research since 2011. Let me be very clear: this money was spent on behavioural studies. We need money to be spent on biomedical research, and we are looking for a solid commitment from the Minister.

Until we have developed effective treatments, however, we must ensure suitable care plans are in place to respond to patients’ varying needs. Many US agencies are now removing their recommendations for graded exercise. However the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines continue to advocate this, despite patient surveys consistently indicating its harm. The risks are not acknowledged in the guidelines, undermining patients’ ability to give informed consent,

[Carol Monaghan]

and some patients are being threatened with being sectioned if they do not commit to a programme of graded exercise.

Mr Goodwill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Carol Monaghan: Very briefly.

Mr Goodwill: Many consider the NICE guidelines to be completely inappropriate. Does the hon. Lady agree that the timescale for that review, which will end in 2020, is far too long for these patients?

Carol Monaghan: Actually, NICE has taken a very positive step in reviewing the guidelines—it is listening to the community—but until they are published in 2020, we need NICE to make a public statement about the potential harm of graded exercise; patients must be made aware of the risk. It is a big ask to request that the Minister talks to NICE and encourages it to make that statement, so that this information can be added to the current guidelines while we are waiting for updated guidelines in 2020.

Care programmes for people vary greatly. Some with ME describe medical professionals who are sympathetic, but others talk of being disbelieved and forced down treatment paths to which they have not consented. Coverage of ME in many medical textbooks remains potentially misleading and inadequate, even non-existent. Health professionals must be equipped with clear guidance on diagnosing ME early and accurately, and with appropriate basic management advice.

At the end of last June's debate, the Minister for public health resolved that

"as a result of the debate I will redouble my efforts to"

raise awareness among medical professionals concerning ME, and said that

"as part of my role as Minister for primary care, all GPs certainly should be aware of ME".—[*Official Report*, 21 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 229WH.]

That was a welcome statement; I would now like to understand what concrete steps have been taken since that promise was made. Furthermore, I would ask the Minister to ensure that ME clinics and treatment centres are aware of the risks of graded exercise and are not forcing this on patients.

Some of the worst cases we hear about are children with ME. ME affects an estimated 25,000 children in the UK. Many experience significant distress when disbelieved by medical and teaching staff, often when these professionals do not understand how ME affects the child's ability to attend school.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Is the hon. Lady aware that one in five families looking after children with ME have been referred to child protection services?

Carol Monaghan: Yes. The statistics are terrible, but I want to describe one such case, which is really quite harrowing. It involves a girl, B, whose name cannot be disclosed. B became ill at the age of eight. A diagnosis of probable ME was made, but it was suggested that the underlying issues were psychological. To show willing, her parents took her to a child psychiatrist, who then

involved social services. B's parents were warned that if they did not fully comply, child protection proceedings would be initiated. Social services specified graded exercise, despite being warned of the dangers. As a result, B deteriorated rapidly until she became wheelchair-bound. Under threat of court action, B's parents were then forced to take her to a children's hospital, having been warned that they were "not under arrest just yet."

B's parents found what they presumed to be a safer option in an ME unit run by a consultant who appeared to view ME as an organic illness, but this was disastrous. B arrived wheelchair-bound but still able to sit upright and read and write, but under the activity programme, she deteriorated. Her mother was banned from visiting, but other parents in the unit observed B unattended in the wheelchair, in constant pain, unable to sit upright, with her head hanging down the side and crying in distress. This treatment continued for five months. Her parents were threatened that if B did not progress, she would be transferred to a psychiatric unit or placed in foster care. Desperate, they turned to Dr Nigel Speight and the Young ME Sufferers Trust. B was finally allowed home, and her name was eventually removed from the at-risk register. However, by the age of 15, she was bedridden, paralysed, unable to feed or wash herself and utterly dependent on carers. Doctors, psychiatrists and social services all failed her when she was eight. As the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) suggested, this is the case for one in five families living with a child with ME.

A firm diagnosis of ME protects the child from these proceedings, but unfortunately, paediatricians are often reluctant to give this, simply because they do not understand the condition. This leaves the child open to social service intervention. Often, paediatricians phone a so-called expert on ME, who immediately prescribes graded exercise, without even seeing the child in person. I say to the Minister that this is a national disgrace and it needs urgent action. Children who are already blighted by ME must not be subjected to this trauma. I ask him to consider this issue with the utmost seriousness, and to give the House an assurance that parents will not be prosecuted simply for caring for a sick child.

ME has been disregarded for far too long, and it can be fatal. In the UK, there have been two patients, Sophia Mirza and Merryn Crofts, whose deaths have been attributed by coroners to ME. However, the actual number of deaths due to ME may be much higher, and we cannot wait for more. The ME community have waited decades for their voices to be not only heard but believed. The Government have the power to make radical changes, and I invite the Minister to meet groups of patients who would welcome the opportunity to describe their experience. Little progress has been made in the 20 years since the 1999 debate. Surely, Minister, in the 21st century we can do better for those suffering from this devastating illness.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. If each hon. Member can stick to four minutes, we will get everyone in, and everyone will get equal time.

3.42 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), along with the hon. Member for Ceredigion

(Ben Lake) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), on initiating this debate. I first heard ME being mentioned in the Chamber in the 1980s by, I think, the late Richard Holt on these Benches and Jimmy Hood on the Labour Benches. I could not pronounce the long title of the condition, but they could. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North West has said, it is disappointing that not much progress has been made, all these years later.

Like so many other Members, I am here today to speak on behalf of constituents with ME who want their voices to be heard. I am thinking of last week's Westminster Hall debate on fibromyalgia, which is another of those problems that is not spoken about much. ME is also an invisible illness, and many people suffer in silence, so I will be using this opportunity to speak on behalf of my 500 constituents in Southend West who suffer from the illness. I would like to share with the House the words of one of them, Isabel Butler, whose moving story tells of the devastating impact of the condition, and the desperate need for the Government to take action. She says:

"I was a trainee teacher and raising my young son, having just graduated with a first class honours degree when I was struck down suddenly with this horrific illness in 2003. I battled on in pain, and despite repeated visits to my GP was simply fobbed off with antidepressants. I was not depressed, I wanted to do things but for every exertion I was overcome with pain that left me bedbound for days. Despite my best efforts and determination, I was too unwell to continue my job and pursue the career I had also dreamt of. The worst of it is, I went undiagnosed for seven long years. People don't believe you when you tell them that you are ill, so you keep quiet, even when I had been admitted to hospital, as medics can often turn on you in contempt at the mention of ME."

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): My hon. Friend is setting out a shocking case, and I am sure that we will hear many others like it today. The key to this has to be research, so that we can start to understand this terrible disease and then be able to build proper treatments that actually have a chance of working.

Sir David Amess: I am taken by the fact that we have two former Secretaries of State sitting together—my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough—and I certainly listen well to their advice. I absolutely agree with what my right hon. Friend says.

My constituent goes on to say:

"I do not understand why we are not being believed. I had a promising life, two beautiful boys and a career I loved. I didn't choose to be this ill with no hope of any treatment, compassion or cure."

The overwhelming experience of sufferers is a struggle to be believed. There is a lack of understanding among the public, policy makers and, most worrying of all, the medical profession.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): My constituent Rachael King told me that one area in which there has been understanding is in schools, saying that Noadswood School and Brockenhurst College in my constituency are very understanding indeed. However, she says that her 15-year-old daughter Larissa is one of the luckier ones in that respect, because so many people are not believed, as we have heard today. If they were not depressed by the condition, they will be depressed as a consequence. However, ME is not depression; it is a serious illness in its own right.

Sir David Amess: I hope that the good practice in the schools in my right hon. Friend's constituency will be shared throughout the country.

Sufferers are too often left in agony for years, undiagnosed and untreated. GPs are failing to recognise or even believe the severity of symptoms that can devastate patients' lives. I urge the Government, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North West did, to work with the medical profession to ensure that all GPs have the understanding to diagnose, treat and manage ME with compassion.

However, a lack of awareness among GPs is a symptom of how little we understand the condition medically. There is no known cause, reason or cure, and there is a worrying lack of investment in biomedical research for ME in this country. Without that research, we simply will not be able to improve diagnosis or treatment for patients. I join Members across this House in calling on the Minister to consider properly funding the biomedical research that ME desperately needs.

Finally, as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines are under review—I was on the Health Committee for 10 years and remember the arguments—we should now take this opportunity to start listening to patients. The controversy of the PACE trial arose from a failure to listen to sufferers and to believe their experiences. For the NICE guidelines to be successful and transform sufferers' lives, we need to listen to patients. I sincerely hope that this debate will not just be mere words and that it will lead to some well overdue action. In signing off her letter, my constituent Isabel said:

"After 20 years of pain, thank you for listening."

Now that this House has listened, I hope that we can have some action.

3.48 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank and congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on her commendable perseverance in pursuing this matter. Like others, I have been approached by constituents to discuss ME, which caused me to dredge my memory and recall individuals whom I have known personally who have suffered from this illness. From my conversations with sufferers, I know that they have been confronted with a range of problems that still exist for others today. Those problems include: a lack of understanding and support in the workplace and in schools, which can mean a loss of job opportunities or problems for the parents of young pupils; inadequate understanding by clinicians; delays in diagnosis and, indeed, inappropriate treatments and tests; incomprehension and insensitivity by the DUP for recipients of benefits, which can lead to a loss of benefits. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, I mean the DWP. A Freudian slip. I do not blame the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for that particular problem.

The loss of those benefits can lead to a loss of income, leading to life challenges over and above the problems such people confront because of their illness. Over and above all that, there is the stigma of mental or psychological problems, which can reinforce the sense of social isolation. It is amazing that, despite the debates we have had on this subject and despite our world-class NHS and top-class medical research, these problems have not been addressed.

[Mr Adrian Bailey]

Like many people, I have personal examples from those who have had their life devastated by this illness. Lucy, a vivacious young political activist I know, was heading for an early parliamentary career before she was struck down. She found that she could manage to work only 10 hours a week, and describes how every speech and every meeting is absolutely devastating to her body. She describes it as remaining awake while her body sleeps. She went to the doctor, and even different doctors within the same medical practice gave different diagnoses, which demonstrates the unbelievable lack of comprehension of this illness.

I would have liked to give many more examples, but I finish by saying that, in summing up last June's Westminster Hall debate, the Minister spoke about channelling research, but the problem is that it seems to be going towards psychological research, rather than neurological research. He also said that the NICE draft consultation will be ready in 2020. Why the wait, given our knowledge of the scale of these problems? He said that he would follow up with the DWP on the problems there, and I hope he can report on that.

3.52 pm

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): It was a pleasure to apply for this debate with the hon. Members for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) and others. [Interruption.] How could I possibly forget the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound)?

Like other Members, I will speak about my own constituents' experiences. As we have already heard, so many Members are here on a Thursday afternoon to talk on behalf of their constituents. We held out for a debate on the Floor of the House, and we are debating not a "take note" motion but a substantive motion. This House debates many contentious issues, passions can run high and there can be many points of order, but hopefully we will see the House of Commons at its finest this afternoon as we do our job of bringing to the attention both of Ministers and of the wider public an issue of real importance that devastates the lives of our constituents and their families.

We have already heard about the issues of funding for biomedical research, and it is clear that, given the prevalence of the condition, there must now be an increase in funding not only to help advance our understanding of its underlying biology but to develop new diagnostic tests and better, more targeted treatments. The problems and dangers of graded exercise therapy and CBT have already been powerfully set out. My constituents have also called for NICE to take their concerns into account and to remove those treatments from its guidelines. We have heard the call for NICE to issue an immediate public statement on the harm that may be caused by the current guidelines for the period they remain active.

It is right that we want GPs and health professionals to know more.

Paula Sherriff: My constituent has to travel 40-odd miles to Manchester for treatment. With a condition such as ME, that is particularly distressing. Does the right hon. Lady agree that we need many more specialists throughout the country?

Nicky Morgan: I agree with the hon. Lady. We all know that resources may be constrained, but we want our constituents to be able to see specialists who really know about a condition. One of the most powerful things that we have heard is that not only are sufferers fighting a condition that makes them feel terrible, but they are not believed when they say what they are going through. That must compound the difficulties of the condition. Having a GP who not only believes them, but wants to help and understand, would make a huge difference. The same is true of other health professionals.

We have talked about children being affected. One of my constituents wrote to me to say that she had had ME since 2013, and had been left housebound. She added:

"As if having this illness wasn't devastating enough, in 2016, my then 10 year old son became unwell and never got better, he has also been diagnosed with ME."

We have heard today about the potential involvement of child protection services. In addition, some schools can deal with the condition, but some schools will struggle. I was contacted only this week, as the debate was being advertised, by another constituent. She talked about her daughter, Elisha, who is now 11 years old and has had ME for four years. Elisha has been discharged from the community paediatrician, physiotherapist and occupational therapist and left with no support or medical help, because there is no funding for paediatric ME care in Leicester or Leicestershire. She has missed most of her schooling in the last four years. Clearly, with children as well as with adults, people must be believed and the condition must be investigated. It is a considerable source of stress for parents and carers, but of course it has a negative effect on the child's personal development and future life chances.

I have family experience of ME, but I want to pay tribute to the constituent who first brought the matter to my attention, Sarah Reed. Some Members, particularly Opposition Members, will know her as the wife of the former Labour MP, Andy Reed, who was my predecessor in Loughborough. Sarah has been a tireless campaigner for ME Action and for sufferers.

There are 250,000—a quarter of a million—sufferers of ME, or chronic fatigue syndrome, in the UK. With any other condition, we would not allow a situation in which people continue to struggle to have their voice heard, and the NICE guidance takes so long to be delivered. There are many examples, and it is time for the Government to respond.

3.57 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): I thank all the hon. Members who secured this debate. In preparing to speak, I have become more and more angry about the injustice and pain heaped on those who suffer from ME. They live in a country where their illness is at best belittled and at worst ignored. Their illness is sneered at thanks to the development, in the medical field and in the press, of a culture of believing that it is just people being lazy or women being hysterical.

The effects of the condition can be totally debilitating. Any other illness with such life-limiting effects would not have psychological and behavioural treatments as the go-to options. This is not a psychosomatic or psychosocial issue, and a better response is needed.

Graded exercise therapy must be suspended and CBT therapy should be an option, add-on or complement to other treatments, not the treatment.

There is a growing consensus about the use of pacing for managing ME. Sadly, current NICE guidelines state that there is insufficient research evidence about the benefits or harm of pacing. That is why more funding for research is vital. We need a commitment from the Minister to increase the sparse funding for ME research, which at present stands at a paltry £1 for every sufferer.

The now widely discredited PACE trial had far-reaching implications. Not only did it add to the existing myths around ME, but it led to alterations in the application of benefits and eligibility for social care.

For someone who knows how unwell they are, there must be nothing worse than being told that it is all in their head and being sneered at by the very professions and organisations that should be supporting them. The constant quest to be believed and the desperation of just wanting some answers was summed up powerfully by my constituent, Barbara Kell. She described the endless rolling of eyes by some GPs and the frustration of others who wanted to help her but knew they would be hauled up in front of the General Medical Council if they did. Barbara told me that she is living “half a life”, and that she grieves for her past. She said she is missing out on so much, including time with her grandchildren—I can testify to the House that they are gorgeous little girls. Like thousands of others, Barbara wants and deserves to live in a country where the Government properly fund research; where treatment helps and does not hinder; where support from the state does not come at the cost of dignity; and where people actually listen to her. Right now, that is not the case.

Barbara told me that every time she went for blood tests, which were of course the wrong ones, and the results came back, she was actually hoping it was something like cancer, just so that she could put a name to the intense pain that she was feeling, get the right treatment, and know whether she was going to live or die. For the sake of my constituent Barbara and the 250,000 others affected, I hope that the Minister is really listening to what is being said today and is ready to give some justice and comfort to those who have been ignored for decades.

4.1 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate, and particularly to follow the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) and her comments. I thank the constituents who contacted me ahead of the debate not only to encourage me to attend but to make clear their concerns about this issue. Several Members have picked up a point on which I shall reflect as well: ME can have such an impact on someone's life, but at the same time they sometimes have to battle for recognition that that is what is affecting them. Of course, there is no specific test for the condition, which leads on to the fact that there is no specific cure for it. As we heard in the previous speech, that can lead to scepticism rather than someone being supported.

As several Members have already said, this condition has a £3.3 billion impact per year, in terms of healthcare costs, the related welfare payments, productivity losses and unpaid informal care, as well as, of course, the wider lost opportunity because those who suffer from this condition are not able to live life to the full or as

they would wish. It will be interesting to hear from the Minister about the review of the NICE guidelines. For the reasons that other Members have already gone into, it is welcome that we know what is being looked at, but it would be particularly welcome to hear whether we might be able to bring forward some updated guidelines earlier than the stated timeline of 2020. It would be interesting to hear the Minister say that when he responds to the debate.

As has also been touched on already, when one considers the impact of ME, it is quite remarkable to see how little is spent on research. I think something like only 0.02% of all active grants given by UK mainstream funding agencies goes towards research in this area. Clearly, without research, there will not be the hope of improved treatment or of a test being developed so that people can move away from scepticism and get support from their medical practitioners. Ultimately, we will hopefully find a cure, or a treatment that at least mitigates some of ME's effects.

Members have already touched on the fact that there is clearly an issue in relation to how those living with this condition are assessed for welfare benefits, particularly because they might be assessed on a good day, which does not then reflect their overall condition. When he sums up, it would be interesting to hear the Minister reflect on some of the conversations that the Department of Health and Social Care is having with the Department for Work and Pensions, although I accept that he is unlikely to get a particularly long time to sum up, given the short length of the debate.

I welcome the opportunity today to highlight this issue on the Floor of the House, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and the other Members who applied on securing this debate and enabling us to raise our concerns on a cross-party basis. As has been touched on, 250,000 people live with this condition in the UK. It needs research, support and a change of culture, so that sufferers feel supported and believed and can have some hope of living the sort of normal life that we all expect and deserve.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am terribly sorry but it is obvious that a lot of people wish to speak. We have very little time, and I am sure the House wishes the Minister to have time to answer the many important points raised, so I must reduce the time limit to three minutes.

4.5 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I shall be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on securing this debate through the Backbench Business Committee. I shall try not to go over ground already covered, but I must pay due regard to my constituent Dr Charles Shepherd, who continues to advise the ME Association and has come forward with many suggestions that it has followed.

On medical education, there is evidence of some progress, which is very pleasing. GPs are the gatekeepers and need to recognise ME at an early stage so they can help their patients. It is heartrending to read what constituents have written to me, particularly the parents of younger children suffering dramatically from this

[Dr David Drew]

dreadful condition. The PACE trial and the need for a rewrite of the NICE guidelines have been touched on already. It is important that NICE bring that forward. It would be interesting to know why the Government have cut the money for biomedical research and the National Institutes of Health. If that money could be put back in, that would be one bit of good news the Minister could give us. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) touched on the role of the Department for Work and Pensions. It is important that this condition be recognised and that sufferers get early support. On the work of clinical commissioning groups, the NHS has to do more and spend its own local resources.

To finish, I want to touch on the overlap with B12 deficiency, which has not been mentioned yet. Autoimmune metaplastic atrophic gastritis, previously known as pernicious anaemia, is often confused with ME. It is very important that we encourage local health bodies to rewrite the rules for that condition as well to ensure that people are correctly diagnosed. It is very unhelpful when people's conditions are not properly recognised as it can result in a downward spiral of psychological problems. It is about time we spent the necessary resources on this condition and gave the necessary help to sufferers.

4.8 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I could easily say amen and sit down, but I would like to compliment the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on her speech.

I hope this debate and the passionate interest of colleagues from the across the House bring some encouragement to those suffering from this condition that they are not forgotten. Louise McAllan from Riverside got in touch with me last June. She tells me that ME led her to medically retire in her early 30s, that she has been too sick to leave her bed for months at a time, that she is unable to tolerate light or sound, that she cannot meet her friends and that she suffers intolerable pain. She was told by a neurologist in a major hospital that there was no such thing as ME, and she was told when she got a diagnosis that at least she did not have anything serious.

Catherine Schmitz from Stirling got in touch last May to tell me her story. For her, it is a dreadful illness that has left her signed off work for 22 years. She has balance and vision problems and sensitivity to light and noise. To get a diagnosis, she was passed around hospital departments that could look only at their own specialist areas.

Cathy Dickson from Torbrex got in touch in November 2017. Her case and the dangerous advice that she was given saw her become more ill because of doctors who had no knowledge of ME. She continues to fight for the support that she needs and deserves.

Pam Sullivan from Bridge of Allan also suffers from ME, which has left her with crippling fatigue, exhaustion, viral symptoms, muscle pain, and impaired cognitive function. Without her loving family, she would have no support at all.

I know the Minister is both compassionate and dedicated, so I hope that he will respond to the demands that we are hearing today in this debate. Treatments that harm

patients should be discontinued with immediate effect. Does he appreciate the fact that ME patients cannot wait for NICE guidelines to be reviewed? I very much hope that he will agree that it is simply not acceptable that seriously ill people should be left feeling that, somehow, they are to blame for not getting better, and that if only they had a better attitude and a different mindset, they would recover.

What more will be done to provide updated professional training for GPs and other healthcare professionals properly to recognise the symptoms of ME? What more can the Department for Work and Pensions do to see that ME patients are treated fairly and that the process to which they are subject does not worsen their illness—especially in respect of how assessments are conducted? Will the Minister please reassure the House that substantially more resources will be dedicated to biomedical research so that we can understand ME and begin to reach for solutions? Minister, people need help.

4.11 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): First, may I add my support to the motion as set out on the Order Paper and congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on leading the way in securing this debate and also on her excellent speech.

I spoke in a previous Westminster Hall debate and later put down written questions on ME on the basis suggested by Dr Ian Gibson, whom longer-standing Members may remember as the Labour Member for Norwich and a distinguished medical scientist in his own right. Ian was incensed by the use of graded exercise therapy. He said that it was less than useless and actually damaging to sufferers as well as causing them pain and raising false optimism that such therapies would work. Given that ME causes extreme fatigue, suggesting more exercise seems to me about as sensible as asking frostbite sufferers to walk about in snow. The other suggested treatment, cognitive behavioural therapy, helped to underpin the myth that ME is a psychological problem, not a physical condition. Neither of those supposed therapies should have been given credence and efforts should have been focused long ago on discovering the real causes of ME and on undertaking proper and thorough research to develop effective treatments.

I first became aware of ME more than 25 years ago when two of my young relatives were found to be suffering from the condition. The fact that I was not aware of ME until then is itself extraordinary given that some 25,000 children are estimated to be suffering from the condition. That is more than 38 children, on average, for every one of our constituencies.

I later became informed of sufferers in my own constituency and recall one man in particular who suffered constant pain and had to lie in a darkened room because he could not bear the light. Such symptoms are well known, but, of course, like so many illnesses, the severity of symptoms can vary greatly. MS, for example, can advance rapidly, or can remain fairly mild and stable for many years. Such variations do not invalidate the condition.

I have mentioned children with ME, but if all adults were included, the figure reaches 250,000, or nearly 400 per constituency; it really is that serious. The impact on the lives of those constituents is enormous, but the cost to society and to the economy is over £3.3 billion a year—an enormous sum. Therefore, finding causes and

discovering effective treatments are vital. Funding research must be a priority, first, to reduce the level of suffering, but also to reduce the wider social and economic costs. Research into ME represents just 0.02% of all grants given to funding agencies—just one 500th of the total, a pathetic amount.

In conclusion, I hope that we are now putting behind us all the myths and misdiagnoses related to ME. It is a physical condition and it is causing untold suffering. Recent research has looked very promising, and has pointed to possible causes of ME. One factor in particular has recently received publicity—the overactive immune system in many sufferers. It seems that we are starting to move in the right direction. We must congratulate the scientific and medical researchers who have done, and who are doing, so much valuable work towards finding solutions to the scourge of ME and alleviating the suffering that it causes.

I hope that Ministers and other hon. Members will take note of the reports in “Breakthrough”, the journal of ME research—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I call Mr Stephen Pound.

4.14 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): May I say that north-west London salutes north-west Glasgow? I was honoured and proud—not that I had much choice in the matter—to support the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) when she applied for the debate. Her influence clearly spreads much further than Whiteinch, because only last week the Scottish Government launched their national action plan on neurological conditions. Action for ME was not particularly delighted with the plan, but one of the good things to come out of it is the allocation of £90,000 to fund a PhD study on the impact of ME. If that funding was increased proportionately for the whole country, it would be well over £1 million. That is something we certainly look forward to.

We have talked about the individual circumstances of many of our constituents. I want to mention one area that has not yet been mentioned: the provision and allocation of social housing. People with myalgic encephalomyelitis and chronic fatigue syndrome often have very specific housing needs. I think of my constituent Pamela Badhan—she is admirably represented by Councillor Deirdre Costigan—who finds it intensely difficult to live where she is at present because of her condition. The thing about ME is that, even if someone with the condition sleeps all night, they are still exhausted the next day, because the exhaustion is endemic; it cannot be sated by sleep. That is how terrifying the condition is.

I will not go into the details of the research today, but we do need to have the biomedical research. We have moved a little further forward since the dark days of the stiff upper lip, when people were told to take one round turn and two half hitches and then pull themselves together. We have to change attitudes, and that cannot be dictated—we have not had a dictator in this country since Oliver Cromwell. We cannot say what a people will do. What we can do is raise this issue, calmly, objectively and using all the pragmatic skills and data available to us.

I want to say to all those people out there who are suffering from ME; all those people suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome; all those people who have been ignored, belittled and, in many cases, insulted: “This House recognises the reality of your condition. This House will not sit idly by while you suffer. This House will not ignore you. This House will devote its intelligence and resources to research and ultimately resolve and cure this terrible condition, because we respect you, we understand you and we give credit and credibility to what so many people have for far too long denied.” ME sufferers the world over must know that this House and this nation are finally speaking for them.

4.17 pm

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): How do I follow that? I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on securing this important debate. Last year I was invited by a group of ME patients in Lincoln to a screening of “Unrest”, Jennifer Brea’s deeply moving and personal documentary. The film really opened my eyes to the bravery and resilience that people living with ME display on a daily basis. Over the past week, many constituents have contacted my office to encourage me to attend this debate. Hearing at first hand from people in Lincoln about the complex difficulties that people with ME encounter really underlined for me the need to provide more support at national and local level.

ME is a disease that poses unique difficulties for those who suffer from it. We are all aware of its fluctuating and sometimes invisible symptoms, which have fuelled an unjust and debilitating stigma around the disease. That stigma is institutionalised in the fabric of ME medical research, healthcare provision and our welfare system. When it comes to treatment, most people do not have access to adequate care and support, and there is an almost total lack of appropriate secondary services. Many primary care professionals receive minimal training on ME—I did not get a lot of training on this when I was a nurse—and are therefore occasionally prone to holding stigmatising and misinformed opinions about the illness. It is clear that more training is required, not only for healthcare professionals but for welfare assessors. Welfare assessors frequently have insufficient understanding of ME and therefore often fail to assess claimants accurately. I heard that a lot at the film screening.

It is completely unacceptable that people suffering from ME are, through no fault of their own, even more harshly exposed to the cruelties of Tory welfare cuts and the disastrous roll-out of universal credit. This Government must consider properly funding research into ME to better understand the condition. It is crucial that we all work towards eradicating the stigma of ME and improve routes to diagnosis, care and treatment. It is also crucial that all Members across this House recognise that that can only be achieved with adequate resources. I hope that today the Minister will give us a real commitment to do this, and not just warm but empty words.

4.19 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) not only on securing this important debate but on her tireless work, with others, to raise awareness of the difficulties that individuals with ME

[Ben Lake]

endure; on relentlessly challenging authorities to improve the way in which they support sufferers; and on giving a voice to those who all too often feel abandoned and alone.

As we know, ME is a chronic, multi-system disease that impacts approximately a quarter of a million people across the UK. To put that number into context, ME affects more people than the terrible Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis combined. It is estimated, as has been mentioned, that it has an economic cost of some £3.3 billion. One would imagine that those considerations alone were sufficient to ensure adequate funding for biomedical research into ME and clinical care for those suffering from the disease, and yet ME research represents just 0.02% of all active grants given by UK mainstream funding agencies. It really does beggar belief that research into an affliction that leaves 25% of sufferers housebound or bedbound, and from which 95% of people do not recover, receives so little funding. This underinvestment needs to be addressed urgently, and I hope that the Minister can help in this regard. I also support a review of NICE guidelines on the treatments prescribed for ME and hope that that can be implemented as soon as possible. If positive changes are adopted, I hope, of course, that they are, in turn, implemented by the Welsh Government so that ME sufferers in Wales can benefit.

It is near impossible for those of us fortunate enough to not suffer from ME to truly comprehend its real, tangible impact, so I would like to conclude with the words of two individuals who have contacted me to share their experiences of the disease. John Peters suffers from ME and was first struck down in the 1980s. The impact on his life has been total, as he so painfully put it to me:

"I have missed the whole spectrum of life: the big things such as family, a career; holidays, celebrations, the 'hooks' of someone's years; but also the minor events—that night out with a friend, the moment on a mountain, the lazy morning in bed with someone, that fantastic book, the sharing of a joke."

Saran, a teenager from Ceredigion, has suffered from ME for over a decade and is now mostly housebound after receiving a formal diagnosis only last year. She told me:

"I have no idea what a life without chronic pain is, I don't know what it's like to be able to tolerate noisy bright spaces, what it's like to remember the conversations I've had with those I love...I have slowly watched my life disappear over many years, and now I'm entirely dependent on my parents, have no job, A levels, or hope for the future."

I sincerely hope that this debate succeeds in its objectives, for we simply cannot wait any longer. John and Saran deserve some hope for the future.

4.22 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I thank the many constituents who have contacted me about their experiences, asking me to take part in this debate. In particular, I thank Pauline Donaldson of the Tyne and Wear ME/CFS support group, who plays a really important part in making sure that I and other Members from Tyne and Wear are aware of the very real problems faced by people who have this debilitating condition.

It is six months since we last debated this issue in Westminster Hall. That is six months more that people with ME have been waiting to see real progress on finding effective biomedical research into ME to work

towards finding effective treatments for their condition, and six months more to suffer from the effects of ME. They are weary and impatient, and angry that treatments like CBT and graded exercise—psychological treatments—are still being put forward as the most common treatment for what is a physical condition. I am glad to take this opportunity to speak on their behalf.

Those people are looking for four things, the first of which is funding for biomedical research. I was shocked to hear that patients and families are helping to fund research themselves. It is really important that we find a way of having that biomedical research done through public funds.

Secondly, many people with ME and their supporters have demanded that the use of CBT and graded exercise therapy be stopped. I will come on to talk about my constituent's experience of that. Thirdly, they want to see more training for GPs in recognising the signs and symptoms of ME. Invest in ME Research is doing much and has information packs, but it does not have the funds to extend that medical training everywhere. Fourthly, they would like to see an end to families with children with ME being subject to child protection procedures.

To finish, I want to talk about my constituent Angus, who was a senior lecturer in business at a north-east university. He says:

"In 2012, every aspect of my life changed when I was struck down with ME aged 47".

He lost his job. He says that he was never a "couch potato"—in fact, just the opposite—and still loves active pursuits, but can no longer do any of them. He says:

"Climbing the stairs in the house seems more exhausting than any mountain I've climbed in the past."

He underwent CBT and GET and found that it made him not better but so much worse that it was a relapse. I wish I had the time to read his evidence. It is crucial that we address this problem and give our constituents with ME the treatment they deserve.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I have to reduce the time limit to two minutes, or else every Member will not get a chance to speak.

4.26 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for securing the debate. The Welsh Association of ME and CFS Support confirms that 12,600 families in Wales are affected by this condition. Even with those numbers, awareness of fluctuating conditions such as these is crucial in society generally and in the Department for Work and Pensions.

It is true that ME receives far less funding than neurological conditions of similar prevalence. That must change, and the funding must also be appropriately targeted. If the World Health Organisation classifies ME as a neurological condition, clearly investment in biomedical research is required, whereas thus far funding has been concentrated on psychological and behavioural studies.

In the short time I have, I would like to pay tribute to two constituents who have contacted me. First, Sarah Oakwell spoke movingly about her symptoms and the

need to develop new initiatives and additional forms of individualised treatment. She spoke of the need for new therapeutic strategies and multi-centre interventions, given the fluctuating nature of the condition. She also spoke of the need for more Government-funded research and said:

“We will wait as we do now in the hope that today will be the day you listen, take note and do something to help us all.”

I would also like to pay tribute to my constituent Reg Hann, who contacted me about his grandson and made these moving comments:

“I have had a close relationship with him all his life. Now he is too ill to travel to visit me. Too ill to speak on the phone... He is 18 at the beginning of February and will be unable to celebrate such an important birthday. I will be 95 the week after. My best present would be if he is well enough to visit me.”

What Reg and Sarah need is action. I hope they get the action that they deserve.

4.27 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for securing this important debate. I spoke in the debate last year about Merryn Crofts, who is one of just two people in the UK to have myalgic encephalomyelitis recorded as the cause of death. She was my constituent and lived in Norden, in the Rochdale area of my constituency.

Merryn suffered so badly from pain that she could not get out of bed. Her GP had worked in a hospice for 10 years, looking after cancer patients, and said that in that job, she could not always take away pain but could manage it. The GP said that Merryn's pain was unmanageable. Although Merryn was on diamorphine and ketamine, she was still in pain. Any kind of stimulus—even just a nurse walking into the room—was an exertion for Merryn.

Merryn's mother was very critical of the PACE guidance given by NICE and attributes the worsening of Merryn's condition to it. She tells me that Merryn thought she could push through the condition and keep going, although her family wanted her to slow down. Sadly, it was only when the family contacted a private medical practitioner that Merryn was given the advice to slow down and rest. The specific advice given was, “Whatever you feel you can do, only do 50% of it.” Merryn's mother feels strongly that, had Merryn been given that advice when her condition started, she might not have gone on to develop severe ME, and she strongly urges that the NICE guidelines be reviewed. Merryn's mother told me:

“If the PACE trial were a drug, it would have been banned by now.”

I have also been contacted by other constituents who have urged me to take part in this debate. One of them is Rebecca Pritchard, who points out that it would not be difficult to increase funding for research, given that very little funding for ME has been given so far. She highlights the work done by Invest in ME Research, based in Norwich, and points out the huge funds that have been crowdfunded by patients and their families.

4.29 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I have a very short time, but I hope this debate will raise awareness of this condition. It is still an illness that

people very often do not know much about, despite the fact that 250,000 people in the UK are affected by it, with about 20,000 of those living in Scotland. Despite all this, there are still no effective treatments for this life-changing, life-stealing and cruel condition. We need our frontline GPs to have proper training so they feel equipped to diagnose and are more confident in the treatment of this condition.

Although recent investment by the Scottish Government is very welcome, it is nothing more than a start for this very long-neglected and misunderstood condition. I am keen to hear what action the UK Government will take to increase awareness and understanding of this condition, and to help us understand the causes of the illness, so that we can improve its diagnosis and treatment.

Having listened to speeches from across the House, I have no doubt that we need a concerted effort right across the UK to tackle this illness. I very much look forward to hearing the response from the Minister. Before I sit down, I want to extend my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for bringing forward this debate, and for all the work she has invested in bringing the subject to the House and raising Members' awareness of it.

4.31 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Given the very short period available, I will not be able to do justice to Karen, Carolyn, Nathalie, Anna, Emma or many of my other constituents by telling their stories today. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), I tell my constituents and all those watching, “The House has heard you and your stories, and understands your plight.” The will of the House will make that very clear to those on the Government Front Bench.

It is clear from the stories we have heard today what a devastating and complex disease this is. When I was a young undergraduate in human bioscience, studying immunology, I heard this referred to in the labs as “Multiple Excuses”, and that was not so long ago. There is clear evidence that much more work is needed on the biomedical and biological processes behind this complex and devastating disease.

I am a member of the Science and Technology Committee, and we have recently completed an inquiry into research integrity. We have some concerns about reporting and transparency, especially in clinical trials. This goes to the concerns of many ME sufferers about what research is being done and how it is being done. Further to our Select Committee inquiry, I hope that the Minister will say what he will do to provide transparency in prospective registration, to deal with positive bias in journals—researchers are incentivised to find positive answers, as opposed to proving negatives, which is sometimes just as important—and perhaps to change the culture of that environment.

Lastly, on the delivery of care, about which we have heard from many hon. Members, the research must be recognised in the NICE guidelines, which lead to the delivery of care for many sufferers—children and adults—and to some of these heartbreaking situations. In my final 10 seconds, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), a colleague on the Science and Technology Committee. I was pleased

[Darren Jones]

to support her application for this debate, and I hope the Government will respond in the significant way that is needed.

4.33 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for securing this very important debate. I have received a number of requests from my constituents to attend this debate to highlight this devastating condition.

Sufferers of ME are often stigmatised and marginalised, as their conditions are not fully recognised by the Government or the medical profession. A number of my constituents suffer from ME. At least two have been bedridden for 30 years because of their condition, and their story is not uncommon. Some 250,000 people suffer from ME, with 25% of individuals house or bed-bound. Children as young as five can develop the condition, and it is the most common cause of long-term school sickness absences.

A Westminster Hall debate last February raised issues about the PACE trial, which has influenced the NHS treatment of ME. A report had recommended CBT and GET as effective treatments. More recent research has disproved that study, which shows that CBT is not effective, and that GET can worsen individual symptoms, as has been the case for some of my constituents. However, those are the only treatments available on the NHS, which means that individuals and their families must endure treatment that not only fails to improve them, but can worsen their condition.

I therefore support suspending CBT and GET treatments in the NHS, as well as updated training for GPs and medical professionals, to alleviate the unnecessary hardship to which individuals with ME are currently subjected. ME has been overlooked for too long. We must fund and support research properly, and work to ensure that those who suffer from ME are listened to, diagnosed, and treated in the best possible way.

4.35 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on securing this debate. She has been a champion for those who suffer from ME. We thank her for all her efforts, and are here to support her.

I have had the pleasure of meeting a lady in my constituency who is attempting to cope with her illness. She is also a champion for raising awareness and changing how those who suffer from ME are dealt with—I say “suffer”, because the lady I met certainly suffers. It is estimated that ME affects some 25,000 children in the UK, and it is said to be the leading cause of long-term school sickness absence in the UK. Given the stigma that people with ME face, families will continue to meet accusations of misconduct and withholding support. What is being done to help those 25,000 children?

We urgently need to update the training of GPs and medical professionals, so that they are equipped with clear guidance for a diagnosis of ME, and can give advice and guidance on appropriate management to reflect international consensus on best practice. In addition, all commissioning bodies must ensure that medical, welfare and care services are accessible to people with ME, including home visits for those severely affected.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow North West said, not much has changed. I still have constituents with ME who are turned down for the personal independence payment, even though they are unable to leave the house for 29 days in a month. People are removed from employment and support allowance and told to go to job interviews, even if they cannot manage to stand in the shower, let alone leave the house or get a job. It is time to move past the idea that if something cannot be tested it cannot be helped.

This debilitating illness takes its toll on men, women and children throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and we simply must do better by them. I would appreciate a response from the Minister on whether there are any plans to do better. If such plans are not in place, when will they be introduced? The 400 sufferers of ME in my constituency request such plans—indeed, they demand them.

4.37 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I thank my constituents who have written to me to share their experiences, both as patients and parents. I also have a close friend who has battled this condition for 18 years. I know that many sufferers find it dismissive to refer to the condition as chronic fatigue syndrome because it sounds so trivial. At very least it should be chronic exhaustion syndrome, because that is what it is—absolute exhaustion. ME affects a quarter of a million people, 10% of whom are children and young people. A quarter of those are so severely affected that they are either housebound or bedbound.

The basic problem is that we do not know the cause of ME. It often seems to start post-viral; I, no doubt like many others here, have had post-viral syndrome, and it can often take weeks or even months to recover from. What is it about ME sufferers that makes the condition become long-term and chronic? That is the crux of the matter. We need biomedical research to consider whether it is an autoimmune cause, a genetic weakness, or a neurological problem. Is it metabolic? There is some interest in whether the mitochondria—the little power packs in the cells—are at fault. Such things need to be considered, and at the moment the only real funding of research is by ME charities.

The UK has not funded any biomedical research since 2012. That makes diagnosis problematic because it is based only on symptoms. We do not have a test because we do not know the cause or what to test for. Naturally enough, I will stick up for doctors and say, “That makes it kinda hard for them.” It becomes a diagnosis of elimination—when they do not find the other obvious causes, the symptoms are put down to ME.

Following on from that, there is simply no treatment. There is no cure because we do not know the cause. There are no drugs coming down the pipeline, no procedures. That means that we are dependent purely on management and support. As has been said, CBT is not a cure or a treatment. It may help some people cope with the depression and mental health issues that come from being so disabled, but it does not tackle the underlying ME.

As has been said, graded exercise can actually make things much worse. The suggestion that it might work was based, as has been said, on the flawed PACE trial published in *The Lancet* in 2011. I think it is quite

sinister that some of the funding for that trial was from the Department for Work and Pensions; that added to the implication of malingering, despite the fact that 90% of sufferers were working before they were diagnosed. That figure drops to 35% afterwards. It was an unblinded study, because it is not possible to hide from people what treatment they are getting. That means that all other aspects should be very strict, yet CBT and GET were promoted to patients as something that would help them. The researchers did not analyse their planned outcomes, which is critical in research. They lowered their defined targets simply because the treatment was failing, and used subjective rather than objective measures. Re-analysis of the PACE study has shown minimal benefit to these treatments; indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) said, some people got worse but still had their treatment classified as a success.

The only thing that has been shown to make a difference to some patients is what is called adaptive pacing—listening to one's body, balancing activity with rest, and planning one's day, or one's weekend activities with the family.

The United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention removed the recommendations of CBT and GET, but as has been said, they have still been NICE recommendations since 2007, and although they are under review, with the results due to come out in 2020—too far away—the NICE website still promotes CBT and GET. There should be a red warning, saying, “Don't follow this. We are looking into it.”

Most of all, we need research to define the underlying cause of this condition, and to develop treatments. We have heard about the £300,000 of funding that the Scottish Government have given to Action for ME to develop peer support projects, but research needs to be on a bigger scale, considering the £3.3 billion economic impact. The US has moved to biomedical research and, as has been said, the UK is still totally focused on psychological research.

In the meantime, until we have answers, the DWP needs to recognise the impact and the disability of ME. GPs, NHS staff and care staff need to provide support, including emotional support, to help manage the condition, and all of us need to recognise the impact of the condition and reduce the stigma that simply adds insult to injury.

4.42 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I start by thanking the hon. Members for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) for securing this important debate. I thank all hon. Members who spoke; it was great that so many did so. Due to time, I shall not list them all.

I thank the charities—MEAction, Action for ME, the ME Association, the M.E. Trust and ME North East—and all the patients who have been in touch with me to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences of living with ME. The ME Association estimates that approximately 250,000 people in Britain are affected by ME; we have heard plenty of moving stories about those individuals today. However, an article published in the *British Medical Journal* in July 2018 reported that 90% of cases are thought to go undiagnosed, and

that people with ME are substantially undercounted, underdiagnosed and undertreated. As we have heard, patients are often passed from pillar to post with dismissals and misdiagnoses, and sometimes left waiting over a year for a diagnosis. I am sure the Minister does not need me to tell him that that does not meet NICE guidelines of diagnosis within four months of the onset of symptoms. The Government should therefore do more, and considering that they are not doing much for patients with ME at the moment, I do not think that that is too much to ask.

The Government do not fund research and clinical care for people with ME at the rate they do for other serious prevalent diseases. As we have heard, the average spent on research for a person living with ME is just £1 a year. According to Action for ME, that represents just 0.02% of all active grants given by the mainstream UK funding agencies. I am therefore concerned that the Government recently confirmed in a written answer that ME research funding is lower now than it was even in 2013-14.

Current treatments of graded exercise therapy and cognitive behaviour therapy have been found to be harmful to patients with ME, and continue the narrative of disbelief and neglect of them, which we have heard about from a number of hon. Members. NICE has already recognised that its guidelines are outdated, and that patients do not receive the full picture on recommended treatments. NICE is updating its clinical guidance on the diagnosis and management of ME, but that is not expected to be published until October 2020. Patients and their families have already waited long enough, so will the Minister work with patients, charities, researchers and NICE to ensure that treatment and care for ME is appropriate?

We have heard today why funding for biomedical research into ME is so desperately needed. According to MEAction, the only year in which the Medical Research Council invested any meaningful sum in biomedical research was 2012, when £1.5 million of funds were ring-fenced. However, no funds have been allocated for biomedical ME research since then.

In the Westminster Hall debate in June last year, I called on the Government to consider funding research, because it is long overdue. Will the Minister commit to doing that today, or will the Government continue to leave it up to the charity sector to do so? Projects such as Invest in ME Research, which has four PhD students researching ME, have been financially supported by patients and their families via crowdfunding in excess of £870,000. That is fantastic, but it should not be left to patients to crowdfund research. More funding for research will enhance healthcare professionals and clinicians' understanding of ME, which will improve the patient experience and debunk the myths of ME being a primarily psychological condition, as we have heard about today. Clinicians must have access to up-to-date research and information so that they can give patients the best possible care and advice.

In some areas, however, that is not the case, as Jennifer Elliot, the CEO of ME North East, has brought to my attention. Jennifer told me of the diminished services available to patients with ME in the north-east region. There are no services at all for young people with ME in the entire north-east. Adult services in Sunderland are closed to patients altogether, and have been for some

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

months, with no date for them to be reinstated. For 20 years, ME North East has been doing all it can to help and support ME patients but, with a severe lack of funding, it is now at crisis point. I am sure that other regions have similar stories, as we have heard today, so will the Minister please consider the loss of services in his response? Will he ensure that the services are reinstated and supported financially by the Government?

Finally, we must ensure that the stigma of ME is tackled. Funding and research will help, but it cannot be right that, as found last year, more than one in five families caring for a child with ME have been referred for child protection proceedings due to school absences and a lack of understanding by the school, as we have heard. I am pleased that the vast majority of those accusations are dismissed in less than a year, but the added stress and burden to families with children suffering with ME can be overwhelming. We therefore need more funding for research, so that we can understand, care for and treat ME, and break down the stigma.

4.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): The two-minute limit produced an impressive result, showing what can be done in the Chamber, but let me issue a plea to the Backbench Business Committee. I know it is unusual for Ministers to make comments like this, but I reckon that sometimes doing less and doing it better is preferable to trying to squeeze two really important debates into a very short space of time. Perhaps the Committee will listen to my plea.

I thank those who have contributed to the debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), who spoke in his usual style, the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), whom I have heard mention her constituent before, the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones), who I thought gave the best speech—the prize goes to him—and the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin).

I also, of course, thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for introducing the debate. I think I am right in saying that this is the third debate on this subject that she has tabled and been granted in the last 12 months. I applaud her dedication, and her passion for ensuring that awareness of ME is kept very high. I echo the thanks given by the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) to all the charities that are working in this space, and I welcome the ladies from the Millions Missing campaign

who are in the Public Gallery. I thank them for coming to listen to our debate; I am sorry that it has been so rushed.

The Government do not for one minute underestimate ME. As we heard from the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), the truth is that we do not understand the underlying causes, and there is no single diagnostic test to identify it. Although some patients—very few—improve and recover, there is currently no cure. We know that the condition has a devastating impact, and we have heard some stories about that today. It has a complex range of symptoms which cause great difficulties for physicians, including disabling fatigue, a flu-like malaise and neurological problems. We have also heard about the effect on families, friends, carers, schools and housing.

No one mentioned the powerful film “Unrest” today, so let me mention it briefly in passing. It won an award at the Sundance film festival a couple of years ago. That was a powerful presentation, if ever I saw one, of the impact that ME can have on people’s lives. I will not say any more about it, because last time I did so someone accused me of doing a film review instead of responding to the debate—which I think was slightly harsh, but that is what social media does for you. I thought that the hon. Member for Ceredigion, who is still in the Chamber, put it very well: although we give constituents’ stories in this place, we cannot for one minute begin to understand what it must be like to suffer from this condition. Those who have seen the film will know that it literally puts people flat on their backs, sometimes for years.

We have heard a lot about the medical profession today, and I think—the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire touched on this—that the profession has had a bad rap, some of it deserved. As we have heard, the difficulties in diagnosis mean that patients with ME often experience great delays in receiving the treatment and support that they require. Recognising the need for GPs to be aware of the condition, the Royal College of General Practitioners includes it as a vital area of clinical knowledge that GPs should have as part of their qualifying exams, featuring it in the guidance for the applied knowledge test, which is a key part of those exams.

The RCGP has also produced an online course on ME for GPs. It highlights many of the common misconceptions, and considers the challenges for primary care professionals that surround this complex condition. Nevertheless, once they are qualified, clinicians are responsible for ensuring that their own clinical knowledge remains up to date—it is not for Ministers to go on educating GPs; that is one of the jobs of the RCGP—and for their ongoing learning. I made clear in the last debate, and I will make clear again, that that activity should continue, and should take into account new research and developments in guidance such as that produced and updated by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West said that people felt that they had been fobbed off. They should never be fobbed off by the medical profession, and I should be very concerned to hear of any examples of that.

Mr Bailey: Will the Minister give way?

Steve Brine: No, I will not, because everyone had a chance to speak and wanted the Minister to respond.

As I have said, I think that GPs have had a hard rap this afternoon. Before the debate I spoke to Helen Stokes-Lampard, who chairs the RCGP, because I anticipated that that would happen. I asked her whether she would be willing to come to the House if I were to facilitate a roundtable—perhaps involving the all-party parliamentary group on myalgic encephalomyelitis, which we hope will be reconstituted, but certainly involving the sponsors of today's debate. She is very willing to do that, and I think it would be a positive development. If the hon. Member for Glasgow North West would like to be part of that, perhaps we can get in touch and make it happen. The door will be open.

The NICE guidance is clear on a number of important points. There is no one form of treatment to suit every patient; that is self-evident. The needs and preferences of patients should absolutely be taken into account. Doctors should explain that no single strategy will be successful for all patients, which is a hallmark of this condition. In common with people receiving any NHS care, ME patients have the absolute right to refuse or withdraw from any part of their treatment; nobody is making this happen. Those with severe symptoms may require access to a wider range of support, managed by a specialist.

NICE guidance supports commissioners to plan, fund and deliver ME services. As we have heard in this debate, and in others secured by the hon. Member for Glasgow North West, the use of CBT and GET in treating ME has long been controversial for patient groups, charities and some clinicians, who are very divided on this condition—understatement of the afternoon, perhaps. That began with the publication of the NICE guidance in 2007, and continued with the PACE trial. However, as Members clearly, from what I have heard this afternoon, know, NICE is updating the ME guidance and will examine the concerns about the PACE trial and whether there are implications for its current recommendations.

The updated guidance is due, but sadly not until October next year, and until then the existing guidance will remain current. I will look into the request made by the hon. Lady and others for an early statement from NICE, but NICE is an internationally respected independent organisation; if we did not have NICE, we would have to invent it. The time allotted for the development of the new guidance will allow all the evidence to be considered and all the voices to be heard, and I am determined to make sure that happens.

I think every single speaker—I have a list here of who spoke and what they said—mentioned research. As set out in previous debates, the Government invest £1.7 billion a year in health research via the National Institute for Health Research and the MRC through UK Research and Innovation. Together, the NIHR and MRC welcome high-quality applications for research into all aspects of ME, which would absolutely include biomedical research. The MRC has had a cross-board highlight notice on ME open since 2003, updated in 2011, inviting innovative research proposals, alongside a bespoke funding call in that year.

ME research remains an area of very high strategic importance for the MRC. I do not have time to go into all the money granted. Members have said this afternoon, “We must surely fund more research,” but Ministers do not sit in the Department of Health and Social Care and decide on what to do research. One of the great

legacies of the late Baroness Jowell was that she understood in brain tumour research that we need to stimulate that research community to come forward with the best research proposals that then can be successful in bidding for funding. The truth is—sometimes it is a hard and inconvenient truth to hear—there have not been good enough research proposals in the ME space, partly because of the stigma—a point raised very well by the hon. Member for Lincoln; she looks delighted that I have mentioned her—and partly because of the division in the medical community. We need people to come forward with good research proposals in this space; that can only be advantageous.

I want to give the hon. Member for Glasgow North West a chance to conclude, but I thank her for raising the issue again on behalf of those affected, including many of my constituents who have contacted me asking if I would be able to attend today's debate; I was able to say, “Yeah, there's a fairly good chance that I will pop in.” One of the Whips present on the Treasury Bench, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), asked me to mention her constituent, Rosalind Amor, who has been in touch with her many times on this subject.

The Government fully recognise the strength of feeling on this issue, as we do for all those living with conditions and disorders which research is unable yet to help us fully understand. That is why we remain fully committed to delivering significant investment in our research programmes and infrastructure, but we need people to come forward with quality proposals.

4.59 pm

Carol Monaghan: I thank all Members who have stayed behind once again on a Thursday afternoon, particularly the Members who sponsored the debate, and especially the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). I also thank the ME community for their lobbying and presence here today in the Gallery, and the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate. We had some very clear asks for the Minister, which he has responded to in part. On the question of medical research, I am sure that many researchers will have heard what he said. However, it is notable that although there is some excellent biomedical research going on just now, it is being funded by charities, and not by the Government. The Government need to take this seriously.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls on the Government to provide increased funding for biomedical research for the diagnosis and treatment of ME; supports the suspension of Graded Exercise Therapy and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy as means of treatment; supports updated training of GPs and medical professionals to ensure that they are equipped with clear guidance on the diagnosis of ME and appropriate management advice to reflect international consensus on best practice; and is concerned about the current trends of subjecting ME families to unjustified child protection procedures.

Karen Lee: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did actually mention the film “Unrest”, and I am sure that *Hansard* will bear me out on that. My constituents would never forgive me if I did not point that out.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The hon. Lady clearly appreciates that that is not a point of order, but she has corrected the record and, as she says, I am sure that *Hansard* will bear her out.

Just before we adjourn the House, I am afraid that once again I have to inform the House of a further correction to the number of votes for Members for English constituencies in the Division on Lords amendment 36 to the Tenant Fees Bill yesterday. There was a technical hitch at that time, and the figures were announced as: Ayes 261, Noes 194. The figures should have been: Ayes 263, Noes 194. The result is unaffected, but the record has been put straight.

Newcastle United Football Club: Regulation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Jo Churchill.*)

5 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, I must start by declaring an interest: I am a Newcastle United fan. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] Thank you. When I raised this with the House authorities, I was told I did not need to declare it as I “derived no real benefit” from it. I would dispute that. Supporting Newcastle United has brought me great joy, and a sense of belonging, shared purpose and community, as well as the opportunity to watch the beautiful game at its beautiful best in that cathedral to football, St James’ Park. But it has also brought me deep despair and disappointment, particularly in the last few years. I also wanted to present myself in my Newcastle team shirt today, but I was told in no uncertain terms that that was not allowed. Instead, I have settled for a Newcastle Libraries T-shirt with our city on it.

Newcastle United is at the heart of the city. Unlike Liverpool or London, we have only one professional football team and we are united in our support. And what support it is! Hon. Members may recall that, back when we had regional development authorities and investment in our regions, the One NorthEast tourism slogan was “Passionate people, passionate places”. Well, the passion of Newcastle is football. We have consistently high attendances—some of the highest in the league until recent times—and the economy of the city is influenced by the success on the pitch. If we are winning, we are singing—and spending. If we are losing, the gloom hovers over all our heads like individual storm clouds. It is part of our culture.

Anyone who moves to Newcastle—and we certainly have an unparalleled quality of life, so I recommend that everyone does so—will find it an open, welcoming and warm city, but whereas elsewhere people might get away with talking about the weather, in Newcastle they will need to know how the Toon are doing. It is part of our mental wellbeing—90 minutes spent at the Gallowgate end would be enough to convince anyone of that—and this is true not only in Newcastle, as my hon. Friends—and fellow fans—the Members for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) and for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) can attest. They would have liked to be here today.

Football is the lifeblood of many cities, particularly in the north, and that remains the case despite changes that have seen money, not fans, become the driving force of football thanks to the creation of the Premier League and billions of pounds from Sky Sports. While I will speak mainly about Newcastle United football club, its finances and its owner, much of what I say applies to football as a whole.

Since 2008, Newcastle United has been owned by Mike Ashley, who also owns Sports Direct, House of Fraser and several other retail businesses. In July last year, I presented a petition reflecting the concerns of fans groups, such as If Rafa Goes We Go and the Magpie Group, and that caught the attention of Mr Ashley, something which I had been unable to do as the MP for St James’ Park, despite writing to him to ask for a meeting. It is testimony to the power of Parliament

that, after announcing this debate, I was able to meet Mr Ashley on Saturday. I committed to Mr Ashley that I would make no personal attacks on him—I will not avail myself of parliamentary privilege to do so—and I say to all the fans that personal attacks on Mr Ashley or his employees are wrong and hurt our cause.

I shared with Mr Ashley my concerns about financial transparency and funding, and he was passionate in his defence of his investments and in saying that he has not taken any money out of the club other than, he said, short-term funding on a temporary basis. That, he said, was in contrast with the period prior to his ownership. He also emphasised that he had made it clear the club must stand on its own two feet and can spend only the money it generates. Well, to put it diplomatically, we disagreed. The meeting was open, frank and robust, with strong views on both sides, and I hope to continue the dialogue. Indeed, this debate is part of that dialogue. It has to be, because I have still to receive a reply to my letter of last year in which I raised several critical issues that I have also raised in correspondence with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the previous Sports Minister, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch).

Mr Ashley said that the club can spend only what it generates—a form of austerity economics of which those on the Tory Benches could be proud—but Newcastle United needs investment to reach its potential. Earnings have been hit by uncertainty and the bad feeling between fans and the owner, but even if we accept what he says, how are we to know what income the club generates? As the Secretary of State said in his letter to me, clubs are treated as any other private business and must submit accounts to Companies House. I am not an accountant, but I have an MA in business administration, studied corporate finance and worked in business for 20 years. However, I have looked at the NUFC accounts and cannot work out what is going on.

Faith in Newcastle's accounts has not been helped by comments made by Mr Ashley at the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee last December, when he said:

“People cheat. That is what businesses do.”

He also said:

“Accountants are able—this is their job, by the way—to move the numbers about pretty much at will.”

That seems to be what is happening at Newcastle. Mr Ashley's ownership of the club passes through four separate companies: Mash Holdings, St James Holdings, Newcastle United and Newcastle United Football Holdings. In addition, dozens of other companies are associated with the club and Mike Ashley, and managing director Lee Charnley has more than 30 other directorships. Newcastle United's accounts do not include a cash flow statement, although having one is a requirement of reputable accounting. All that seems designed to make it harder to follow the money and see what income is being generated.

I hope that the Minister will agree that that is unacceptable and that she will commit to ensuring that the following income streams can be identified. First, TV payments. These should be more than £123 million, but they are not reported separately. Secondly, merchandise. Mr Ashley turned the club shop into a Sports Direct shop, but the revenues from Sports Direct do not go to

the club. Thirdly, player sales. The way in which the purchase and sale of players is booked and amortised is in itself arcane. Newcastle United is consistently reported as having one of the lowest spends on players in the English premiership, and many estimates indicate the club has actually made a profit on player sales overall during Mr Ashley's ownership. Does the Minister agree that we should be able to calculate that sum?

Fourthly, advertising. Sports Direct hoardings are all over St James' Park and, yet again, we do not see the revenue in the accounts. Finally, land sales. Next to St James' Park is an area called Strawberry Place, which Mr Ashley allegedly purchased from the club for less than it was worth—we do not know, because the price is not visible. What we do know is that Strawberry Place is being developed for student accommodation. Selling the land stopped any further expansion of the stadium, and fans believe that the profit from the sale of that land will not benefit the club, but how are we to know? There is also an issue about land and property apparently sold to companies called Project J Newco No.39 and Project J Newco No.40, which appear to be connected to Mr Ashley, but there is no evidence of any payment.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Has the hon. Lady seen Deloitte's “Football Money League” report? It seems to identify some of those incomes, such as £27 million for match day, £143 million for broadcasting and £32 million for commercial, figures that we can only dream of for Walsall football club.

Chi Onwurah: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's interest in Newcastle United, and I have seen the figures in Deloitte's report, which make Newcastle United the 19th richest club in the world. My concern is that those figures should be reported visibly for all clubs, particularly in the Premier League, where there is so much money going around.

Mr Ashley appears to be able to move assets between his privately owned companies at will, despite the club being a historic cultural icon and the other companies being of somewhat less reputable status and longevity.

We do not know what income the club is generating and whether that money is being used on the club. What is certain is that this transfer window, like the last one, is closing without money being spent on players or training facilities. Mr Ashley's principal investment in the club has been in the form of loans, rather than equity—presumably to protect his financial exposure. Those loans are interest free, which is good, but as loans they can be called in if needed, so the sustainability of Newcastle United depends on his other businesses being successful.

That leads me to Mr Ashley's business practices more generally. The BEIS Committee likened them to a Victorian workhouse, with employees being paid below the minimum wage. A “Dispatches” investigation found employees were publicly shamed for talking, spending too long in the toilet or falling ill, and lived in fear of being fired. Now Mr Ashley says that he is going to save the high street. Forgive me for being somewhat cynical, having seen how he has saved Newcastle United.

Newcastle United is an asset to our city, a cultural giant in our lives. I explicitly pay tribute to the fantastic Newcastle United Foundation, which uses the power and passion of football to do great work across the

[Chi Onwurah]

north-east and is, in part, funded by the club, although again that funding is not transparent. The Premier League also uses some of its vast wealth for the benefit of local communities, at least what can be spared from expenditure such as its £5 million farewell gift to departing executive chairman Richard Scudamore.

Neither Newcastle United nor the Premier League consider themselves to be accountable to fans. As many constituents have made clear to me, fans feel powerless before the slow destruction of what we believe in. Newcastle United is the beating heart of our city, and we should be able to protect it.

That goes to the heart of the matter. Why is it that a person can buy a stately home in the wilds of Wiltshire and not be able to change even a window frame, but they can buy Newcastle United, which is in the heart of Newcastle, and strip it of its assets without so much as an eyebrow being raised? Why is football left largely to regulate itself when other businesses, from pubs to social media companies, must meet social requirements?

I know that the Minister recognises the importance of football clubs and the custodian role of owners, because she said so during the recent debate on Coventry City. Will she now put that recognition into action? Will she launch an inquiry into the reporting requirements of premiership clubs, using Newcastle United as a test case? Will she ensure that that inquiry answers the financial questions that I have raised? Will she ensure that supporters have a voice on football club boards, as Labour has called for? Will she make reputable custodianship a requirement of club ownership? The fit and proper person test is clearly not fit for purpose.

It is with great sadness that I say that I have come to the conclusion that football is broken. Its governance has not kept pace with its income, and money has won over sport. We cannot turn back the clock, but we can put in place effective regulation so that financial transparency enables the beautiful game's true splendour to shine forth once more.

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Mims Davies): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) not only on her outfit, but on securing this wonderful and important debate. I was wearing black and white shoes this morning, and I thought I might have had to declare some sort of interest. I understand the reasons behind her sartorial elegance this evening.

Before I respond fully to today's debate, I will acknowledge that the search for Cardiff City football club's Argentine striker Emiliano Sala, and his pilot David Ibbotson, had to be called off this afternoon. We offer sincere condolences to their families and friends at this deeply concerning time. It has been a difficult few days in the game.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the Minister for what she has said, and I echo her comments. I was at St James's Park to see Cardiff City last week. It must be a terrible time for the family and friends, and for Cardiff City fans.

Mims Davies: I turn to the points that have been raised in this debate. Newcastle United are 17th in the premier league, with some uncertainty about the manager

and no signings so far in the transfer window, but last week they had a good win in the FA cup. I would like to say that not all football clubs are feeling that pain, but there others at the bottom of the premier mix, including Cardiff, Fulham, Burnley, Huddersfield, Southampton and Crystal Palace. I have to declare an interest when it comes to Southampton, which is very near to my constituency and has many fans. I also understand the impact on the economy when they are not winning.

I am surprised not to see the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) here, because we are talking about football—I am surprised not to be interrupted by him. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) spoke about the love and affection in north Walsall for the football club there. I was in that area recently to visit a local school, and there was huge affection for the club. The area has so much to look forward to with the Commonwealth games. It is not all doom and gloom.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I have to confess that I am here under slightly false pretences. I came to take part in a debate about a fantastic football club that wears black and white stripy jerseys and black shorts, only to discover that it was Newcastle United, not my own Halstead Town football club. The passion that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) displayed for her local team is matched by the passion I display for mine, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to take part, briefly, in this debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am not sure it is in order for the hon. Gentleman just to mention a team because they play in black and white like Epping Town.

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) for reminding me of the importance of the grassroots. We had an important debate earlier in the week about facilities and what the grassroots mean to football up and down the land. We need to make sure we protect our stadiums and our future stars.

The Government wholeheartedly agree that football should absolutely be supported and that fans have every right to ask questions about those who run their clubs. We saw protests at Bolton earlier this week, and at Blackpool and Charlton in recent times. Such protests demonstrate the discontent that can exist when fans believe that the ownership is not working in the best interests of the club at all times. Over recent years, the Government have invested significant time in finding ways to improve the relationship that fans have with their clubs. We want to see owners working with fans and seeing them as an integral part of their clubs' successes, and I want all fans to see that, up and down the game.

The Government's expert working group on football supporter ownership and engagement, which reported in 2016, resulted in an important rule change in football. All clubs in the top four divisions must now ensure that there is open dialogue between the owners and senior executives and the fans on the matters of most importance to the running of clubs. These meetings must now take place each season, and they are leading the way in enabling fans to be better informed about their club's

financial standing, future plans and other matters of real importance to them so that they can help to set the agendas.

Last summer, the Government took a further step in listening to fans' concerns when we asked the FA to carry out a comprehensive review of the ownership of football clubs and stadiums. The intention of the review is to learn why many of our clubs have become separated from the ownership of their homes, so that going forward we can advise clubs and fans on how they can work together to protect these important community assets.

The issues came into sharp focus with the problems at Dulwich Hamlet, but the problems of clubs becoming entangled in land and development disputes are not exclusive to non-league clubs. As we have heard, they can occur across all levels of football. With the help of the Secretary of State, we are working to help to find a solution for the fans of Coventry City.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will know that I was very involved in Coventry in my previous life. It is not necessarily about whether the club owns its stadium—in fact, in Coventry, it is the council ownership that has protected the stadium for football—but whether the owners really have the fans at heart. There have been many cases in which they have not, which is why we need a review of the structure and of how fans engage, not only in Coventry and Newcastle, but in Torquay.

Mims Davies: Absolutely, and I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. His interest in this goes back some time—[*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) behind me raises the importance of Bury Town to Bury St Edmunds. These clubs really do matter to our communities and, as I said, that was very much the focus of the debate earlier in the week.

When it comes to club ownership, the football authorities have been progressive in recent years. They have needed to be to react to the huge investment and interest that there now is across the world in owning our football clubs. In our top four football leagues, the rules now require public disclosure of the ultimate beneficial owners of all clubs, with the full chain of ownership disclosed to the relevant football authority. The current owners and directors test has been strengthened, and it bears favourable comparison with that expected in corporate circles.

New owners have to meet the Premier League or English Football League board and provide detail on the sources and sufficiency of the funding they have in place. Clubs must submit information on their financial structure, any proposed investment and a business plan demonstrating that all liabilities can be met for the next 12 months, and clubs must submit independently audited accounts each season. If these are not filed at Companies House, clubs should take steps to ensure that they are. Clubs must also continue to work with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs over any tax owed. Together with the adoption of fair pay rules, the financial state of football clubs in this country is better now than at any time in the last 20 years, but I take the points made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central about income streams, shop sales, player sales and the other wide-ranging issues she raised, and I will be happy to send her a fuller response afterwards. I want to reassure her, however, that we are not complacent.

The football authorities should not be complacent either. In my regular meetings with them, I will look for further assurances that they continue to review the rules constantly, ensure ongoing transparency around the ownership of clubs, make sufficient inquiries into the suitability of owners and ensure that, financially, our clubs continue to live within their means. The football authorities have agreed to keep the owner and director test under regular review and to listen to supporters' concerns about club ownership. I will also be asking for an update on the role of the FA's regulatory authority, which was set up in 2012 in response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and Government regulation around the game's governance.

The football authorities need to take a good look at the rules and judge impartially whether clubs are in compliance. There are existing structures, but if we need to go further, I will be unafraid to give an additional appropriate focus. I will also be listening to supporters' groups. I know that the general cost of travelling to and attending games must be kept under constant review, and I will continue to look for a fair deal for fans. I appreciate that football is heavily reliant on broadcasting contracts, but clubs must consider their fans when it comes to scheduling matches and changes to kick-off times.

I come now to the fortunes to Newcastle United. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central will be keen to hear this. We can all agree that this is one of our biggest and best-supported clubs, and the city, adorned in black and white, is one of the most visible and wonderful of sights. St James' Park sits loud and proud in the centre of the city. Newcastle is a city that loves its football club and wants the very best for it, as we have heard today. Part of the case made today is that Newcastle United is currently in the hands of someone who is not a lifelong fan. If we looked at other clubs, we would probably find that plenty of owners did not meet this traditional expectation, but that does not mean they are running their clubs badly or unsustainably or without taking a huge interest in the clubs succeeding.

As the Government set out in response to the petition the hon. Lady presented last summer, to the best of our knowledge Newcastle's owner is complying with all the financial reporting and ownership criteria I ran through earlier, but I have a list of responses to come back to. The club is also meeting its obligation to engage with supporters and discuss matters important to the running of the club. That does not mean, however, that Mr Ashley, or any other owner for that matter, could not go further than simply complying with the league rules. There is always room for progress.

Mr Ashley has made no secret of the fact that he is looking to sell the club, but until such time as he does, he remains the person responsible for its custodianship. Like every owner, his primary responsibility is to ensure that the club is financially secure, and despite the concerns raised, I am certain that Mr Ashley is shrewd enough to understand that if he wants to sell the club and realise its best value, he needs to look after it.

In summary, it is important that the issues of most concern to football fans continue to be heard. I will continue to listen to supporters up and down the land about their concerns over ownership, and will be meeting the Unified Football Supporters' Organisation on 5 March.

[Mims Davies]

I will continue to work to hold the football authorities to account, and we must ensure that there is continued assessment of the regulations that are in place. We must continue to encourage good ownership, proper financial reporting and meaningful dialogue with supporters. We must support our grassroots, working with the Premier League, and make sure that we have a pipeline of young footballers coming into the game. I have not mentioned women footballers and other areas in relation to participation. I take the concerns very seriously. I will

write to the hon. Lady on all those points, and I thank her for the opportunity to respond to this Adjournment debate this afternoon.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We could possibly wish good luck to every team that plays in black and white. That is not in order, but there we are.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 24 January 2019

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Knife Crime

1.30 pm

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered tackling knife crime.

It is always a pleasure to serve when you are in the Chair, Ms Buck. First of all, I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing a debate about this hugely important issue. In particular, I thank its Chair—my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns)—as well as the other members of the Committee and its Clerk, Sarah Hartwell-Naguib, who has been extremely helpful in assisting me to put together this debate.

The main spring for the debate was, very sadly, the murder of 14-year-old Jaden Moodie just over two weeks ago. The attack took place in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), albeit right on its boundary with my constituency of Leyton and Wanstead. The family live in Walthamstow. Both of my Waltham Forest neighbours—my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith)—will speak later in the debate.

To many people, that appalling incident in Leyton two weeks ago was a new low in a wave of violent crime that has been sweeping across and beyond London, because we are dealing with county lines and all sorts of other related issues. That wave of violent crime seemed to start some months ago and it has not abated; there is no sign that this knife and gun crime is going to disappear, and we have become quite used to it.

Before I continue, I would like apologise on behalf of two hon. Members who supported my application for this debate, but who unfortunately cannot be here today. Over the past few months, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) has, week in, week out, during business questions and Home Office questions, raised concerns about problems in his constituency. I also apologise on behalf of the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who chairs the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which recently completed a report on adverse childhood experiences. It covered trauma, abuse, neglect and so on, and found a clear correlation between those experiences, school exclusion and mental health problems. It also found that early intervention—on which the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green has done a great deal of work—is vital, and many other reports have come to the same conclusion.

To some extent, we have become inured to the violence on our streets. It is certainly happening across east London, but it is also happening elsewhere in the country. Every week there seem to be more news stories about

stabblings, gun crime and related activities. However, what happened a couple of weeks ago seems to an awful lot of people to be a new low. To some extent—I am not talking about specific cases, but speaking in generalities—there have been profound shifts in society and profound changes in the way in which society is structured and how people live. A lot of those profound changes underlie what we have seen over the past few months or the past year. Structures that used to provide security and safety, particularly for children, have been undermined and in some cases have completely disappeared.

I have met and dealt with many youngsters who come from profoundly chaotic backgrounds and have become involved in gangs, partly because doing so provides them with some sort of security. To give a couple of examples—I cannot give too many, because I am talking about people in my constituency and they might be identified—a few months ago I remember meeting a 14-year-old whose father was in prison and whose mother had just disappeared. He was living by himself in a council flat and having to look after himself at the age of 14. A person does not stand much of a chance in those circumstances. I can remember another, slightly older but not much older, who was living in a bail hostel 20 miles from Waltham Forest and whose exclusion order meant that he could not go to Waltham Forest. I am not commenting on the rights and wrongs of what he had done—which I am familiar with but do not want to talk about—but those two cases give a sense of the gravity of the situation and the shifts we are dealing with.

There is no magic wand for youngsters in that position; there is no magic bullet that will sort it all out and make their lives so much more secure, happier and safer. However, we cannot just throw up our hands and say, “It is all far too complicated. It is all far too profound and difficult, and there is nothing we can do about it.” To even start to tackle these issues, we need to start to talk about resources, because at the moment they are simply not there to cope with the consequences—I am talking to an extent about consequences, rather than the root cause.

I will come on to the root cause in a little while, but we certainly need early intervention. We need the resources to tackle both the causes and the consequences, and the stark reality is that the resources are not there. Both Waltham Forest and Redbridge—I cover six wards in Waltham Forest and two and one third in Redbridge—have faced huge cuts in the numbers of police officers. The exact numbers are not clear, but there have certainly been profound and extensive cuts in the numbers of officers.

Police stations have also been closed. When I was elected MP for Leyton and Wanstead nearly nine years ago, there were three police stations in my constituency. Now, there are none. Every single one has closed. Wanstead police station was one of the oldest in London, and while this is slightly beside the point of the debate, its closure seems to have led to a very sharp rise in burglaries in my constituency, particularly aggravated burglaries. It seems like common sense that if a police unit has to come from Ilford—which is quite a long way away—rather than Wanstead itself, burglars are going to work out that that is the case. We have therefore seen a rise in aggravated burglary rates in Romford, with associated violence in many cases.

[John Cryer]

Waltham Forest has one of the highest rates of serious youth violence in London. To give one example, in 2017-18 the rate for serious youth violence leading to injury was 9.9 per thousand of the population. That is 18% above the London average, and with a clear upward trend over not just the past year or two, but year after year.

As an aside, it is a historical quirk that Waltham Forest has been categorised as an outer London borough. The reality is that we are dealing with virtually all of the serious problems experienced by inner London boroughs, but because of the strange decision made in 1964—the year I was born, so it is going back a while; well, not that far, but Members know what I mean—we are regarded as an outer London borough. I have always thought that the judgment made all those years ago was perverse. If Waltham Forest were categorised as an inner London borough, there would at least be some further resources available for police and other agencies.

In the 12 months to July 2018, Waltham Forest experienced the sixth highest volume of knife crime resulting in injuries—not knife crime per se, but knife crime leading to serious injury—to young people in London. At the same time, there seems to have been a rise in the number of schoolchildren, including those as young as year 6, getting involved in gang activity. Again, those are all upward trends; it is not that there has been a levelling off or that the numbers have been going up over just the past year or two. Year after year, there has been an upward trend in involvement in gang activity and in knife crime and related activities.

For some time, Waltham Forest Council has run a widely praised anti-gang strategy and a violence reduction unit, but that council has lost well over £100 million in central Government funding over the past few years. Redbridge has lost a similar sum, so across both boroughs, perhaps £250 million in central Government funding has been lost. The local police and council, among other agencies, are working together, as we are regularly and rightly told to do by Ministers. I am keen to praise those police officers, social workers, volunteers and many others who work long and hard to prevent violent crime and to tackle its consequences.

To address those fundamental issues against a background of a huge loss of resources places those agencies, volunteers, officers and social workers in an impossible position. Sometimes it is an actively dangerous position. That is why it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit social workers, particularly for youth services. The physical danger is obvious. They have had a pay freeze and they have not got the support, so it is no wonder that they are not joining the service. Between 2011 and 2017, Waltham Forest's youth service budget suffered cuts amounting to 67%. We have reached a stage where we have hardly any youth social workers left in Waltham Forest, which is one of the biggest boroughs in London in terms of square footage or acreage. We have a youth service today that has been decimated by the cuts.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, who is making a powerful speech. In Nottingham, we face a similar situation to the one he faces in London. He mentioned

my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker). Resources for youth services are crucial for diversionary activities for, let us face it, young boys in particular, so that they can go into positive, productive activities—music, sport and so forth—that absorb their energies and take their attention away from perhaps less productive activities. He is absolutely making the right point. I hope he will extract some change in policy from the Minister.

John Cryer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are talking about prevention rather than cure, and it is always better to engage in a policy of prevention. I will say one thing that slightly contradicts what he said, which is that, increasingly, girls are getting involved in gang activity. At one time it was very much male-dominated. To some extent that is still the case, but there are increasing numbers of female gang members getting involved in related criminal activity. We are certainly seeing that across east London, at least.

As well as youth services being cut to the bone in Waltham Forest, mental health services are also being cut. Many Ministers have said over the years that mental health services have been seen as a poor relation in the national health service, and that has to change. There is little sign of that changing when mental health facilities are closing on a regular basis, including in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, when budgets are being squeezed and when posts are being left open. We are talking about prevention, rather than cure, and mental health services are doing that right on the frontline. It is better to start there, rather than tackling the consequences when things have gone completely wrong.

It is worth mentioning some of the Mayor's initiatives, including the London-wide violent crime taskforce, the Young Londoners fund and increased investment in the London gang exit service. The Young Londoners fund is £45 million, which sounds like a large amount of money—actually, it is—but that is spread across one of the biggest cities on the planet. It does not go very far per borough, despite the best efforts of the Assembly and the Mayor. City Hall has a London-wide programme to provide knife wands to every school, but, again, that deals only with the consequences. When we get to a stage where we are using knife wands in schools, including primary schools, we are in a pretty desperate area. We have to deal with the causes, not use knife wands, which are hardly a magic bullet in anyone's analysis.

We desperately need joined-up policy approaches and joined-up working between the various agencies. Ministers regularly and rightly talk about that, but we also need a properly resourced range of agencies. It is not just about the police; there are the local authorities and the voluntary services, many of whose budgets are being cut or have even disappeared. People are working increasingly long and hard to prevent the sort of problems under discussion. I will mention for a second time the efforts of social workers, police officers and others who put in a tremendous effort to try to make our society better, but it is an uphill battle because they do not have the resources any more, given the profound cuts.

We are getting to the stage where there needs to be an inquiry into youth crime and related activities. Perhaps that should be a Select Committee inquiry, but we have had those in the past. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) is leading a violent crime inquiry, but I wonder whether we could have an

inquiry under the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992. Such an inquiry could subpoena people and force them to appear as witnesses, which Select Committee and other bodies are unable to do. A public inquiry could also listen to young people on the receiving end of criminal activity, the attentions of gangs and all the other related issues. In Select Committees, it is more difficult to hear the reality of what is going on out there. A public inquiry could listen to the voices of young people, as we heard to some extent on last night's BBC programme, but we need a proper inquiry that will come to conclusions and be conducted by someone who understands the causes and consequences of what we are dealing with—that wave of crime sweeping across London.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) said, the wave is also sweeping across other parts of the country. The midlands, the north, the south-east, Essex and Kent are all affected by the issue. County lines are reaching out further and further, and they are causing mayhem, often in areas that do not have a history of that kind of criminal activity. I would like a public inquiry, and I am interested to hear the Minister's response.

1.46 pm

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I had not expected to be called so early, Ms Buck, so I have rather been taken by surprise. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) for securing this important and timely debate. He is my predecessor as MP for Hornchurch, so he will no doubt share my concern that the London Borough of Havering, while still a low-crime borough, has seen a worrying rise in gang activity, particularly focused around the economic hub of Romford. We have regrettably seen the use of knives in a number of recent incidents.

While my constituency has not experienced the same level of gang activity, when a crime involving a knife takes place it sends shockwaves through the community. One phenomenon we have recently experienced is young people from neighbouring boroughs using the transport system to come into economic hubs such as Upminster and Hornchurch to intimidate shopkeepers with threats of weapons and to mug schoolchildren, who often might be carrying a parent's credit card, or using or wearing expensive technology or clothing.

My constituents rightly ask whether the police have enough funding, and that undoubtedly must be a priority area for Government going forward. Thankfully, that has been recognised. Following meetings before Christmas with the Home Secretary and Prime Minister, I was pleased to see that the funding available to police and crime commissioners will be increased by up to £813 million. That is the biggest annual increase since 2010; it protects the Met's grant funding in real terms and gives the Mayor the chance to raise an additional £81 million if he deems it necessary. That means that the Met will see a total increase in funding of up to £172 million next year. I very much hope that some of that can be dedicated to a more visible policing operation and to looking at previously successful operations with knife arches and amnesties.

Money needs to be concentrated not just on an increased police presence on our streets, but on analysts and detectives who can look at crime trends and build strong cases against criminals higher up the food chain. I was

interested to read some of the reports last year from the National Crime Agency, which attributed some of the increase in street violence to the tightening grip of Albanian crime gangs on the UK's cocaine market. By forming direct relationships with producers and linking with existing UK gangs, Albanian crime gangs have been able to lower the cost of cocaine, making it more affordable for smaller, younger street gangs to get involved in drug dealing. The lure of easy money and a sense of disenfranchisement from mainstream society regrettably mean that a ready supply of teenagers have been willing to act as drug runners. Vicious disputes and rivalries between such gangs, often ramped up on social media, have led to the completely needless deaths of children.

We must therefore focus on cracking down on other parts of the crime chain, while pulling vulnerable young people in a more positive direction. It has been noted today, and by crime analysts, that many of the young people we are losing to knife crime were not attending school. I very much welcome Ofsted's focus on school exclusions as a performance measure going forward, but, as has been noted, pressures on other services have led to gaps through which vulnerable young people are falling.

Last year, I met Sally Miller, a councillor in Elm Park who acts as an appropriate adult for young people involved in crime. That has led her to witness countless interviews between the police and young people who have been arrested for carrying a blade. One of her consistent observations is how little those young people fear being referred to youth offending teams.

Havering appears to have a well-performing youth offending team with good outcomes, but in this context good outcomes means a 33% reoffending rate, compared with a national average of 42%. A third of young people reoffending in our borough is still too high. A tendency to reoffend is much more common in complex cases where children have grown up in households in which violence is commonplace, school is seen as optional, and the abuse of drugs and alcohol is the norm.

When I wrote to the Ministry of Justice about youth offending teams, it was suggested to me that, when sentencing children, we ought to look at not only deterrence but the child's welfare and the aim of preventing reoffending. That is where the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead raised many valid points about gaps in local authority services and social services.

The most intensive of the community sentences used by youth offending teams is a youth rehabilitation order. That can include up to 18 requirements, including electronic monitoring and curfew, unpaid work, drug and alcohol treatment, mental health treatment, and education. Such interventions require the system to be firing on many cylinders.

I was pleased to see the Education Secretary dedicate more funding recently to special educational needs, which can affect many of the young people involved in this kind of crime. I also commend the work of the third sector in trying to encourage young people away from crime. Tomorrow I will attend an assembly about Harold Hill by the charity You and Me to see how it equips young people with the confidence to step away from negative spirals of activity.

Will the Minister let us know whether police resources are being kept under review, in spite of the increases to which I referred? I am also keen to hear about progress

[Julia Lopez]

in the National Crime Agency on cracking down on international drug dealers, including whether there have been any deportations and whether the NCA is working in-country with international police forces to crack down on international crime operations.

Finally, I would be grateful for the Minister's comments on whether she feels her own work on serious violence is in any way being undermined by gaps in other interventions, whether that be social care pressures, strain on addiction services or gaps within schools, and on what work she may be doing with social media companies and Ofsted to address some of the social pressures that young people are under.

1.52 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): It is always a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck.

As hon. Members may know, between January 2017 and March last year, nine young people in my constituency were murdered, mostly by knives. Since last March, we have been incredibly fortunate that no more children have died, but I have to say that that is a really strange thing to feel thankful for. The reprieve is making it possible for my community to begin to heal, and I can only pray that that lull in violence continues.

Healing is hard—not just for families, friends and witnesses, who are so devastated and traumatised by what they have seen, but for communities. In Forest Gate, children were taken away again and again. It was horribly traumatic. There was palpable fear and a feeling of shock on the streets. I would walk into a shop, and all people would talk to me about what had happened last week, last month and the month before. They wanted to know what we were doing about it.

Last September, I gave a speech in which I made seven asks of Government. One was for a rapid and professional mental health response to be available for communities in the wake of tragedies and trauma, such as the murder of a child. With mental health services so overstretched in most areas—especially child and adolescent mental health services—that support is often not there. Even as I held in my arms a young man who was sobbing because he had held a dying friend, I knew that he was not going to get the support that he needed at the time that he needed it, and nor were his friends.

On that, I am glad to say that the Government have responded and engaged with me positively. I recently met the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), who listened, as she does, with sympathy. I am working with the East London NHS Foundation Trust and other leading mental health bodies to try to find a model that will be effective, and I hope that we will look at piloting services soon.

My community has been calmer, but do not be deceived. The drivers of the violence have not gone away—far from it. The second of my seven asks was for the police and the courts to focus on those who are driving much of the violence for profit by grooming and exploiting children as cheap and disposable labour in the quest to sell drugs across the county lines. I am grateful that the Minister for Security has engaged with me on that, and I am expecting a confidential update on progress from the National Crime Agency soon—I hope this speech will prompt the Government to make that very soon.

I have five other asks as well. We need to safeguard children and build their resilience against grooming, so my third ask is for investment in children's social workers and youth workers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) said, that has been decimated, and we have been reaping the disbenefits since. My fourth ask is that there is proper training and support so that everyone, from social workers to police officers, teachers and parents, can recognise the signs of gang exploitation and know how to respond.

Fifthly, we need new and trusted ways for young people to report what they know. I do not think that Crimestoppers is working. Many people in my constituency have told me that if they call it, the police will pop round, putting them in danger. We need to find a new, effective, third way of reporting, so that young people can have confidence when they pass on confidential information to the police.

Sixthly, we need far better systems to keep people safe after they have done the bravest thing and given essential evidence to the police or in court. In September, I told the House about one horrifying case of a father and son who had to leave home because they were in great danger, and about the appalling way in which they were abandoned thereafter by the system. They had no money at all—the father had to leave his job. Social services had not picked it up, and the police had not followed through on the support. We need to ensure that if people do the right thing, we do the right thing by them. Big changes are needed, such as a national system of dedicated caseworkers to support witnesses who are genuinely in danger. I have not heard anything to convince me otherwise. Young witnesses and their families should have a bright and secure future, not punishment for what they have done for us.

Seventhly, we need stronger action against incitement online. I hope that the online harms White Paper will do that job and tighten up regulation, because content that harms our communities is still being put online and staying online. In my speech in September I talked about a drill music video that clearly celebrated and encouraged violence in my community. It was celebrating the murder of a 14-year-old child in a playground in Forest Gate.

The original version had more than 1 million views on YouTube. It was taken down, but copies have gone up in its place, with pointless disclaimers on the front that should not protect the videos from action, but apparently do. By September, the copy version had received 120,000 views. Five months later, it is still up, and the view count is pushing 300,000, so, frankly, the greater calm in my constituency is no thanks to YouTube.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead for his efforts to secure this debate, for his passion for the issue, and for the opportunity to press the Government again for the action that is needed to protect the vulnerable in my community.

2 pm

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer)—I know that I am not meant to call him that, but he is genuinely a friend—on securing this debate. He, our

colleague the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and I have discussed how to deal with knife crime, which is a problem nationally, a problem in London and a particular problem in the borough that the three of us represent. I will take each aspect of the problem in order.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to the debate. The issue of knife crime tends to be shovelled away because the media too often see it as a spat between members of different gangs; it only ever breaks the surface when somebody they cannot pigeonhole is abused or murdered, as in the terrible event that happened recently in the hon. Lady's constituency. I pay tribute to the victim's family for their behaviour and their demeanour—our hearts go out to them. Yet somehow the media's game always seems to be, "As long as it is not people we think are important, it is acceptable." I will cite some figures later to suggest why that is the case.

Violent crime is increasing, not just in London but across the country. It exacts a terrible toll on our most disadvantaged and impoverished communities. The London murder rate has reached the highest level for a decade, with stabbings and shootings often linked to gangs and the supply of drugs. People often say that a lot of it is not related to the gangs, but even when the gangs are not directly involved, the gang culture on our streets has a massive effect on young people's behaviour, even if only defensively. Many who are not involved in the gangs end up being bullied or coerced for not wanting to be part of the process, and sometimes they succumb and find themselves trapped. The gang culture is sapping away at some of the best of our young people; they are exchanging their future prospects in return for short-term gain, or what appears to be gain.

In London alone, more than 25,000 incidents of serious violence were recorded across the 32 boroughs in the 12 months to the end of June 2018. Most of those incidents were completely unreported to the general public, except maybe in the local area. In my borough, Waltham Forest, the number of knife crime offences was 27.34% higher than in the previous year. This is a growing problem. Intriguingly for the three of us who represent the borough, the increase in knife crime in Waltham Forest is significantly greater than in the Metropolitan police's service area as a whole. We have a local problem, a city-wide problem and a national problem.

Violence against the person has been on an upward trajectory in the borough for several years. Since 2010, there have been an average of 525 violent crimes per month, but there has been only one month since April 2015 with fewer than that. That is a shocking statistic that tells us what a daily event knife crime is. I saw that at first hand when I went out recently with a police patrol—I am sure many other hon. Members present have done the same. It was on a Friday afternoon, not a Friday night; everyone assumes that things are all right in the afternoon, but in the space of three and half hours we attended one shooting, two stabbings and a knife threat to a family.

The police said, "This is not prime time—it will really kick off after you've gone." That tells us just about everything we need to know. We went at speed up and down the borough—from one end of my constituency to the bottom of the constituency of the hon. Member

for Leyton and Wanstead. I swear to God: it was an eye-opener. I did not think my eyes needed opening, but I was wide-eyed by the time we had finished.

Commentators too often say that London is a city of 8 million, with 19 million annual visitors, so the level of violence is a problem but not a crisis. I have read articles that say, "Yes, we are awfully fussed about this, but it is contained." That is shocking. Tell that to the families whose children have been damaged or murdered, or to the communities that have been blighted.

It all comes back to the point about culture, because the gang culture blights whole areas. Shops do not open in areas where the gangs operate significantly, because they come under threat. Kids who go there come under threat, too, so the streets become less occupied and people are more worried about going there. There are families whose children are being bullied and are frightened to go out, because they know that they will meet a gang member who will tell them that unless they get involved, something will happen to their families. People disappear from public spaces, and parts of our city end up deserted by decent people because they are frightened and worried. Even if they have not seen anything, hearsay tells them that things are going on in their area.

The point of challenging knife crime is not just that we are worried about violence and crime, but that we are worried about our communities not thriving as they could—their economies are bad, jobs are going and all the rest of it. We need to see the issue in a wider context, because it is about the health of a city.

A decade ago, the Centre for Social Justice, an independent organisation that I am part of, set up a programme to investigate what was going on in cities and look at what had gone right elsewhere. Its report, "Dying to Belong", was about the nature of the people who end up locked into gangs. We commissioned its authors to look at cities that have had the problem, possibly for longer than London: they went to America and looked at Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Boston and even New York, and then they came back and looked at Glasgow and Liverpool. The Glasgow experience was particularly interesting, and so was the Matrix project in Liverpool; it was perhaps not as comprehensive as the Glasgow model, but it had some similar and very interesting outcomes.

What came across constantly from those visits was that the cities that have successfully controlled their levels of gang activity, and thus violence and violent crime, have all used a two-pronged process. First, policing needs to be absolutely and conclusively co-ordinated with the local area. I accept that the word "consent" is bandied around, but it is more a case of co-operation, understanding, shared intelligence and a sense of where and who to police.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the loss of neighbourhood policing has had a major impact on the situation he describes? The sense of communities working with the police has been shattered.

Mr Duncan Smith: Yes—I will come on to that point. It is about intelligence on the streets, both for the communities and the police, and the operational matter of how to target policing.

[Mr Duncan Smith]

What came across from Boston and Cincinnati was particularly interesting. Their gangs were very similar to London's: they tended to be multi-racial in the sense that, unlike in Los Angeles, they were postcode gangs drawn from whoever lived in the community and reflecting the balance of people in the community. In Boston, Operation Ceasefire led to a 63% reduction in youth homicides. The level of violence is different in American cities, mostly because of firearms, but the overall suppression as a result of the operation is staggering. The figures have continued to reduce and have remained low because it is a permanent process. It is not about the police arriving in a borough, targeting people for nine months and then going somewhere else; it is constant, perpetual and part of the community.

The interesting point about the findings and the recommendations of that report is that, too often, we just focus on one or the other. I want to come to the comment made by the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier). Since the report was published, too little of it has been implemented around the UK. There was lots of talk. I talked at length at that time to the Labour Government—it was published under the last Labour Government. There was lots of interest in wanting to take it forward, but the issue comes down to the activity of the cities and the boroughs themselves—they have to want to take the decisions. There are issues for the Government, which are clearly to do with funding and organisation, but there are also issues to do with the local areas.

In the areas where they did pretty much next to nothing about the issue following the report, and carried on in the same way, some 700 young people have been fatally stabbed and shot. I believe those are 700 young people we could have saved, had we operated across the board, comprehensively. The level of co-operation, co-ordination and joint activity is a problem for London, with its 32 boroughs.

I had very interesting dealings with Waltham Forest Council at the time. It is a Labour-controlled council, and has been for some time, but the reality is that it was more important for us to work together to try to find a way through. At that time, to its credit, it implemented much of what the report was about: it brought the Glasgow people down, looked at the report and thought about how to act on it, and it set up an organisation and enhanced support in communities. For a time, the level of violent crime in the borough reduced. It was a good record, and I was proud of that. It was not my political party, but I was proud of the fact that we could get something done—it showed me that the report could work.

Since a while back, the pressure has come off and there have been other distractions, and this whole issue of where the Government funding went and how the boroughs reacted came to life. The point I want to make is that if the changes are not permanent, everything comes back. We see that now in Waltham Forest. I am not by any means attempting to be critical; I just simply make the point that this is not the first time.

The process in Glasgow that has been persistently and constantly maintained contains a number of things. The city was once dubbed the murder capital of Europe: someone below 22 years old in Glasgow was literally more likely to die by being stabbed than through a road traffic incident. That was unlike anywhere else. That is

how terrible it was. The films of some of the gang violence going on in the city at the time were really concerning. As a result of the consistent activity in Glasgow, there has been a 46% fall in violent offences, a 73% fall in gang in-fighting and an 85% fall in weapon possession. They call it a health programme, because they talk about the community work at the same time, and co-operation with the health department and the intelligence that is necessary. It is not just about policing.

If it had just been about policing, there would have been a moment when they had reduced the level of crime, but that could not have been sustained forever, because there would have been no stoppage. As they said, they needed to get to the younger kids in the gangs and take them out of the gangs, into remedial work, through community groups and other groups that work to change educational outcomes and that get them re-stabilised—perhaps there is an unstable family, or a family who are threatened and need to be moved. All that has to happen at a community level and be led at the bottom, and it requires us to ask how we focus in on the necessary funding—not just across the board, but in the areas most greatly threatened by gang violence. It is perhaps time for us to ask whether specific areas and councils need a more targeted approach to support them.

Too often, that sort of process is effectively forgotten. I mentioned two cities in the UK that genuinely set about the process, but in all the rest, on all the visits I have been on, the work is patchy. As a result, we thought we needed to look at that report again. I say that as a member, as others are, of the Government's violence taskforce, which is very helpful for presenting the case to the Government. I genuinely do think the Government are now seized of the need to resolve the situation.

The things that need to be done are not rocket science and they are not new. Although we talk about county lines and the way the drugs trade is changing and stretching out from London, in the end it all comes down to gang activity. If the young kids are able to be in the gangs, the gangs can operate. If the gangs do not have the young kids coming into them, then they die. The guys at the top of the gangs cannot operate without the runners and the young kids taking stuff from A to B, collecting the money and doing all the legwork, away from them. Those are the young people they need and they are the ones they threaten, so the community-level approach of stripping those young people out of the gangs is vital.

The police can target the top of the gangs, take them out and put them through the criminal justice system—throw the book at them—and police them on the streets and do their stop and search through intelligence-led processes. However, as the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead said earlier, the reality is about getting the young kids out. It is about them leaving the gangs and taking them out. It is not even early intervention—it is after the event. Even when they have gone into the gangs, we have to bring them out, take them away and get them through other work. Where that is done, as it has been seen and done in those cities, almost immediately the gangs begin to fold in on themselves. It does not matter who is running them—it does not matter if we are talking about the Mali Boys or whoever—the truth is that, at the end of the day, the top guys in these gangs do not operate if they do not have the young kids running and doing the work for them. If we can get to them, it strengthens the policing activity.

We cannot police our way out of this. We need organisations such as those I visited in south London, such as XLP and London Gang Exit, or Gangs Unite up in our area, Key4Life and Growing Against Violence. There are lots and lots of groups who do fantastic work in changing the nature of what goes on.

I have a very simple message. All the patterns and strands of work—from aggressive but targeted policing, through community work and the council working together, all rely on something very important. This is the last strand of what I was talking about, and it is in the book we published.

It is absolutely vital that all the Government agencies and local government agencies sign up to working closely together. Too often in the past, that has not happened with some Government Departments. I say this regretfully, but having talked to the areas that have addressed this issue, I think the most difficult Department to get involved in the giving of intelligence is the Department of Health and Social Care. It holds its intelligence very carefully and worries about it going out. In many households, the health visitor is the first person they will have in and the very last person they will eventually chuck out if they are worried about life. Health visitors hold a wealth of information about the problems of certain families. We need to find a way to use that intelligence.

We talk about early intervention. There are a wealth of signposts when it comes to kids who are excluded from school or playing truant, or families who we know are dysfunctional or already have problems or criminal activity in them. When I went to visit the programmes up in Glasgow, they pointed out to me that too often the courts are simply unaware of the kind of street that they are about to place the kids back into, or the worries about the families. More than that, they talked about why young people in certain areas will not travel to work and take jobs: if the normal map is overlaid with the gangs map, it is immediately obvious why. The young people will not cross the gang areas because they are frightened about crossing, being seen and getting caught.

Cross-party, throughout the Government and local authorities, and through community groups, we have to make a real pledge that we are not going to let this problem go on any longer—that in my borough and others, we will now work together. If money is required for funding, we must find it and make sure it is targeted. We cannot make political capital out of this issue. We have a duty to ensure that the next generation that comes through are not blighted by the times of the last.

2.19 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): We could not have had a better Chair for today's debate, Ms Buck, given your expertise and experience on this subject, so it is wonderful to serve under your chairmanship.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) for all his hard work in getting this debate from the Backbench Business Committee, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who I know is sad he cannot be here today, but, first and foremost, I pay tribute to the family of Jaden Moodie, who are with us today. They have shown incredible courage and strength at such a difficult time by being here and being so determined about the future.

I want to start by saying that we sometimes look at this through the wrong end of the telescope. We talk about the violence, but I want to start by talking about the person, by talking about Jaden and his family, who have told me about his smile, his laughter and his ambition to take up motorcycling, work in a garage and be a young man who would have a business that would thrive in our local community. When we talk about these young people, we must talk about what we have lost as a society, about the contribution they could have made to our communities and country, and about why this is, frankly, a national crisis.

Jaden's is not the first story I have heard, and his is not the first family I have worked with as the MP for Walthamstow. In the last 18 months, we have buried six children in our community—children killed by other children. The others were Elijah Dornelly, Kacem Mokrane, Joseph William-Torres, who was known as Nico, Amaan Shakoor and Guled Farah. Each of their families, like Jaden's family, is grieving for the life they have lost and for all the family celebrations where there will be one seat empty—one person they will never forget. They are now asking for our help so that no other family will go through this horror.

We know that we cannot talk about the details of Jaden's case. That is absolutely right, but we must talk about what is happening in our communities and country. This is a national crisis, as I said. We should have this debate every week in Parliament due to the level of knife violence and the young people's lives that we are losing. In London, there have been 15,000 attacks involving knives in the last year—a 50% increase on 2015. Five hundred children have turned up in our hospitals as victims of knife crime in the last year alone—an 86% increase in the past four years. It is an upward trend, as my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead said, and it is decimating London, in particular.

We have about 259 violent gangs in our capital city, who are responsible for almost a quarter of serious violence—17% of robberies, 50% of shootings and 14% of rapes in our communities. We know that gangs are growing, with 4,500 people in those roughly 250 recognised gangs in London. They are involved in not just drug crime, but violent crime. It is estimated that about 230 people in my borough are involved in gangs or are gang associates.

One of the things that gets lost in the way we look at these debates is the recognition that this is about not just gangs, but the people caught up in them, who live with the fear of violence—children who are not in gangs, but who are living through this time with us and who need our help. The Greater London Authority has estimated that by 2023 there will be a 15% increase in the number of children at risk from gangs in London, either as victims or offenders. That is an extra 123,000 young people aged 10 to 18 who need this not to be the only debate. They need us to talk about not just the violence we have seen, but the things that we will do to stop it ever happening again.

We know the gangs are changing. In my borough of Waltham Forest—what happened there has led to this debate—the problem was territory a few years ago. We have fantastic research on this by John Pitts: young people felt a sense of pride in being in a gang with other local people and said that that was who they were. Now, it is a commercial enterprise that is driving the toxin of drug dealing in our communities. There is a business

[Stella Creasy]

ethos, as John Pitts calls it, and young people are being sent through county lines all around the country to make money for the elders.

The National Crime Agency found that 88% of areas now report county lines activity—a phenomenon that has grown only in the past few years. It means that what is happening in our capital city is affecting everyone in our country. And, yes, young women are involved too: 90% of those areas saw young women involved in county lines activity.

The gangs picture changes so quickly, but the young people who matter, and who are at the heart of this, do not. We think we have about 12, or possibly 13, serious gangs in Waltham Forest. Of those 12 gangs, only four were active a few years ago. The situation is changing and calls for a local response.

Some people have talked about middle-class drug users and the way they are driving the situation. It is important that we recognise, particularly in our local community in Waltham Forest, that people are trading in small amounts of drugs, which is pushing people into gangs. Some young people are being sent miles to make just £5. They are selling to everybody, and we need policing to be able to disrupt those chains of distribution. Anybody who tells you that policing does not matter is not living through this crisis. Our local community in Waltham Forest has lost 200 police in the past couple of years alone. Our police work hard to identify these young people and to work with our social workers and youth workers. Two hundred police have gone, which means there are 200 fewer people to help do that work—gathering intelligence, building the confidence of the local community, and interrupting and disrupting that behaviour.

We know it is not just about drugs. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead talked powerfully about the importance of social work. I want to talk about the importance of schools and, as I said, to see the children behind these figures who are falling through the cracks. When we do, we see so many similar issues in the stories they tell, which is why this debate is so important. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) is right to say that this is not a new phenomenon. The gangs might be changing, but we know what works. We know how we can help and step in to support families—not to demonise them, but to recognise their value to our communities.

We know that the motivations for joining gangs and getting involved in violence are complex. Yes, poverty and racism play an important part, but it is also about schools, geographical communities and the support networks—the strong and weak ones—around our young people. We see the grooming process start early, often with children as young as 10. Frankly, sometimes the interventions that we see are just too late in that chain of process, which is why I pay tribute to my local authority for the work it is doing. It recognises that young people under 18 who are involved in this activity are being criminally exploited and that they need protection and support. I also want to put on record my thanks to Gedling Council for the work it has been doing not just to support Jaden's family, but to recognise some of the interconnections.

I know that Members will talk about early trauma, about a public health model and about how contagious these problems are. My local authority, like the Mayor of London, recognises that our schools are struggling to cope with the early presentation of these problems. How do we help young people who might be struggling at school and who have problems in their family? We need more than warm words; we need funding, and we need to recognise what we are fighting for: not just to stop the violence, but for a future for each of those young people.

The hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) mentioned exclusions, which is really what I want the Minister to comment on. Looking at the many letters that she has written to me about this issue, it feels like we look too often at what happens when violence occurs, yet we know that exclusions are a common theme in some of the stories we are talking about. Indeed, 41 pupils a day were permanently excluded last year from schools in this country. There were 19 permanent exclusions in my local authority alone, which is actually below the national average. There are 115 children in our pupil referral units, which suggests that there are many more children who need support and intervention but who are not being picked up through the process of being categorised as excluded.

The all-party parliamentary group on knife crime found that one in three local authorities has no vacancies in their pupil referral unit. Those young people are the most vulnerable. They might be a minority of the school population, but they go on to be a majority of our prison population. They are 10 times more likely to have a mental health need, 20 times more likely to be subject to social services intervention, and 100 times more likely to commit an offence of knife possession. If we work with these young people now and recognise their value, we can stop many of these problems and break some of these cycles. I also say to the Minister that, frankly, we can save money. Every excluded pupil will cost £370,000 over their lifetime in terms of extra education, benefits, healthcare and the criminal justice system. That is a total of £2.9 billion lost to the Exchequer by permanently excluding just 7,000 pupils.

The Pitts research on Waltham Forest bears out what we are talking about in terms of those young people who are vulnerable and being exploited. One professional said:

“That's the level of ruthlessness of these gangs, they will recruit these kids and basically just use them as a piece of meat for whatever purpose they've got.”

Another said:

“Youngers are normally easier to influence, when they are at school.”

However, the honest truth is that the Home Office's work on violent crime—it is very commendable that the Home Office has started to look at it—is not working in schools and does not recognise that localised approach. A gang's position in my local community will be different from a gang's position south of the river, in south London. That work needs local people who see those young people, who see the warning signs and who see why it is worth fighting for their future.

I know the Government will talk about social media and the money they are putting in to tackling violent crime. I know they have recognised the amazing work that my hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) and for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones)

have done on knife crime and a public health approach. However, we also want a preventive approach, as we have with healthcare. A legal duty to a public health model will mean little if there are no organisations to work with it and do the preventive work.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green talked about people who are in a desert of decent people. We in Walthamstow are a decent community; I know that not only because of the good families here with us, but because of the amazing people from the voluntary and community sectors who have come today. They, too, are committed to solving this crisis. Organisations such as Spark2life, Access Aspiration, The Soul Project, Gangs Unite, Boxing4Life, Words 4 Weapons, the Waltham Forest community hub, Break Tha Cycle, Worth Unlimited, the Ken Tuitt Football Foundation and Walthamstow Youth Circus all see that those young people need our support. They need a Government who join the dots and recognise that too many of our young people are struggling in education, are vulnerable to exploitation and are therefore vulnerable to such challenges.

Yes, I have seen the letters from the Minister, for which I thank her. We keep talking about exclusions and mental health, but we need to join up the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education. We must ensure that young people receive alternative provision, that referral units are not seen as some sort of sin bin; and that we see those young people as worthy of fighting for. Please, Minister, I do not want another child in our community to be buried because of knife crime ever again. It is preventable, and if we work together, we can stop it.

2.31 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate with you in the Chair, Ms Buck. I know that if you were not chairing it, you would be contributing to the debate with a great deal of expertise. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) on securing this important debate. In his speech, he talked about the need to deal with the causes and reasons young people become involved in crime.

Those causes are manifold. In London, we live in a city of enormous wealth. In fact, the wealthiest 10% of its population own half of the wealth. The disparity in income and wealth distribution in London is very stark indeed. All of our communities, including in my constituency, have examples of shiny new developments that have received enormous amounts of investment, but precious little is reinvested in the surrounding local communities.

Too often, that investment is done to the community rather than with it. That leads to people feeling that they are not part of the enormous growth in the wealth of our city, but that they are excluded from it. More importantly, they feel that they do not have the same—or, indeed, any—opportunities to engage in and enjoy the distribution and benefits of the wealth that they see all around them. That feeds into people's lack of aspiration and determination to improve their life prospects through, for example, education. That despair and lack of aspiration feed into sections of our community. Not everyone is affected—we are talking about a minority of people—but none the less, it creates an area where those who want to engage in crime can not only prosper, but entice others to join them.

What do we see? Increasingly, in parts of our communities working-class kids are attacking—and, too often, killing—one another. If we pour into that the now nine years of austerity—which means that the services supporting those communities have struggled to cope and keep going—we get a perfect storm in which those sorts of criminal activities can prosper. That is the background that we have to deal with.

We must recognise that those communities are being left behind. A lot of research suggests that they voted heavily to leave the European Union. There were many contributing factors. People felt such despair and so disconnected from the economic prosperity around them that they decided to vote that way. We have to address the root causes of why too many of our young people become involved in crime.

I will not make political points, but we have seen a significant reduction in the number of police officers. As those numbers have gone down, particularly in neighbourhood policing, we have seen an increase in knife crime and violent crime in our communities. My own borough has lost 168 officers since 2010, and roughly 70 of those were from our safer neighbourhoods team. Those teams were not just involved in arresting people and investigating crime, but embedded in their local communities and involved in a great deal of diversionary activities that got young people away from crime. It was the policy of those safer neighbourhoods teams not only to know their communities but to own the streets and make them safe for the whole community, including young people who were vulnerable to becoming involved in gangs. Those teams knew the prominent individuals who were likely to be involved in crime, and they would engage with other agencies in their local communities to divert young people away from crime.

When others are in control and people feel safe in their communities, young people in particular do not feel that the only way for them to move safely around the community is to be associated with one gang or another. Too often, the postcode approach to gangs influences young people. We have lost the community engagement, which had local community policing—one of the range of agencies mentioned by other hon. Members—at its heart.

A safer neighbourhoods team in my constituency has, sadly, been decimated and now has only two officers. I went with them to play football in the pouring rain with a gang of kids on an estate. I very much supported what the officers were doing, but I asked the police sergeant, "This is not mainstream policing—why are you doing this?" He said, "Because it's very important that these young people see the police in a different light from when they are being stopped and searched. It's important that they feel that we are a part of the community that they can trust and come forward to; otherwise these young people will feel vulnerable and will be more likely to fall prey to those who want them to become involved in criminal activity."

That sort of policing has been lost. Too many of the cuts to local authorities have fallen on services that, alongside the safer neighbourhoods teams, support young people. We have to address those issues. I commend the Mayor for trying to get safer neighbourhoods teams back—sadly, we are down to two dedicated ward officers per ward in my area, where we used to have six—because that is the right approach. I am sure that that will have

[Clive Efford]

an impact on crime in my borough. If there is one message that I would like the Minister to take from this debate, it is this: we need to return to that effective form of community policing that works with other agencies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) spoke about school pupils and exclusions. I absolutely agree that, too often, young people being excluded from school begins a downward spiral of neglect by services that should provide them with support, because they are overwhelmed with demand. Too often, young people who would otherwise be in school are left to their own devices in the community for too many hours.

We must also look at the other side: what is going on in schools and what are we asking teachers to do beyond educating young people? We have to look at why those young people had to be removed from school in the first place, and question whether it is right to ask teachers—including, quite often, women—in classes to deal with extremely violent situations. When violence takes over in a school—I have seen examples of this—young people see that teachers, and perhaps even the police, are unable to deal with the situation, and that it is the troublemakers or those involved in gangs who are in control. That makes them more inclined to become involved in such activity because it makes them feel safer at school, on their way home or when they are out and about in the local community. It is not just a question of children becoming vulnerable because they are excluded; we must address a lot more of what goes on in our schools. We cannot just leave it to the schools.

In conclusion, I say to the Minister that we must start reinvesting in our community policing, because it works. We must also provide organisations in our communities, such as schools, with the support they need to assist young people so that they are not dragged into gangs and criminal activities.

2.41 pm

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. Like others, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) on securing this incredibly important debate.

We seem to be living through a knife crime crisis. In the year ending March 2018, there were nearly 40,000 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument—a staggering 16% rise on the previous year and the highest rate since comparable data began to be collected in the year ending March 2011. We should all be extremely concerned about that rise, especially because it has a disproportionate impact on young people and some of the most disadvantaged in society. Various solutions to the problems have been trialled over the years, but we do not seem to be keeping pace with what is happening. We cannot let the problem overtake us, because the consequences are all too real for our communities.

Other Members have talked about what has happened in their constituencies; in mine, at the beginning of November a 15-year-old child, Jay Hughes, was stabbed to death in Bellingham. Less than 72 hours later, 22-year-old Ayodeji Habeeb Azeez was murdered in broad daylight on a Sunday afternoon in Anerley. That was just one year on from the murder of teenager Michael Jonas just

down the road. Following those murders I met the Home Secretary and we discussed the Government's approach. I am really grateful for that, but those murders have shaken our community; constituents have expressed to me their fear about their family's safety, taking their children to school and letting them be out at the local shops and on the streets.

Despite the difficult and tragic events that we have faced in Lewisham West and Penge, our community has shown strength and determination to bring the community closer. Stewart Fleming Primary School has held coffee mornings with the community, police and councillors, bringing them together to talk about how to tackle this problem locally. This Saturday, Athelney Primary School in the heart of Bellingham will hold an event with the police to bring the community together to talk about how to combat knife crime. I am proud of the resilience that our communities have shown in the face of adversity. As much as our community has worked hard to heal the wounds left by those tragedies, it cannot be left continually to pick up the pieces. The serious violence strategy sets out the Government's response to violent crime and the increase in knife crime. There is extensive analysis in there, but my worry is that there are not sufficient concrete measures or funding for prevention.

We must be clear about the impact of austerity on the situation. Young people's services play a key role in keeping people out of knife crime, but they have been cut to the bone. The budget for young people's services has been cut by 60% since 2011-12, which led to the closure of youth clubs across the country. The Government's own research shows that when there are no positive activities for young people to participate in, a vacuum is created into which gangs all too often move. We need investment in youth services and youth clubs in our communities.

Our schools play a huge role in the choices that young people make, but they too face massive financial pressures. When I visit primary schools in my community, I am told by school leaders that they can identify from the very early age of three years old which children are likely to be vulnerable to gangs and crime. They can identify them because they may have older siblings or family members who are involved in gangs. Schools in my constituency do a tremendous job working with those vulnerable people, but often there is a question about resources. Those schools are struggling to resource even the basics. When that happens, it is a real challenge to put time and resources into early intervention, yet it is so vital.

In London, the Met police have faced £1 billion cuts since 2010, which has led to the loss of 30% of police staff and 65% of police community support officers. Our police do an absolutely fantastic job. In particular, I pay tribute to Sergeant Dave Moss in Bellingham, and Sergeant John Biddle and PCSO Andrea in Perry Vale, who all do an amazing job in the communities. The reality in the wards I represent, however, is that we have at most two ward officers and one PCSO per ward; they do fantastic work, but they are overstretched. The big police station in Penge shut some time ago, and our small station in Penge was closed recently. That means that people do not think the police have as visible a presence as they used to have. Again, that means that people do not feel safe and do not feel as though they have the same relationship with the police.

Most people in the Chamber will agree that in order to tackle knife crime we need a public health approach. I thank my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), who is not here as she is performing Whip duties. She chairs the Youth Violence Commission and has campaigned tirelessly for a public health approach to youth violence. What has happened in Glasgow is a testament to how a public health approach can work to reduce knife and violent crime. That approach requires joining up health, education, youth services, the Home Office and the justice system, but the reality is that they have all been cut in recent years. If we are clear about the public health approach, it must be properly funded in order for it to work.

The warm words we have heard about a public health approach to tackling knife crime are a step in the right direction, but they are not enough. The Government need to come forward and take the lead on this issue. The austerity agenda since 2010 has left our communities and young people behind. We really need a fully funded cross-departmental public health approach to knife crime. My community cannot wait any longer.

2.50 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure and a privilege to speak under your chairmanship, Ms Buck—particularly about a subject on which you have done so much good work. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) for securing the debate and opening it so eruditely.

Sadly, we have got used to seeing horrific murders, particularly of young people, that make headlines for a day or two before being replaced by other news or another tragedy. I hope we never become inured to that and never stop regarding each one as a terrible disaster, not just for the families concerned but for our communities. Last year, there were 139 murders in London, more than half as a result of stabbings. Equally tragically, that is the tip of the iceberg, below which there is a huge volume of crime, some of which is not reported in the same way. This is not just a London problem; over the past three years in England and Wales, there have been increases of first 22% and then 16% in offences involving knives or sharp instruments, which numbered 40,147 in 2017-18.

Looking at hospital admissions, the number of “finished consultant episodes” due to contact with a knife, sword or dagger more than doubled in three years, to 12,412 in 2017-18. The Royal London Hospital has done very good work on this subject. Its statistics show that 25% of knife crime victims were of school age, the average age of victims was 18, and it was common for victims to have between five and nine stab wounds. The number of stab wounds treated in its unit has doubled since 2012.

It has become commonplace for people to carry a knife, for whatever reason or excuse that is given, yet doing so dramatically increases someone’s risk of injury; it is not a way of avoiding injury. About half of the stab victims seen at that hospital were injured by knives they took to the scene themselves; they either suffered self-inflicted wounds or had the knife taken off them and used against them. Those figures are staggering.

However, in the short time I have, I would like to look at some of the positives and possibilities. As colleagues have said, a lot of work is going on. Office for National

Statistics figures published today show that in London—not in the rest of the country, sadly—the increase in violent crime and violent crime with injury has slowed. That is perhaps only the beginning of a turnaround in the problem, but it is worth noting.

I do not say it is not possible that serious knife crime will decline. Moped crime, which is often associated with violence, robbery and so on, and acid attacks have spiked but then declined in the past two or three years. It is possible that that will happen with knife crime, too, but I do not think the underlying problem will go away, because of the figures I have just cited. There will continue to be a climate of violence, which will manifest itself in one way or another. That is why the long-term approach that the Mayor of London and others have talked about is the right way forward.

[SIR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

I praise the Mayor for the initiatives he has taken. City Hall has thought very seriously about the issue, and it has come up with some money. Today’s announcement of an extra £85 million of new funding for violent crime and burglary in the capital is very welcome. That comes on top of £15 million to create the violent crime taskforce and £45 million for the Young Londoners fund, which is significant in this respect but in others, too. There will now be an additional £6.8 million for the violence reduction unit. It was useful to hear the deputy Mayor talk about that yesterday. All that is good.

Obviously, just spending money is not an end in itself, but it is being spent thoughtfully. The approaches the Mayor has looked at include targeting law breakers, targeted stop and search and better detection. Obviously, we also have to look at disposals in the courts and what punishments are available, and at keeping weapons off the street by restricting the availability of knives. I might say more about that in a moment.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I very much agree with what my hon. Friend is saying. Does he agree that in looking at the supply of knives, we need to consider the ready availability of some pretty horrendous weapons online? The Government need to look hard at what they can do to restrict access to knives through that channel.

Andy Slaughter: I do not disagree—some pretty horrific things are available, and they tend to make the headlines—but the most common weapons are kitchen knives, because they are so readily available. I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend about people getting around the rules online, but to be honest, carving knives, cleavers and so on are available in most kitchens. We need to think about that.

The Mayor is taking forward a number of other initiatives—other Members have spoken about them and I do not want to take up too much time—to support victims, work with communities and educate young people. I hope we all support them, and obviously we hope they are all successful, but this is a very complicated issue. YouTube and certain types of music were mentioned. The most serious recent incident in my constituency, which got a lot of national publicity because 40 people were arrested, was a horrific gang attack in which someone was pursued and stabbed on a public

[*Andy Slaughter*]

street on new year's eve. Fortunately, using CCTV, the alleged perpetrators were tracked to a party and everyone at the party was arrested.

It transpired that the party venue was an Airbnb let. I am going to see Airbnb to talk about that. It tells me that it will ban that particular user and give advice to the host, but we need to go further and ensure that we do not create areas of lawlessness in the city where such things can be done. There are many steps that can be taken to control the problem, which would otherwise become out of control.

The good news is that we have a lot of sound advice and help. I have been corresponding with and meeting a retired circuit judge, Nic Madge, and with the chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland, John Crichton, who did a lot of work in Scotland, which has pioneered work on this. I have also talked to trauma surgeons about it. It is a combination of detection, policing—of course—and looking at the social background, but also taking practical steps.

One issue is why there are these weapons lying around in every household, to go back to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms). Why do we need to have such a number—often a large number—of very dangerous weapons in any kitchen? Why are they pointed? Why do people need 10-inch pointed knives? Why is it not possible to sell knives that have rounded tips? Most serious injuries are caused by multiple stabbing. These are ideas that could be better explored and taken up.

The expertise is there, but there are not sufficient resources. The Mayor of London is doing everything he can; he is squeezing every possible budget dry and increasing his precept, which I think is the right thing to do in this case, to fund the campaign against knife crime. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) said, there have been large cuts, with £850 million in cuts, I think, to the Met budget and another £263 million to come. Cuts of that order cannot be made without impacting on the ability to tackle these offences. I compare it to homelessness—another issue that is hugely affecting London and other big cities. We have huge expertise in how to deal with that, and we have dealt with street homelessness quite successfully before. What we do not have at the moment is the resources to do that.

I say to the Minister that I am sure we will have a consensus today and that everybody here is sincere in wanting to see this scourge tackled, but it is going to take substantial resources. I hope we can hear something from the Government today about where those resources might be located and where they might be allocated.

3.2 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) on securing the debate, which highlights the tragedy that is affecting so many of our communities, as reflected by the speeches today. I will talk about the impact on Hackney and what the Government need to do. I warn the Minister that I have some very direct requests for her to answer, hopefully today.

From November 2017 to today, there have been seven gang-related murders and three other murders in Hackney. I choose those dates because, prior to that, there was a two-year period when there had not been a gang-related death. Since October last year, there have been eight stabbings, including, most recently, that a 50-year-old man on the streets of Hackney last night.

We can quote the statistics as much as we want, but this is all about real human lives. Too many of us have had to visit families whose lives have been devastated and who will never live the same life again because of the loss of a child—their child, an actual child in their household. I have chosen not to name my constituents today; they have to live through enough pain as it is, and I am aware that there may be media scrutiny of what we say today.

I will quote from one constituent, who I spoke to recently, whose son was stabbed eight times in an ambush in Hackney on 7 November last year. After she visited him in hospital, she said:

“When he started to speak to me I felt physically sick and wanted to vomit. I told him I was feeling sick and he said it’s okay, I’ve been sick so many times since arriving here, just sit down... He told me he was ambushed and knives were coming at him from all angles. I thought that was it, he said. I didn’t even know these guys. They just ambushed me and started stabbing me.”

Her son underwent surgery to his legs, chest and arms, and both his hands will need plastic surgery, but she said:

“I’m blessed that I am a mother who can say thank God my son is alive.”

Despite that horror, that young man is alive today, but with life-changing injuries after such an horrific event. His mother went on to say:

“I have serious concerns and really don’t know where to turn for support and advice.”

I address the Minister when I say that this woman speaks for so many, whether it is youth workers, teachers, families or friends of those young people. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) said, where do they turn to tell someone about what is going on?

After we had the riots in Hackney—a slightly separate issue from what we are discussing today—there were a good number of community events, where people talked about what had happened. I do not want to go down that route too far, but what was apparent was that people in communities know who the vulnerable children in their midst are. They know that, but they are not sure where to take that information or who can help. They are sometimes fearful of the intervention of authorities, who can come in and do things to people. We all know of case conferences where a vulnerable young person has eight or 10 adults in a room all talking about them, but not necessarily talking with them.

In Hackney, we live with the problem—sadly, all too often. The Hackney Integrated Gangs Unit works on a regular basis with 150 gang nominals at any time. A number of the factors now affecting Hackney are also affecting other boroughs, including gang youngsters getting involved, sometimes because the older perpetrators are in prison. That underlines the point about early intervention that many colleagues have talked about. Many children as young as nine and 10 are getting involved; we need to get early intervention in place, and I will ask the Minister about that later.

County lines grooming has been working. There is a danger that we conflate knife crime with county lines and gangs. It is not necessarily all related, but it is like a Venn diagram, with an obvious overlap. To illustrate the effects on very young people in my constituency, I spoke to a youth worker who told me about a young boy who was about 10 years old who had been given a gun to look after by some older men. The gun went missing, and he was told he owed them £3,000. Clearly, he could not find that, and he was going around asking anybody he knew if they could lend him the money. I do not know what happened to him, but that is one of the ways that gangs groom young people.

These young people need support and intervention; policing is one way to do that. It is worth highlighting that, in Hackney, we have lost one in four police officers since 2010. We are now linked with Tower Hamlets as one borough command unit, and we have not lost any more police, but there has not been any increase, so the savings have not materialised as additional people on the street.

In my intervention on the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), I mentioned that neighbourhood policing is vital. I remember the days when there was such distrust for the police in Hackney; neighbourhood policing helped to break down those barriers because people knew who they could talk to, or they could make a call to somebody anonymously. I have been on doorsteps on a number of occasions doing a roving surgery, and people have said, “I have to tell you something, but don’t tell the police. I don’t want them to know my address, because I have a teenage child, and I’m frightened that if the police come to the door, they will be targeted.” It is palpable fear.

On one side we see that fear, and on the other we see an increase in brazen behaviour. Only last June I went to a small community event. If I had arrived five minutes earlier, I would have been in the midst of teenagers arriving on bikes, pulling out machetes when they recognised someone and marauding through a group of toddlers and mothers, with only a couple of men in the environment. That did not make the headlines, because those people were not living their lives on Twitter or social media; they were just frightened in the moment.

As I arrived, someone was on the phone telling the police. For the next nearly two hours that I was there, not a police officer turned up. Obviously, I have raised this with the police, and I will not go into the detail—they said they were seeking the perpetrator. But what message does it send to our communities when we do not have enough police to go and get the evidence? People were willing to be witnesses, and between them they could probably have identified the perpetrators. What the young children there go away with is that something like that happens and the police cannot even attend. I have heard a number of tales of young people on bikes, with machetes in hand, brazenly going down the street to show that they are in control, because they no longer believe that the police will turn up.

In defence of the police, when they do come, I have seen instances where they know the young people. The remaining neighbourhood police work hard to know the young people, and they try to work with them to protect them. They know what is going on, and there is some good, talented policing going on, but there are just not enough police to do it well. The more police are

removed into police stations and blue-light cars, the more the connection with the community is broken, and that is not working. The Minister has to directly address the release of resources; no one can pretend—if they ever did—that it is not going to make a difference to the lives of young people on our streets and the lives of families and communities.

The context, as others have said, is an £850 million round of cuts to the Metropolitan police since 2010. More than 17% of the funding is controlled by the Government, so it is directly in the Minister’s remit to tell us what she and the Government are going to do. The Public Accounts Committee, which I have the privilege of chairing, has highlighted real concerns about funding for policing and also about the Home Office’s understanding of exactly what the pressures are on the police—the cost shunting, for example. The police are the blue-light provider of first and last resort. They pick up the pieces when other public services, such as mental health and so on, are overstretched. So the police are doing more with less, and that has a direct impact in the circle of austerity. “Austerity” is a buzzword—sometimes, it is a positive word in the mouths of some Government Ministers—but it is having a real effect. The problem needs to be explained in those terms. We also have the context of cuts to local authorities of around a third—40% in my own borough since 2010.

I am really weary of this. Hackney is weary, the parents in my constituency are weary, and the young people are weary and afraid. We keep raising our concerns. I have been a Member of this place for nearly 14 years and in elected office for 25. Children are fearful. At an age when they should feel free and be able to roam their streets freely, they are afraid to go out. Their parents worry about what is happening to them when they are out, and are worried that they will not come home. I have met too many parents whose children did not come home, so I understand their worries.

Too often, I meet the parents and families of victims who will never walk through their door again. I meet parents who are burying or nursing their children. I meet teachers in schools mourning a pupil. It is not normal to go to a school’s speech day and have to talk about a child’s death. That happens too often to those of us who are not victims and are not really affected. It is the pupils and young people who are affected. We have all been to too many funerals, as churches mourn one of their own.

At every primary school I visit, the children raise concerns about knife crime and violence in very specific terms. I try to reassure them that what they read in the papers is a small percentage overall, but the fear escalates and reaches every one of them. I visited a youth group in Hoxton where young girls told me about their big fear of knife crime. The UK Youth Parliament’s English group has made knife crime its No. 1 campaign priority. We should listen—and the Minister should listen—to those young people, who tell us what is important to them, and that should be the most important thing to us.

I want to touch on the issue of social media, which my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham raised in her speech. I have been appalled by what I have seen, and I applaud the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) and others who have raised such concerns. I was horrified to learn from a

[Meg Hillier]

local headteacher that a close associate of a young man currently in prison for the brutal manslaughter of a 16-year-old girl has a following of more than 1 million on YouTube. The videos blatantly talk about violence and gang action on Hackney's streets.

It is not only YouTube that streams this stuff. BBC 1Xtra—our own public service broadcaster—broadcast a video of raps about stabbing on Hackney's streets, which I raised with the BBC. In the video, areas are named and rival Hackney gangs called out. I was told that the production team did a careful analysis of the content and that, in this case, they did not think it crossed the threshold. Do they live in cloud cuckoo land? They certainly know nothing about my borough. It was immediately obvious to me, and I am a middle-aged woman, for goodness' sake—it is not like I'm down there with the kids. I could tell that this was not just innocent stuff. I am meeting the BBC next week because I was completely dissatisfied with its response. Its understanding of the reality and the impact of the terminology and references is really not good enough. We need to work out what we are going to do about this. I know that that is a lot for the Minister to take on, but there must be conversations across Government about what we do about that online presence.

The Mayor of London joined us in Hackney during one of our worst periods of attacks. We met local community leaders, including very good young youth leaders, as well as church leaders, other key people and young people themselves to discuss what we need to do. As I said, we know what is needed. As the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green said, it is not rocket science. In fact, a very long time ago, under a Labour Government—I am not being party political—we began to look at some of the issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) was the Minister at the time, in a position similar to that of the Minister now, and he looked at trying to get that public health issue resolved. As the right hon. Gentleman said, it can be very difficult to get some of that health information into the mix, but it is vital that we do. That was one of the big stopping points. It is important that we have not just an initiative here and an initiative there, but the long-term approach that many have talked about.

Investment in youth work, particularly detached youth work, is one part of that. Since the Mayor of London visited, one of his deputies has visited, and it was really interesting to hear the young people themselves say what mattered to them and what worked for them. The young men and women could see that the diversionary opportunities for nine and 10-year-olds—they named that age group—were particularly important so that they knew they had a positive future that did not take them down the gang route and that took them away from the idea that they needed to carry a knife. It still will not take away the fear, but it gives them a positive outcome.

Going back to the riots in Hackney in 2011, not a single Hackney schoolchild was involved. Our schools are now among the best in the country—some of them in the top 1%. That is probably an enviable position for the Minister, given that her constituency in Lincolnshire is not in the same favourable position. Those young people had purpose and did not get involved.

The Home Office has said it wants to adopt the public health approach, but we need investment in prevention. We need something much more concrete than an aspiration. I am hopeful that the Minister, who is a thoughtful woman, will lay that out today. We know some of the triggers. As others have said, domestic violence or some kind of traumatic incident in childhood has a big impact on the future of young people, often leading to exclusions from school. If young people have a special educational need, it is often not dealt with quickly enough. The fact that they cannot reach an educational psychologist sometimes forces a school to exclude, when we would normally encourage it to keep a child in school. Delay means things escalate and can lead to expulsion and exclusion, so that young people do not get what they need.

There is a whole area of work around what happens in our pupil referral units and the support there for young people, but we do not have time to go into that today. It is good to have a Youth Violence Commission, but we want to make sure that its work is implemented. Early help and prevention is really important, but it has got to be more than just a pithy term. We need to invest early and make sure that those who might become youngers in the gangs are supported so that most of them do not become youngers, but stay as children with hopes, aspirations and the freedom to roam.

Will the Minister put Government money behind this? It is not necessarily a lot of money. It is about how we configure the money that we have got. More money is always welcome. I am not asking her to say, "No, we cannot give more money"—I know that is probably the line she has been told to take by her officials. I understand that she personally cannot sign the cheque, but I am sure she will be lobbying the Chancellor. The Public Accounts Committee has highlighted how the Home Office has too little understanding of the pressures on the police and of the impact of funding, but I know the Minister or her colleagues will reply to our report on that.

What conversations is the Minister having with the Department for Education about special educational needs and other support for vulnerable pupils, such as teaching them resilience, providing mental health support and picking up, as schools often do, a problem at home that can cause other problems? Not all these young people have problems at home, but there is an overlap. What is the Home Office doing to take account of the Youth Violence Commission's recommendations?

A small amount of money—for example, for an added youth work hour or two, or an extra half a youth worker—can make a huge difference. I am so impressed by the youth organisations that I visit in my constituency. They do amazing work, giving young people somewhere to go and sometimes walking a young person home because they are frightened to go home alone. When I have spoken to young people, very often they want something simple: somewhere warm, safe and dry to do their homework. They are not asking for a great deal. It can make a disproportionate difference in prevention and can increase the feeling of safety so that young people are free to roam.

I want to pay a brief tribute to the hospitals in my area—the Homerton and the Royal London—and the investment in making sure there is diversionary support. I recently spent some time in hospital—not on a visit as an MP; I lived there for a little while—and when a

victim of a knife crime came in, I could see the very good impact of the support that wraps round in the Royal London Hospital. However, it is a tragedy that both the Homerton and the Royal London are centres of excellence in dealing with stabbings of young people—they should not be centres of excellence on this. Is that not a tragedy? However, they do good work and should be commended. Every young person who goes in with a knife injury should be properly “wrapped around” and supported. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) has highlighted that from her perspective as both an MP and an accident and emergency doctor.

I hope that the Minister will heed what the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green said about the need for an ongoing process. We have started before, but the process stops and starts again. In the end, a long-term, ingrained approach will be better for everyone, including the taxpayer. I hope that the Minister will be the one who really kicks things off. She knows that if she does, she will have our strong support. If she does not, we will be snapping at her heels to make sure we do not have to visit more families who have lost a loved one.

3.20 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, but I have to acknowledge that after 19 years in this place I am weary, depressed and upset. Here we are again: colleagues—often the same ones—coming to use our words in debates such as this. *Hansard* will record the issues we explore, and the tremendous number of ideas conveyed.

When I began my career in this place, Operation Trident was just getting going in London. At that stage the discussion was about whether we could get over the gun violence then happening in London, associated with gangs often described as Yardie gangs. There was a sense that we would be able to get on top of the problem, and that it would go—that the issue was really to be associated with downtown America. Almost two decades later, we might view the situation we have got to with knife and gun crime and gang activity in the UK—in London and England, overwhelmingly—as if it were a patient, being assessed by a doctor. The patient's condition could be getting worse, stable or improving. Sadly, it has clearly got a lot worse. Something has gone drastically wrong.

I agree with everything said in the debate so far, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), who secured the debate. I send love, humility and respect to the family of Jaden, aged just 14, who lost his life recently. When I think of him, I cannot but think of my eldest son, who is just a year younger. It breaks your heart. I also reflect on the loss, on Easter Monday last year, of a beautiful young woman, Tanesha Melbourne-Blake, who was shot and killed leaving a newsagent in Tottenham. That led to the current debate, which is currently overwhelming us.

Things have got worse. We have heard that there were 40,147 offences in the year ending in March 2018. Today we found out that violent crime has gone up by 19%. Homicide and knife crime are up. It is all up. The problem is, in a sense, not new: we just have to read Dickens's description of Fagin and the gangs that populated London in 1839. However, it is a problem that grips us hugely at this time.

An important issue has been touched on, in relation to county lines, and that is drug use. What we are talking about is not just kids knifing each other because they happen to be violent. Behind much of the knife crime lies a huge industry, which reaches all over the world. It begins in countries such as Colombia. I have spoken to quite a lot of young urban people aged 12, 13 and 14 and many of them cannot even tell me where Colombia is. They certainly could not organise the trans-shipment of cocaine across the Atlantic and through Spain and Amsterdam to this country. They are not the men in suits—often anonymous—who deal with that traffic. Those men are not sufficiently made the subject of debate in this House. Yes, such organised crime traffics huge amounts of drugs. However, it also traffics people—women—and guns, which is why there is an increase in gun crime.

There are many different types of young people in the urban communities affected by the problems we are debating, but I will give Members a picture of some of them. Of course, there is the young man or woman who has fallen into a gang. We talk about them a lot; but there is also the young man or woman growing up on one of the great housing estates. They are not in a gang. They do not know anything about gangs, really. They are just seriously scared.

I think about those young people a lot, because that was me once—scared. They are picking up knives and burying them in bushes, because they do not feel safe in the communities where they live. I must tell the House that if they do not feel safe in the communities where they live it is the responsibility of this place, of the Met Commissioner, of Government—the Home Secretary—and of the Mayor. We have failed those young people living on estates who do not feel safe and who pick up knives and bury them before and after school and at the weekends, to protect themselves—and then find themselves using them.

There is another group of young people. I care a lot about them. They are the kind who might be in a park after school, following the crowd. Often they have special needs such as dyslexia, ADHD, mild Asperger's or autism. They are just following the crowd, in the park, but they are another group who get rounded up. We could be having a debate about joint enterprise. Why do we have a law that throws young people into prison, even though they did not commit the murder, because they happened to be in the same place? They are vulnerable and impressionable—like most teenagers—and some of them are in jail as I speak. Why? It is because the police are not close to the intelligence, and there is a culture of “no snitching” and not telling tales. Therefore we round them all up. To put it bluntly, because we are mainly talking about black lives, no one really cares.

There are different groups of young people, and then, of course, there are the victims. All of that is largely driven by drugs, which are prolific. The price of cocaine has dropped, the purity has risen, and it is estimated that 875,000 people used cocaine in England and Wales last year, a rise of 15%—it just gets worse—with an 8% rise among 16 to 24-year-olds and 432 deaths related to it.

All that is driving the gang activity, serving markets across the country. That struck me when I was in Highbury Corner youth court. I had a young constituent, 17 years old, and the magistrate announced that he had

[Mr David Lammy]

been arrested in Aberdeen. I have been to all four corners of this country, but I must admit I have never been to Aberdeen. I thought, “What’s he doing in Aberdeen?” It turns out there is a big cocaine market in Aberdeen. There is a lot of money coming off the oil rigs, and there was my young constituent, serving the market in Aberdeen—or rather being pimped out by an adult to serve that market.

Of course, the trafficking of that drug drives a culture of violence back home. It can affect kids who are not county lines, because it creates a culture of violence in the communities we represent. I must ask the Minister: in that context, why, oh why has the Home Office budget for the UK Border Force been cut by £110 million, or 18%, since 2012? We talk a lot about cuts, but if we cut the Border Force it will have an impact on the drug market.

Most sane commentators, who in this country stretch from William Hague, the former leader of the Conservative party, to Charlie Falconer, the former Secretary of State for Justice under the previous Labour Government, are beginning to talk very seriously about the idea that the war on drugs has failed, yet we in this place have failed to keep up in our responses. That is for another debate, but let us put that squarely at the centre of this discussion. Sadly, just as was the case when Dickens was writing about London all that time ago, where there is poverty, where there is hardship—I will return to that in a moment—there will always be young souls who can be taken up. Much can be said about prevention, but let us address the seriousness of the demand driving this whole agenda and the need to support the different kinds of young people I discussed.

Many in this debate have talked about the importance of policing, but there are other crucial services beyond policing. We require our local authorities and young offending teams to set effective violence reduction and youth strategies, but it is hard to be effective when council budgets have been slashed by 54%. Youth centres, after-school activities—gone. Between 2012 and 2016, 600 youth centres closed, 3,500 youth workers lost their jobs and 140,000 places vanished. Spending on universal youth services has fallen by 52%. Interventions at local level have disappeared. That is on top of the neighbourhood policing that we have discussed.

Let us be clear about what that neighbourhood policing is really about; my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) made this point. We have housing estates where, I am afraid, the police cannot be found. That is why the young people are scared. The police are just not there in the numbers they need to be. I think of the Broadwater Farm estate in my constituency, which has 3,500 people. The police are not there in the numbers, and that is why the young people are scared.

When those young people are making a decision about whether to tell on a young person they know who has a knife or a gun hidden in his bedroom—“Do I worry about him and his mates on the estate or do I tell the police?”—they are making a reasonable judgment. Of course they do not tell the police, because they do not think the police can protect them; they do not see them in the numbers and the police are not present on the estate. It is not an unreasonable judgment that these young people are making.

I must also make it absolutely clear what is happening in reality in these young people’s lives and those of their parents. This is not to make excuses: poverty is never an excuse for violence. I grew up poor and working-class. Many Members of this House, including some who have spoken already, grew up in those circumstances. I never, ever say that poverty and being working-class or poorer is an excuse for violence. Nevertheless, black youth unemployment in this country between the ages of 16 and 24 is currently running at 26%. The national average is 12%—it is more than twice that for this community. People say, “Oh, why is it always black youth that we see?”, but my mother would have said, “Idle hands make the devil’s work.” It is quite simple. I am sure you too have heard that saying before, Sir Graham.

Young people must have jobs, and we must do something about the housing crisis, which is also creating polarised communities: people living perpetually in houses of multiple occupation, again in the context of the housing estates I am describing, with a lack of services, polarisation and increasing poverty, against a backdrop of huge cuts to welfare—they, too, have a bearing on this—and unemployment. The cauldron in which the story we are telling is mixed starts to feel akin to what Dickens was writing about. That is the point.

Yes, we need a public health approach, but it will have to be more than just a nice slogan or phrase; I am worried that it is becoming one of those in politics. I have seen it happen before. It happened with another phrase that we started using a few years ago: “affordable housing”. Affordable housing? In London? At 80% of market value? We still use that phrase, but it means nothing to ordinary people, and I am worried that the public health strategy, which had a great name when it came out of Glasgow, is being tarnished, because it needs resource, joined-up activity and real co-ordination.

I am very pleased that I was asked to be on the violence reduction task force, but there is a hell of a lot to do. On the issue of drill music and YouTube, some of the commercial companies have a lot to answer for at the moment, but we should not focus entirely on the music that young people listen to. There are issues across social media with all young people in Britain, including young girls bullied on forums such as WhatsApp and Instagram.

Lyn Brown: I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend was here for my speech, but the only thing I would like taken down is the specific drill video that celebrated the murder of a 14-year-old in the playground, not all drill music. I do not intend to blame a genre of music for the deaths of children.

Mr Lammy: Let me put it on the record that my hon. Friend is entirely right; if my comments came out the wrong way, they were not what I meant. However, there are issues about what it is acceptable to put on social media—what it says and what it is driving—and there is a real question about regulation. That is absolutely clear.

France has just banned smartphones for under-14s in school, I think. We have heard nothing from the chief medical officer in this country—nothing. Nothing has been said. But we know that there are issues of mental health. We know that self-harm is up and anorexia is up. In a way, knife crime is a different sort of self-harm

in the community, is it not? So there are some ingredients here, but we need to be careful about focusing on one particular group when actually this is an issue across the board.

I hope that the Minister might say something about serious organised crime and about cocaine—about drugs. I hope that she understands that the thrust of much of what has been said here is entirely about the resources available for the police, local authorities, youth services and families themselves to grip and deal with this problem so that we are seeing a reduction and not—as we are seeing now, month on month and year on year—a rise.

3.40 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, and, as always, to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). I often seem to follow him in knife crime debates, which is always daunting.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) for introducing it. I agree with, I think, everyone in this Chamber; there is a lot of agreement about what the problems are, what issues we face, and what should be done. I know that the Minister is listening and that she will do all she can.

I want to remember the young men who have died in my constituency of Croydon Central. Andre Aderemi died in August 2016. Jermaine Goupall, who was only 15, died in August 2017. And Kelva Smith, whom I had canvassed during the election campaign and promised that I would work on knife crime and do all the things that we needed to do—I let him down; we all let him down—was stabbed to death on the streets of Croydon in March 2018.

Fortunately, there have not been any murders of that kind in Croydon since. We are very glad about that and hope that it is the start of a trend. I want to pay tribute to my borough of Croydon, which, in the face of very significant cuts, is doing a lot. There are community groups. There are faith groups, which we should not forget, because faith groups have people who can love one another; have money; have buildings that they can sometimes support other community groups in; and have faith, which is what drives those people who are religious and gives them a purpose. We must not forget the faith groups, because they have a huge role to play. We also have the council and the police. They are all working together. Croydon Council has committed to setting up a violence reduction unit, which is a very good thing.

The main flip that I think we need to see at national, regional and local level is that, rather than panicking every time knife crime rises and throwing a pot of money at the problem, we need to understand the problem and its causes, work out how much money that would cost to address and then implement the measures necessary. What happens, probably across all our constituencies, is that as soon as there is a pot of money, many different organisations have to compete with one another to get it. It leads to a situation in which we are encouraging people to work on their own, rather than working together. We need to flip that round.

In Croydon, we have done a review of the 60 serious cases of youth violence. That has not been published yet, but we have seen some of the findings. In the 60 serious cases of youth violence, every single child was outside mainstream education. There was a maternal absence. That was interesting because we often talk about paternal absence, but there was also a maternal absence. It was not necessarily that the mother was not there, but she may have had an addiction, may have been working several jobs or may have had her own mental health problems such that she was not able to parent.

The other interesting finding was that, of the 60, very few had a trusted adult—whether that be a teacher, someone from a state organisation or a family member—in their life. When we look at the number of times, especially as seen in the serious case reviews for most violent deaths, that the state intervenes, for none of the people to be able to be a trusted adult because they come and go and different state bodies intervene is significant. That intervention does not quite have the impact that we want it to have.

I really hope that Croydon, by setting up the violence reduction unit, will look at all these things in the round—look at adverse childhood experiences, look at the trauma-informed approach and look at what is actually going on in the streets of Croydon. We have done a bit of work looking at where violence happens in public in Croydon, and there are about 11 hotspots in the borough; there are only about 11 places where most of the violence occurs. If there are only 11 hotspots, surely we can have more policing in those areas and try to tackle some of those problems for the long term.

Like other colleagues, I pay tribute to the schools. There is a huge difference, which we have talked about, in approaches to these issues. In Croydon, there is one school that in a year made 187 temporary or permanent exclusions. There are others that make a handful, if any. Those approaches are very different. We have had many conversations about why this is happening—why exclusions are increasing, and what we need to do about it.

It is a slightly easy response to blame entirely the new academy system, as some people do. Because of the autonomy that academies have, perhaps we are not able to put enough pressure on them, and they are looking to their results. That may be true up to a point, but there are also some excellent academies that are not excluding children, so we need to understand what is really going on in that mix.

The all-party parliamentary group on knife crime, which I chair, did some work on this, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) mentioned. We found that one third of local authorities do not have any places left in their pupil referral units. That is not surprising, given that permanent exclusions have increased by 56% in the past three years. Almost half those exclusions are of children with special needs. It cannot be right that we are permanently excluding children with special needs without going through a whole series of interventions that should be in place to try to keep them in mainstream schools. That will not always be possible. It is not always right for children to be in mainstream schools, and we do need to have a PRU system that works, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) said,

[Sarah Jones]

we need to look at the whole PRU world, because not enough light is being shone on the good and the bad, and how effective they are.

Knife offences have increased at pretty much the same—

Lyn Brown: Can I just make a tiny intervention on the point that my hon. Friend has just made? One issue with the PRU in my constituency is that mums have complained that the people they are trying to get their children away from, the groomers, are waiting outside the PRU because the captive audience is going to leave it and walk straight into their arms.

Sarah Jones: That is absolutely true. There is a greater vulnerability to influence. There are lots of issues with PRU systems. For example, children tend to finish much earlier than in mainstream schools; they finish at 2 o'clock, so they are more likely to be on the streets for longer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) has mentioned before in Parliament, if we look at when knife offences occur, we see that there is a peak after school and before parents come home from work. It is absolutely tragic, but the number goes up, and then it goes down again. It would be good to keep children busy for that time, before their parents get home from work.

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. In pressing the point about PRUs and alternative provision, will she also recognise—I am sure that she sees this in Croydon—the very real concerns about the disproportionality in the number of black and minority ethnic children who are excluded from schools and find themselves in alternative provision, and, frankly, the seeming scarcity of public concern about that escalation in school exclusion rates?

Sarah Jones: My right hon. Friend is absolutely, completely right. I have had cases in my constituency, as we probably all have, and I have talked before in the Chamber about the worst case that I had.

A young boy who was black was permanently excluded from school. He was on the route to being diagnosed as autistic, which takes a very long time. Everybody knew that he was autistic. His classroom was turned around over the half-term period, so when he came back to it everything was different. He kind of freaked out: he was violent and was permanently excluded. This child was five—five years old. We appealed the case and won, but for obvious reasons his parents did not really want him to stay in that school, so we found alternative provision. His mother is a wonderful woman, who has the wherewithal to be able to fight the system—get in touch with her MP, and do all the things that people need to do. I just feel for the people whom I do not meet; they are the ones who do not have that wherewithal, so they suffer much more.

We absolutely need to look at education. The Government are looking at the issue. Ofsted is looking at it, too, and the Children's Commissioner has done great work. We really need to work out how some schools manage to keep these kids and not exclude them, while still running a good school without disruption to the other children in their classes.

I will talk a little about the public health approach. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead said that there is no magic bullet for these issues, and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) said that of course we know what the solutions are, and we just need to follow what works. I think both those things are true, and we need to be clear about that.

We actually know a lot about what works. Violence is not inevitable; how we reduce violence is absolutely evidence-based. The public health model is a way of reducing violence. When we talk to surgeons such as Duncan Bew from King's College Hospital, he will say that he is a great advocate for the public health approach. He spends his time putting back together children who have been stabbed. Actually, we should also recognise that there would be a lot more dead young people were it not for surgeons' improvement in their practices over the years. The survival rates for stabbings have gone up massively and it is a credit to our medical profession that they have managed to do that.

Duncan Bew, this great surgeon who is an advocate for the public health approach, would say that if he, as a doctor, knew that there was a cure for a disease but he did not implement it, then he would be done for medical negligence. Why on earth, then, are we not doing what we absolutely know works—looking at violence as an epidemic? That is what it is. It goes up then it goes down, and it spreads and then contracts. Reducing it is all about interventions. As the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green said—completely rightly—we have to keep doing things, because we can do all the right things and reduce the violence, but then it will go up again.

The public health approach is very simply about interrupting the violence, preventing its future spread and changing social norms so that it does not happen again. It is very clear. The World Health Organisation has done plenty of work on this issue as well; it will give people the seven strategies of intervention, which work. We just need to look at the evidence of that work, and as my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham said, there needs to be more than words. We need to make sure that we actually put the funding in underneath, to ensure that we make all the interventions that we know work.

On county lines, I agree with everything that has been said already. Croydon has a line to Exeter and I have met Exeter police. They say that if they go to the coach station in Exeter and see a little chap getting off the coach with no baggage, that is someone they need to be looking out for. However, one of the issues they have highlighted to me is how we make sure that those young people, when they are picked up by the police, are looked after; sometimes the police will ring the council and the council say, "Well, the foster parent doesn't want them any more, because they have just been found with drugs. We haven't got any emergency foster care. Can you just keep them there for a bit?" The police end up with these kids sitting in their office for hours on end while the council tries to find someone to look after them.

Meg Hillier: My hon. Friend highlights a really important issue. One of the other challenges, of course, is that if a child is outside their own local area, they fall between different social services authorities. They are picked up

as an emergency case, if they are young enough, by the receiving area, but ultimately they are not that area's responsibility. I am sure she will agree that that issue also needs to be looked at.

Sarah Jones: Absolutely—I completely agree. Joining up all these services, so that we look after these children properly, is incredibly important.

Youth services have already been mentioned, as have policing and the strong case for more resourcing for neighbourhood policing. When we met a group of young people who had been in prison for knife crimes, some of whom had been in and out of prison over a number of years, they talked about knowing their local community police in the past. They said that that was not the case now.

Finally, I will talk about sentencing—we have not talked about that much—and about what we do with our young people. The all-party parliamentary group went up to Polmont in Scotland last year. Scotland has stopped imposing custodial sentences of less than a year for young people, so it has halved its youth prison population, but it has kept the funding in place for the prison in Polmont. Scotland now has half the number of young people in prison that it had before; those young people who are in prison are there for serious crimes. They are the people with the significant issues.

In Polmont, the funding goes into teaching young people to read and write, giving them apprenticeships and giving them all kinds of skills. The fire brigade comes in and does a course with a load of them on public safety. Local businesses teach them how to do bricklaying or other skills that we actually need outside prison. We met a lot of those young people, who are managing to turn their lives around.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham talked about the fact that a lot of the people involved in knife crime in London are black. Of course, in Polmont the entire population is white, but when we asked people there, “What are the issues that cause knife crime in Scotland?”, they will say, “Sectarianism”—a word that we do not use in London at all. Sectarianism is the issue in Scotland.

It is worth looking at the underlying issues, one of which is that of those young people in that prison for youth offenders, two-thirds come from the 20% most deprived areas. The same poverty underlies all this violence. Furthermore, nearly 40% of them had lived in a family where there was domestic violence, and 75% had experienced a traumatic bereavement. Traumatic bereavements are really significant. A lot of those young people had experienced one, two or three traumatic bereavements—somebody in their family had been murdered, or had died of a drug overdose or in some kind of other accident. Some 50% of them had parents who had been in prison. The issues there are exactly the same as in London.

I want to ask the Minister some questions, although I know that she will probably not have time to answer all of them today. I am interested to know how the Government are engaging with young people on this issue, because, as has been mentioned, young people are at the heart of what we need to do. They are the answer to all these problems. It would also be good if she talked about what more we can do about school exclusions, and how we can share good practice on that issue.

There was a recent report in *The Independent* that the Home Office is reducing the support available to county lines victims. I do not know whether the Minister can comment on that. Also, does she have any understanding of the proportion of children involved in knife crime, or in any kind of serious violence, as a result of grooming and criminal exploitation? My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham talked about that.

The figures from the Office for National Statistics that came out today showed that knife crime is up by 8%—the highest level on record. We absolutely need to tackle that rise and to be far more ambitious about doing so. I end by saying that our ambition should be nothing less than to be the safest country in the world. That is what we should aim for. To achieve that, we need to increase policing but we also need to look at the underlying causes of violence. As Desmond Tutu famously said,

“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.”

That is the answer.

Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair): We now have three Front-Bench speakers to wind up, but I know that the hon. Gentleman who secured the debate would also like to wind up briefly at the end for a couple of minutes.

John Cryer: If we have time.

Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair): If we have time.

3.59 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, and to summarise the debate and speak on behalf of the Scottish National party.

I thank the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) for securing this very important debate. He took time to stress the importance of an approach that addresses prevention as well as cure. He also asked that we address the causes of crime and, in doing so, adopt a joined-up approach.

The hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) asked what could be done to monitor social media, which can be used to promote violent crime. The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) highlighted the extended trauma felt within communities and the fear it spreads. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) noted that violent crimes are sometimes associated with tit-for-tat crime among criminal gangs, and mentioned the role that our media play in that. He also mentioned the violence reduction unit in Scotland, which I will talk about in greater detail later.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) rightly talked about the victims and their families, and highlighted an increase in violent organised crime and the young people who are, and will be, put at risk until we address this problem. The hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) talked about the need to invest in communities in a way that benefits them—“working with” rather than “doing to”. The hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) expressed frustration that we are not keeping pace with the changing nature of the

[*Ronnie Cowan*]

problem, and also referred to the VRU in Glasgow. The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) spoke movingly about a young man who survived a terrible attack but whose mother now does not know where to turn. Where is the support for those victims? The alternative is young men and women being recruited into gangs, so we need intervention and support.

The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) said that he was weary, depressed and upset that we are still debating violent crime all these years after he came to this place, and that the statistics in England and Wales are getting worse. Like many others, he mentioned policing and county lines, which is surely a subject on which a debate is waiting to be had. Finally, the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) asked the Minister to listen to the consensus of opinion that she has heard today. The hon. Lady also paid tribute to faith groups, which play an important part in our community, and I am glad that she found time to mention the excellent work that has been done in Polmont. From that brief summary we can feel the frustration and anger at the loss of life and the perversion of aspirations, especially among our young people.

A United Nations report published in 2005 found that Scotland was the most violent country in the developed world, with more than 2,000 people subject to violent attacks every week. In the same year, another report produced by the World Health Organisation determined that Scotland had the second highest murder rate in western Europe. Glasgow was widely claimed to be the murder capital of Europe, as was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, with more than 70 knife-related murders every year.

Looking back on those statistics, one of the most eye-catching aspects was the rapid increase in crime over a relatively short period. Between 2003 and 2004, for example, the number of murders rose by almost 20% and the number of attempted murders rose by one third. An arms race was taking place on our streets as individuals sought to protect themselves from perceived threats. Drugs, alcohol and gang culture played a key role in that rapid rise in knife crime, and many urban areas of Scotland were affected.

That experience was not felt exclusively by Glaswegians. My constituency of Inverclyde also suffered—or, to be more specific, families suffered from the loss of loved ones as we tried to grapple with violence on our streets. Scotland stood at a crossroads, and it was at that point that Strathclyde police established the violence reduction unit, in an effort to change the circumstances that were giving Glasgow such a brutal reputation. There are similarities with London's well-publicised problems with knife crime, which are spreading throughout the United Kingdom, in part due to county lines. Perhaps the rest of the United Kingdom is now standing at a crossroads as to how it tackles that problem.

Scotland's choice was to take a public health approach to knife crime. While custodial sentences for handling offensive weapons tripled in length between 2005 and 2015, a number of other programmes were launched to engage directly with young people. For instance, a pilot scheme called No Knives, Better Lives was first implemented in my constituency of Inverclyde. That scheme was primarily an education programme and included workshops that

allowed young people to speak with ex-offenders, victims and medical professionals as they learned about the consequences of carrying a knife. That programme was backed up by high-profile advertising campaigns in cinemas, bus stops and other public locations. By 2010, there had been a 35% drop in knife carrying, and since 2006-07, there has been a 68% decrease in violent crime in Inverclyde.

The VRU has been supported by the work of Medics Against Violence, a group of medical professionals from a range of disciplines who go out and speak with schoolchildren about their experiences with knife crime. It is one thing for a child to get a lecture from their family, or indeed from a politician; it is entirely another thing for them to hear an ambulance driver describe their experience of finding a murder victim, or a plastic surgeon describe the process of reconstructing a person's face after a knife attack. However, the primary focus of the campaign was not shock and gore: it was the real-life stories that had the greatest impact on the students. Dr Christine Goodall, an oral surgeon, said in 2009:

"We realised that, in order to have some chance of preventing young people getting involved in violence, we had to address the problem early—it was no good waiting till we saw them in hospital after an injury. We realised we should be talking to young people before they accepted that violence was an inevitable part of their lives... We thought perhaps if we could take the doctors out of the clinics and operating theatres and into schools to talk about the consequences of violence from their point of view, we might have some chance of helping some young people avoid injury."

Another community initiative established by the VRU was the "call in", which called in more than 600 gang members in Glasgow. Those who attended listened to hard truths from former gang members and the families of murder victims. One attendee, named Paul, said:

"I felt excluded all my life. Now here was the police, who used to exclude me all the time and they were trying to include me."

Among the 200 gang members who became directly involved in that initiative, violent offending halved and weapons possession dropped by 85%. Violence decreased even among those who did not attend the programme. More generally, the work of the VRU has contributed to the halving of Scotland's homicide rate. Similarly, the number of recorded incidents of handling an offensive weapon declined by almost 70% between 2006 and 2016. The number of recorded violent crimes has also halved since 2006-07 to one of the lowest levels since 1974.

All of those achievements have been made possible by the more than £17 million in funding provided by the Scottish Government, including £1.6 million to the VRU's community initiative to reduce violence—which tackles territorial gang culture in Glasgow—and £776,000 to the mentors in violence protection schools programme to continue its work of educating our young people about the impact of violence. That policy is a statement that the Scottish Government will not allow knife crime to be normalised.

Duncan Bew, the clinical lead for trauma and emergency surgery at King's College London, who was cited earlier by the hon. Member for Croydon Central, stated:

"The VRU is run by the police force, with support from the Scottish government. This is highly unusual—Scotland has the world's only police force to have formally adopted a public health model."

I know that London can learn from our experience, and I am pleased to read that the city recently established a VRU. I wish its director, Lib Peck, all the best in her new role, and in spreading the message that violence is not inevitable.

In the words of a tireless knife crime campaigner from my constituency, John Muir MBE:

“We have to be honest about what is going on out there.”

We have clearly had some success in Scotland, but we cannot become complacent. Knife crime still exists, violence is still on our streets, and even one death from knife crime can devastate a community. I sincerely hope that the UK Government can learn the lessons of prevention and are taking a proactive approach, engaging with those at risk of going down the road of violence.

4.9 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) on securing this important debate. It has been an excellent debate that has allowed us a lot more space than we usually have in the main Chamber to debate the root causes of the issues and practical solutions. What has been striking has been the consensus around both the causes and the solutions.

My hon. Friend spoke about the profound shift in society and how the structures that used to provide the safety net for young people have been undermined or even disappeared. The hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) talked about the creation of similar gaps through which vulnerable children are falling because of the failure, particularly of local authorities, to provide services thanks to nine years of cuts. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) talked about the self-same perfect storm of cuts that have created vacuums allowing criminal gangs to exploit very vulnerable children. We heard about the trauma not only for victims and their families, but for entire communities such as West Ham, Walthamstow and Lewisham West and Penge, where people feel afraid to go out to use the shops and attend school, despite the clear resilience of those communities.

The debate has made clear the consensus on finding a public health solution and a whole-system, long-term, trauma-informed approach that targets intervention and has prevention as its absolute focus, providing intervention as early as possible alongside targeted, permanent community policing. It is clear that that kind of joined-up approach simply is not happening at the moment. At Home Office questions, I raised with the Minister the need for mental health referrals for victims of crime. I had a young constituent—he was 17 years old—who was stabbed multiple times last August. He was then targeted by the same gang and stabbed again in September. He is still to receive a child and adolescent mental health services referral. He is without mental health support six months on, after being stabbed multiple times on two separate occasions. That simply is not good enough and shows the failure we are experiencing in the system.

For everyone scarred by this now five-year upward trend of violence, it augurs a personal crisis from which they will never truly recover, with young lives lost, families destroyed and a son or a daughter they will never see again. It is a national crisis. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) was right about that. I served as a special constable 10 years ago in Brixton, which is a high-crime neighbourhood. In my three years, I never experienced

a shift like the one he described. Our police are facing demand that they have never seen before. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) said, that is because they are acting as a blue-light service of first and last resort. They are picking up the crises in all our other public services, including mental health and social care. They are having to transport patients with physical illnesses and ailments because the ambulance cannot arrive. She described a case where the police did not turn up for two hours after a machete attack. My jaw dropped. It is thoroughly unacceptable.

Meg Hillier: If I may correct my hon. Friend, the police did not turn up at all to that community, on that day or thereafter.

Louise Haigh: It was even worse than I said. It is completely unacceptable. As my hon. Friend said, the police do their best when they arrive, but they are so stretched for resources that they are simply unable to provide the service that the public need and deserve.

It is important to set the context for the contagion of youth violence we are seeing. As has been said, today's crime statistics confirm once again that we are facing a crisis. I am sorry to say that it has been allowed to build as a result of neglect by the Government. Never since records began has violent crime been as high as it is today. Never since records began has knife crime been as high as it is today. The number of arrests has halved in a decade. As statistics today have shown, not only are we seeing a surge in violent crime, but police numbers remain at levels not seen for 30 years. We know that hampers the ability to tackle violent crime, and it does so in two important ways.

First, the fall in police numbers inevitably forces the police to focus their resources on reactive policing and responding to emergencies and crimes once they have happened. That is why we saw so many neighbourhood policing teams merged with response teams, masking the true number of officers lost from our streets. It is thoroughly ineffective, because the policing matrix shows that almost two thirds of successful interventions designed to reduce crime are proactive, rather than reactive.

Secondly, and even more crucially, evidence has shown time and again that local policing increases the legitimacy of police, which encourages the local community to provide intelligence and report crimes. It is beyond doubt that the reduced legitimacy of the police as a result of cuts has led to under-reporting, especially in certain categories of high-volume crime. That legitimacy and support from communities suffering from this epidemic is crucial to any success. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham talked about the need for young people in particular to see the police in a different light, as fellow human beings and members of the same community.

Intelligence-led stop and search will always be a crucial tool in bearing down on knife crime, but the truth is that that tool can only hope to be successful alongside a proper neighbourhood policing function rooted firmly in the community. Policing matters—of course it does—but serious youth violence does not happen in a vacuum; it reflects the environment and the society in which individuals live, learn and work throughout youth and adulthood and the political choices made about who to support. The story of youth violence is at

[*Louise Haigh*]

heart a question of vulnerability and is fundamentally a result of twin failures: first, an environment that fails to nurture children; and secondly, services creaking under terrible strain and unable to provide the specialist support that children in particular desperately need. That is the scandal at the heart of this violence, and it is the real price of austerity. We have talked about exclusions, which my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) spoke passionately about. Just 2% of the general population have been excluded from school, compared with 50% of the prison population.

The Children's Commissioner has shown that 70,000 under 25-year-olds are currently feared to be part of gang networks. Some 2 million children live in families with complex needs, and 1.6 million have no recognised form of additional support. As the Children's Commissioner said in her excellent report on vulnerabilities:

"We are all familiar with frailty in old age but much less so for children and teenagers...do we know...about children who start school unable to speak? Do we understand how this affects their...progression? Do we realise that an inability to express yourself leads to anger, and difficult behaviour, which is then reflected in rising school exclusions...? Do we know that if this continues...not only does the child's education suffer but so does their mental health? Do we know that 60% of children who end up in the youth justice estate have a communication problem...? No—we do not know how many children got speech and language therapy last year, or how many were turned down."

Why do we not know that, Minister? Why are we using evidence dating back to 2002 on the link between school exclusions and violence? Why has nationwide research not been conducted since 2006 on why young people carry knives and use them on each other? The last research was prior to the rise of social media and the consequences of austerity. Why are our services not designed to prevent children with special educational needs or speech and language difficulties ending up in the criminal justice system? Why do hospital-based diversions only exist in a handful of hospitals across the country, while serious youth violence is prevalent in every city? Why have our known successful youth services been denigrated to the point that most young people do not have access to any diversionary activities at all? I hope the Minister will consider carefully the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead for a full inquiry, so that we can consider all the factors in why young people are carrying knives.

The Government's language on public health has been welcome, but while it is easy to talk, it is much more difficult to take the action necessary to tackle this contagion. That is the task before the Minister and we will all continue to hold her and this Government to account. Despite the challenges posed by Brexit, there is no more pressing or significant a challenge facing the House than the one we have been discussing today.

4.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I thank the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) for securing this extremely important debate. I thank colleagues from across the House for their contributions. Many of them have cited incredibly moving examples from their own constituencies and communities of youth violence and youth tragedies.

I am particularly moved by the very recent tragedy for the family of Jaden Moodie. I offer my sincere condolences to his family on behalf of the Government and, I am sure, the House. He was just a child. Anyone who has not experienced the loss that the Moodie family, and those other families we have heard about today, have experienced simply cannot begin to believe or understand the pain or difficulties that they are going through, this day and every other day.

We have heard primarily from London MPs, but I am conscious that this issue is not restricted to London. Indeed, just before Christmas I met someone from my constituency, which is very rural and very different from some of the constituencies represented here, who was the victim of a knife attack in our market town. The circumstances were very different from the county lines scenario that many hon. Members have described, but none the less important. I know that this issue affects many Members across the House, and their constituents.

I was struck by the urging of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), and the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and for Leyton and Wanstead, that we should listen to young people's voices. I completely agree with them. That is an important part of my role. Indeed, last year, as well as going to visit youth services and people who work with young people in their communities, I invited former gang members into the House of Commons to meet colleagues, so that they could describe their experiences to us in this place of power and influence that sets the laws that have such an impact on their lives.

I am also sympathetic to colleagues' urgings regarding adverse childhood experiences. This week we launched the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, which, as I said at the time of the launch, is important for not only the immediate victims of domestic abuse, but the children who witness incidents of violence in their homes. We know that the most prevalent factor for children in contact with social services is experience of domestic abuse. Those children are more likely than those not in contact with social services to require alternative education provision. Again, we have heard from hon. Members about the impact that that can have.

One woman I spoke to last week at a women's centre told me how her teenage son had started to copy the behaviour that he had witnessed at home before she could escape her incredibly toxic relationship. The gang members whom we meet and talk to through youth workers provide a reminder that domestic abuse is a horribly common factor for those who are drawn into gangs as well.

I pay tribute to the police and all agencies that work to stop violence, and that have to deal with the aftermath of violent incidents. I know that those thanks are very much echoed across the House. I want to give the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead a chance to wind up, so I will try to stop in about six minutes.

The Government published the serious violence strategy last year. I know that hon. Members are very familiar with that document, which sets out a step change in the way we think about and tackle serious violence. One of the most important parts of the strategy is the serious violence taskforce. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) are both part of the taskforce.

It is an important way of drawing together all the agencies that have been mentioned, and placing an obligation on them to change some of their thinking.

The topic of exclusions has been raised frequently. A great deal of work is going on at the moment through the taskforce, and through the Department for Education, on exclusions. A report is due, I hope shortly, from Edward Timpson, looking at alternative provision across the country. The results of that review, as well as the work that we are conducting through the taskforce, will help to solve some of the problems that have emerged regarding children being vulnerable to gangs.

The right hon. Member for Tottenham spoke passionately about the role of drugs. He spoke with eloquence and clear feeling about how it has affected his constituents, and the young people in his constituency who are being used to ferry drugs around the country. Shockingly, the United Kingdom is, I think, the highest consumer of cocaine in Europe. I emphasise the message again that anyone taking those drugs—a wrap at the weekend, or whatever—needs to be very clear about the role that their wrap is playing in the wider market of drugs and gangs.

We are taking a range of specific actions—too many, I am afraid, to go through this afternoon. The Offensive Weapons Bill is making its way through Parliament to ensure that we tighten up on some of the problems that we know about regarding, for example, the online sale of knives. We have just announced 29 projects that will benefit from £17.5 million through our early intervention youth fund. Many of those are, I am happy to say, in constituencies of Members of Parliament here today.

We are supporting additional much smaller charities through the anti-knife-crime community fund. I am glad that one of the projects that we are supporting is Redthread, because we know from A&E wards, which sadly have to try to pick up the pieces after a violent incident, that there is a teachable moment for children who are brought into A&E wards. Through Redthread, in London, Nottingham and Birmingham, we can reach more children to stop them on the path that they are taking.

I recognise the role of robust law enforcement. I have been out on a raid with the Metropolitan police's violent crime taskforce. I am really pleased that that is working well. Nationally, we have Operation Sceptre, where every single police force in the country has a week of action of tackling knife crime in a way that is appropriate for their local area.

I am also very much in agreement with colleagues who raised data-sharing. We put explicit comfort in the Data Protection Act 2018 that organisations can, and should, share data to safeguard vulnerable people. The more we can put that message out, and press, frankly, the Department of Health and Social Care and others to have confidence in that, the sooner we will see results. Very often, A&E departments are where we can get a great deal of information about what is happening, and where, in our local communities.

The Home Secretary recently announced a new £200 million youth endowment fund to provide long-term support over the next decade to young people at risk of involvement in violence. That picks up on the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green: that we need a permanent focus on the problem.

That approach is coupled with the fact that we will consult on imposing a new legal duty to support the multi-agency approach in tackling serious violence. Again, there is a focus on permanence and ensuring that we are working constantly to help these young people. There will also be a review of drugs misuse, given the importance of drugs as a driver of violence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster raised many points, including international crime. Other developed economies are facing similar issues with the rise in violent crime. We called police forces, law enforcement agencies and health agencies to London a couple of months ago to talk to us, and to discuss what we could do internationally to stop it as well.

Those are just some of the measures that we are taking. I am very conscious that I have not had time to answer more questions. I thank every colleague who has spoken. If there are particular issues that they would like to discuss with me outside the debate, I am happy to do so. However, I think there is one thing on which we agree: we all want this to stop. I believe that by working together, with the comprehensive approach that we have taken this afternoon, we can—and will—make that happen.

4.28 pm

John Cryer: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I will be brief, because I do not have much choice. This has been a cracking debate; I wish I could refer more extensively to the speeches of hon. Members across the parties, but I will make just two points.

First, my friend and neighbour the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and many others spoke extensively about the public health approach to youth crime and youth violence, particularly knife violence. Crucial to that approach, as far as London is concerned, is the restoration of the safer neighbourhoods teams, which were introduced about 20 years ago. I was the Member for Hornchurch at the time—it was before I lost to the predecessor of the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez): not that I am bitter about it.

I remember the teams coming in and making a palpable difference almost straight away. There is intelligence that cannot be picked up when the police address crime purely by responding to incidents; it takes safer neighbourhoods teams out there, getting to know their wards. Every ward in London had a safer neighbourhoods team with a “one, two, three” system: one sergeant, two officers and three police community support officers.

Secondly, will the Minister consider my request for a full public inquiry into youth crime and its relationship to drugs, knife crime and violent crime generally? Perhaps she could discuss the matter with the Home Secretary and come back to me.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered tackling knife crime.

4.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 24 January 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Supporting New Parents in Work

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): Through the industrial strategy the Government are working to transform our economy to ensure that everyone, no matter what their background, can enter into the labour market and progress at work.

In the “Good Work Plan” we set out an ambition that all work should be fair and decent. Pregnancy and maternity discrimination has absolutely no place in that ambition. It is unlawful.

In our response to the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into pregnancy and maternity discrimination, we made a commitment to review the position in relation to redundancy following the suggestion that we could further strengthen existing protections. We have completed that review.

Tomorrow, we are publishing a consultation document proposing legislative changes to strengthen the existing protection against redundancy by extending it into a period of return to work after maternity leave or other types of parental leave. It currently applies to women on maternity leave. By doing so we will further help to tackle discrimination and support new parents in work.

The consultation also covers other steps we are taking to change the culture which can exist around pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace.

Copies of the consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1277]

DEFENCE

War Pensions Scheme: Up-rating

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The new rates of war pensions and allowances proposed from April 2019 are set out in the following tables. The annual uprating of war pensions and allowances for 2019 will take place from the week beginning 8 April 2019. Rates for 2019 are increasing by 2.4% in line with the September 2018 consumer price index.

<i>War Pensions Rates</i>		
	<i>Rates</i>	<i>Rates</i>
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>
	£	£
<i>War Pensions</i>		
<i>Disablement Pension (100% rates)</i>		
officer (£ per annum)	9,674.00	9,904.00
other ranks (weekly amount)	185.40	189.80
<i>Age Allowances Payable from Age 65</i>		
40% - 50%	12.40	12.70
over 50% but not over 70%	19.10	19.55
over 70% but not over 90%	27.15	27.80

<i>War Pensions Rates</i>		
	<i>Rates</i>	<i>Rates</i>
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>
	£	£
Over 90%	38.20	39.10
<i>Disablement Gratuity (one-off payment)</i>		
specified minor injury (min.)	1,181.00	1,209.00
specified minor injury (max.)	8,816.00	9,028.00
1% - 5% gratuity	2,948.00	3,019.00
6% - 14% gratuity	6,554.00	6,711.00
15% - 19% gratuity	11,462.00	11,737.00
<i>Supplementary Allowances</i>		
<i>Unemployability Allowance</i>		
personal	114.55	117.30
adult dependency increase	63.65	65.20
increase for first child	14.80	15.15
increase for subsequent children	17.40	17.80
<i>Invalidity Allowance</i>		
higher rate	22.65	23.20
middle rate	14.70	15.10
lower rate	7.35	7.55
<i>Constant Attendance Allowance</i>		
exceptional rate	139.80	143.20
intermediate rate	104.85	107.40
full day rate	69.90	71.60
part-day rate	34.95	35.80
<i>Comforts Allowance</i>		
higher rate	30.10	30.80
lower rate	15.05	15.40
mobility supplement	66.75	68.35
allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	69.92	71.60
therapeutic earnings limit (annual rate)	6,526.00	6,838.00
exceptional severe disablement allowance	69.90	71.60
severe disablement occupational allowance	34.95	35.80
clothing allowance (per annum)	239.00	245.00
education allowance (per annum) (maximum)	120.00	120.00
<i>Widow(er)s Benefits</i>		
widow(er)s-other ranks (basic with children) (weekly amount)	140.60	143.95
widow(er)-officer higher rate both wars (basic with children) (per annum)	7,477.00	7,656.00
childless widow(er)s u-40 (other ranks) (weekly amount)	33.67	34.48
widow(er)-officer lower rate both wars (per annum)	2,597.00	2,659.00
supplementary pension	94.05	96.31
<i>Age Allowance</i>		
(a) age 65 to 69	16.00	16.40
(b) age 70 to 79	30.80	31.55
(c) age 80 and over	45.70	46.80
<i>Children's Allowance</i>		
increase for first child	22.05	22.60
increase for subsequent children	24.70	25.30
<i>Orphan's Pension</i>		
increase for first child	25.25	25.85
increase for subsequent children	27.60	28.25
unmarried dependant living as spouse (max)	138.25	141.60
rent allowance (maximum)	52.95	54.20
adult orphan's pension (maximum)	108.05	110.65

[HCWS1275]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council: January 2019

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): The Agriculture and Fisheries Council takes place in Brussels on 28 January.

As the provisional agenda stands, the primary focus for agriculture will be on the post-2020 common agriculture policy (CAP) reform package. There will be an exchange of views on the new delivery model for the regulation on CAP strategic plans, followed by a presentation from the Commission on green architecture. The Council will then discuss the proposed regulation on common market organisation (CMO) of agricultural products.

The presidency will also give a presentation on its work programme, and there will be a presentation by the Commission on a protein plan, which the Council will then debate.

There is currently one item scheduled for discussion under “any other business”:

information from the Danish delegation on the establishment of an international centre for antimicrobial resistance solutions (ICARS) to strengthen the fight against AMR internationally and especially in low and middle-income countries.

An additional item is also expected to be added to the agenda under “any other business”:

information from the Commission on the outcome of the ministerial conference on “Eradication of African swine fever in the EU and the long-term management of wild boar populations”.

[HCWS1273]

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Crime Agency

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): The National Crime Agency (NCA) leads the fight against serious and organised crime. It has the power to task other law enforcement partners and a capability, with local to international reach, to disrupt the impact of serious and organised crime on the UK.

This is the fifth HMIC inspection of the NCA. The inspection stemmed from a recommendation in the 2015 NCA internal review of warrants and was conducted jointly with HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI).

This report is being published today and I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library of both Houses. I have asked Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to publish this report on my behalf and it will be available online at www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk.

The inspection found that the NCA has been working to tackle the areas of concern highlighted in the 2015 review. The inspection of search authorities, search warrants and production orders identified some deficiencies, but overall HMICFRS found the applications are completed to a good standard. HMICFRS made six recommendations which will improve procedures and update guidance and they believe these recommendations will help enhance what is already a mature process.

It is for the director general to respond to these recommendations, in line with the requirements of the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

[HCWS1276]

Police Grant Report: England and Wales 2019-20

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), has today laid before the House, the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2019-20 (HC 1896) for the approval of the House. The report sets out my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary’s determination for 2019-20 of the aggregate amount of grant that he proposes to pay under section 46(2) of the Police Act 1996.

The first role of Government is to protect the public. We will always ensure that the police have the powers and resources needed to keep our citizens and communities safe. We know that the police need the right capabilities and resources to respond to the changing nature of crime. This financial year, we provided forces with a £460 million increase in overall funding, including increased funding to tackle counter-terrorism and £280 million for local policing through the police precept. Most Police and Crime Commissioners set out plans to use this funding to either protect or enhance frontline policing.

Last year, we indicated we would provide a similar funding settlement in 2019-20, if the police made progress in delivering further commercial savings, used mobile digital working and increased financial reserves transparency. The police have delivered on these conditions and are on track to deliver £120 million in commercial and back office savings by 2020-21 and move towards a new commercial operating model. All forces have published reserves strategies using the guidance we published in January 2018.

Before announcing the Government’s proposals, we reviewed the demand on the police again. It is clear that demand pressures on the police have risen this year as a result of changing crime. There has been a major increase in the reporting of high harm, previously hidden crimes such as child sexual exploitation and modern slavery and a growing threat from serious and organised crime (SOC). SOC affects more UK citizens, more often, than any other national security threat and costs the economy at least £37 billion each year. It is increasing in both volume and complexity.

Through the serious violence strategy, we are bearing down on the worst spike in serious violence and knife crime that we have seen in a decade by combining support for more robust and targeted policing with effective long-term investment in prevention and earlier intervention. And we need to recognise the work done by the police to combat the evolving threat from terrorism. The Government are determined to support the police to meet the demand across counter-terrorism, serious and organised crime and local policing.

I have carefully considered the responses to the consultation on the provisional police grant report. I am pleased with the positive response we have received with most Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) consulting their communities on using the new £24 precept flexibility in full and many saying that they will use the additional funding to increase or protect the frontline.

I can confirm that the allocations that have been laid before the House today are the same as those proposed in my statement of 13 December 2018. These proposals will help forces to both meet additional demand and manage financial pressures. In total, we will enable an increase in funding for the police system of up to £970 million compared to 2018-19, the biggest increase since 2010. This includes increases in Government grant funding, full use of precept flexibility, funding to support pensions costs, and increased national funding to meet the threats from counter-terrorism and serious and organised crime.

As the Chancellor announced at the Budget, funding for counter-terrorism policing will increase by £160 million compared to the 2015 spending review settlement. This is a year on year increase in counter-terrorism police funding of £59 million (8%) compared to 2018-19. This increases the counter-terrorism budget to £816 million, including £24 million for an uplift in armed policing from the police transformation fund. This is a significant additional investment in the vital work of counter-terrorism police officers across the country. PCCs will be notified of force allocations separately. These will not be made public for security reasons.

The Government have prioritised serious and organised crime (SOC) within our funding for national priorities in 2019-20. Criminal networks are increasingly resilient and adaptable, exploiting technology and ruthlessly targeting the most vulnerable, ruining lives and blighting communities. The new SOC strategy, published on 1 November, sets out the Government's new approach to prevent serious and organised crime, build our defences against it, track down the perpetrators and bring them to justice. Police forces, alongside the NCA and regional organised crime units, are an essential part of this approach, tackling complex SOC threats, including fraud, cyber-crime and child sexual exploitation and abuse. We will invest £90 million in much-needed SOC capabilities at national, regional and local levels, with a significant proportion allocated directly to police forces.

We are increasing the general Government grants to PCCs by £161 million (including £90 million additional funding from the Exchequer) to a total of £7.8 billion, including a £146 million increase in core grant funding. Each PCC will see their Government grant funding protected in real terms. Specific grants to the Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police will increase by £14 million; an affordable increase that will better reflect the additional costs of policing London, at a time when the Metropolitan Police Service faces specific financial pressures, and the City of London Police does not benefit from additional council tax precept flexibility.

Following the announcement at the Budget that the Government would allocate funding from the reserve to pay part of the costs of increases in public sector pensions contributions in 2019-20, we are allocating a further £153 million of specific grant funding to support the policing system with increases in pensions contributions (including additional funding for the counter-terrorism police network and the National Crime Agency). This funding will be distributed according to a methodology developed with police leaders.

We are also proposing to double the precept flexibility for locally accountable PCCs. Last year, we provided an additional £12 precept flexibility. This year, we propose

giving PCCs the freedom to ask for an additional £2 a month in 2019-20, to increase their band D precept by £24 in 2019-20 without the need to call a local referendum.

It is for locally accountable PCCs to take decisions on local precept and explain to their electorate how this additional investment will help deliver a better police service. If all PCCs use their flexibility in full in 2019-20, based on the latest Office for Budget Responsibility tax base forecasts, it will mean around an additional £509 million public investment in our police system.

Taken together, this substantial increase in police funding will enable forces to continue recruiting, fill crucial capability gaps such as in detectives, meet their genuine financial pressures, drive through efficiency programmes, and improve their effectiveness by preventing crime and delivering better outcomes for victims of crime.

In addition to these increases in direct funding, we will also support PCCs and forces through continued investment of £175 million in the police transformation fund (PTF) and £495 million to improve police technology, as we did last year. Our priorities in the PTF are to support sector led initiatives that will build important national capabilities delivered to forces through the major national police led programmes, which include a Single Online Home (Policing website) to engage more effectively with the public, and new ways of working through productivity and cyber-security tools supporting collaboration. The Home Office technology programmes will, for example, replace and upgrade end of life critical infrastructure such as the Airwave communication system with the 4G emergency services network. The law enforcement data service will replace the existing police national computer and police national database with an integrated service to provide intelligence to law enforcement and its partners. I set out in an annex to this letter further information regarding police funding in 2019-20, namely tables illustrating how we propose to allocate the police funding settlement between the different funding streams and between Police and Crime Commissioners for 2019-20.

As I set out in my statement of 13 December, this investment will support four key pillars of police effectiveness.

1. Increasing capacity, including investing in Police Now to attract excellent new talent, while introducing technology that saves time—so officers spend longer on the frontline;
2. Crime prevention, including funding for innovative new techniques;
3. Enhancing the support we offer to hard-working frontline police officers and staff, with the new national welfare service;
4. Through ensuring system leaders provide national direction on performance, including through working more smartly, with the digitally enabled modern tools to police effectively.

As set out in December, this settlement sets out four priority areas to drive efficiency, productivity and effectiveness next year to drive improvements in services to the public.

1. On behalf of the taxpayer, the Government will expect to see continued efficiency savings in 2019-20 through collective procurement and shared services. We need to see national approaches to procuring forensics, vehicles and basic equipment such as helmets, developed over the coming year. And we will be setting an expectation that every force contributes substantially to procurement savings; we will work with the police to agree the right force level objectives for 2019-20

and 2020-21 in the coming months. All forces should also contribute to the development of a new commercial operating model over 2019-20;

2. We will expect major progress to resolve the challenges in investigative resource identified by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, including recruiting more detectives to tackle the shortfall. We will work with the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council to support forces to make this change by accelerating their action plan on investigations, making full use of the innovation offered by Police Now;

3. Forces will have to continue improving productivity, including through smarter use of data, and digital capabilities including mobile working, with an ambition to deliver £50 million of productivity gains in 2019-20;

4. Furthermore, we expect forces to maintain a SOC response that spans the identification and management of local threats as well as support for national and regional priorities. This response should be built around the disruption of local SOC threats alongside SOC prevention, safeguarding, partnerships and community engagement.

We will be engaging with police leaders in due course to discuss how these improvements will be delivered.

This settlement is the last before the next spending review, which will set long term police budgets and look at how resources are allocated fairly across police forces. The Home Office is grateful to the police for the good work they are doing to build the evidence base to support that work, and we will also want to see evidence that this year's investment is being well spent. In addition to working together to understand demand, we will be working with the police to present an ambitious plan to drive improved efficiency, productivity and effectiveness through the next spending review period.

I have made clear that the Government's priorities are an increasing emphasis on crime prevention, while maintaining a focus on catching the perpetrators of crime; improved outcomes for victims of crime; better support for front line officers; and a step change in the effectiveness of how data and digital technology are used to build a smarter police system and support a more effective service to the public.

The Government pay tribute to our police forces and police staff around the country for their exceptional attitude, hard work and bravery.

I have set out in a separate document the tables illustrating how we propose to allocate the police funding settlement between the different funding streams and between Police and Crime Commissioners for 2019-20. These documents are intended to be read together.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-01-24/HCWS1274/>.

[HCWS1274]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing Redress

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Our White Paper "Fixing our broken housing market", published February 2017, highlighted the need to make the housing market work for everyone, and set out a comprehensive plan to achieve this.

We have been clear that we want to make the housing market fairer and more transparent for tenants, leaseholders and homeowners. This includes making sure consumers have straightforward routes for getting problems swiftly put right when things go wrong with their homes.

That is why my Department consulted earlier this year on options for strengthening consumer redress in housing, including options for streamlining housing redress services to simplify access for consumers.

The consultation sought views on the existing provision of redress for housing consumers and considered how we could improve services, strengthening access where there may be gaps in existing provision, and how future services could be configured to serve consumers better.

Today I am pleased to publish my response to this consultation. The response sets out proposals for a programme of reform to strengthen redress for housing consumers.

First, I am clear that people should be able to access help in resolving housing complaints without needing to apply to the court system. We will bring forward legislation to require all private rented sector landlords, regardless of whether they employ an agent for full management services, to be a member of a redress scheme, including all residential park home site owners and private providers of purpose-built student accommodation. We will also introduce legislation when parliamentary time allows to require all freeholders of leasehold properties, regardless of whether they employ a managing agent, to be a member of a redress scheme. Finally, we propose to bring forward legislation to create a similar requirement on all developers of new build homes to belong to a new homes ombudsman and will consult on the detail of that legislation in due course.

Secondly, there is a need to simplify access to existing redress schemes. Responses to the consultation were clear that we need to reduce confusion for customers in the face of a multiplicity of schemes, while maintaining the specialisms needed to handle complaints within specific tenures.

I therefore propose the establishment of a new housing complaints resolution service, a single access portal through which consumers will be able to seek help to resolve complaints and access redress when they have not been able to resolve disputes with their landlord, property agent or developer.

I intend to work closely with ombudsmen and redress schemes to deliver this in partnership. My ambition is for this service to be available for social housing residents, private renters, leaseholders and buyers of new build homes. People must be confident in their options when things go wrong with their homes, and we will commit to raising consumer awareness of how to resolve complaints once the new service is operational.

We will establish a redress reform working group with ombudsmen and redress schemes to help drive the programme of reform, including the establishment of the resolution service. We want to work with this group to undertake a comprehensive audit of existing standards for handling complaints and explore how they could be improved through existing and new voluntary guidance on a sector by sector basis which, where appropriate, will be underpinned through legislation or regulation.

It is my ambition that this will develop into a comprehensive code of practice on complaint handling for the whole housing sector. Through this we can ensure that there are clear expectations for accessibility, transparency, timeliness and sanctions in terms of handling complaints. Work to improve complaints handling in the social housing sector will initially be carried forward separately, given our commitments in the social housing Green Paper to address the specific issues facing social housing residents.

The redress reform working group will also help us work to understand both how to deal with complex and difficult cases, which may not fit easily within the remit of redress schemes, and how to better enforce decisions. We will keep open the option of tabling further legislation if necessary, to make this as effective as possible.

Finally, in October, we announced proposals to ensure that a new homes ombudsman is established to protect the interests of homebuyers and hold developers to account when things go wrong. We intend to bring forward legislation to require developers of new build homes to belong to a new homes ombudsman and we will consult on the detail of the proposed legislation.

Cumulatively these reforms will help ensure that nobody will be left without somewhere to go when something goes wrong with their housing, and that they will have free, accessible and independent routes to have their case resolved in a timely way.

The policy proposals primarily relate to England. The UK Government will be discussing these issues with devolved Administrations on those matters where proposals have scope outside England.

Copies of the consultation response will be placed in the Library of the House and are available on the Government's website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-consumer-redress-in-housing>.

[HCWS1272]

PRIME MINISTER

European Union Withdrawal Act: Section 13(11)(a) Statement

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Further to section 13(11)(a) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 (the 2018 Act), the Government propose to proceed with the steps outlined in my statement of Monday 21 January 2019 [HCWS1258] made under section 13(4) of the 2018 Act. As set out in that statement the Government will schedule a debate on a joint motion in neutral terms to the effect that Parliament has considered the relevant statements pursuant to the provisions of section 13 of the 2018 Act, which includes both that earlier statement and this statement. The debates will be scheduled to take place on Monday 28 January 2019 in the House of Lords and Tuesday 29 January 2019 in the House of Commons.

To enable these debates to take place the Government will today table in each House joint motions under sections 13(6) and (11) of the 2018 Act, and as provided for by section 13(13) of the 2018 Act. As was explained

in the statement of 21 January, these joint motions will replace the motions tabled in both Houses on Monday 21 January under section 13(6) of the 2018 Act. As referenced in that statement, Members will need to re-table the amendments tabled to the original motion under section 13(6)(a) of the 2018 Act. Members should seek advice from the House authorities on tabling amendments.

This approach is being taken to avoid any legal uncertainty as to whether the Government have complied fully with the terms of the 2018 Act.

[HCWS1271]

TRANSPORT

Maritime Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am today announcing the publication of "Maritime 2050: Navigating the Future", the Government's landmark strategy setting out our vision and ambitions for the future of the British maritime sector.

Our nation depends on the wide range of benefits the maritime sector delivers. It contributes over £14 billion a year to the UK economy and directly supports an estimated 186,000 jobs. Around 95% of British imports and exports are moved by sea. The leisure and marine sectors are vital to our enjoyment of the seas. Our maritime clusters around the UK showcase the diversity of our regional economies, from professional services in London to ship management and educational excellence in Scotland.

We rightly take pride in our maritime past. Maritime 2050 is about looking forward, anticipating the challenges and opportunities ahead and recognising the UK's strengths so we are well placed to capitalise on them. Maritime 2050 looks at these across seven themes and under each makes short, medium and long-term recommendations: UK competitive advantage; people; environment; technology; infrastructure; trade and security and resilience. It highlights multi-billion pound commercial investment in maritime infrastructure at ports and beyond; our unwavering commitment to safety and security; and our reputation for innovation. We pave the way on regulatory frameworks and technology to facilitate smart shipping and autonomy, and lead the way in clean maritime growth. But no matter how far advances in ships and technology take us, it sets out how the people graduating from our maritime training and academic institutions will reflect the world around us and continue to be sought after across the globe for their skills.

As the global maritime sector adapts to challenges such as climate change, rapid technological advances and security concerns, Maritime 2050 sets a series of strategic ambitions around which Government and the sector will focus their efforts, and core values which we will be guided by.

The partnership between Government and the maritime sector has been vital to the development of this strategy. It began in March 2018 with a call for evidence, seeking to reach all branches of the sector, complemented by workshops around the UK to capture the views from across our maritime clusters, and interviews with leaders

in industry and academia. Maritime 2050 has also benefited from the advice and scrutiny of an independent panel of 13 internationally respected academics, industry leaders, maritime business services providers and promotional bodies. As a result, Maritime 2050 reflects the depth and breadth of the UK's rich maritime sector.

A copy of Maritime 2050 has been placed in the Library of both Houses and is available on gov.uk, together with the trade and technology route maps setting out in greater detail the steps needed to achieve the UK's strategic maritime ambitions.

[HCWS1270]

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 24 January 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	317	EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION—continued	
Agricultural Policy	325	No-deal Preparation	332
Automotive Sector	328	Scientific, Cultural and Educational Programmes..	321
Business Community	331	Second EU Referendum.....	330
Citizenship Rights.....	326	Second EU Referendum.....	334
Contingency Planning: EU Member States.....	323	Secretary of State for Scotland: Discussions	321
Contingency Planning: No Deal	329	Support for Farmers	319
Customs Union.....	333	Topical Questions	335
Devolved Administrations: Discussions	317	Universities	329
Fishing Policy	332		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 24 January 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		HOME DEPARTMENT—continued	
STRATEGY	17WS	Police Grant Report: England and Wales 2019-20..	20WS
Supporting New Parents in Work.....	17WS		
DEFENCE	17WS	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL	
War Pensions Scheme: Uprating	17WS	GOVERNMENT	23WS
		Housing Redress	23WS
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	19WS	PRIME MINISTER	25WS
Agriculture and Fisheries Council: January 2019 ...	19WS	European Union Withdrawal Act: Section	
		13(11)(a) Statement.....	25WS
HOME DEPARTMENT	19WS	TRANSPORT	26WS
National Crime Agency	19WS	Maritime Strategy	26WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Thursday 31 January 2019**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Thursday 24 January 2019

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 317] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union

EU Free Trade Agreements [Col. 341]
Answer to urgent question—(George Hollingbery)

Business of the House [Col. 353]
Statement—(Andrea Leadsom)

Joint HMI Prison and Probation Report [Col. 369]
Statement—(Rory Stewart)

Backbench Business
Holocaust Memorial Day [Col. 378]
Motion—(Ian Austin)—agreed to
Appropriate ME Treatment [Col. 421]
Motion—(Carol Monaghan)—agreed to

Newcastle United Football Club: Regulation [Col. 448]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Knife Crime [Col. 213WH]
General Debate

Written Statements [Col. 17WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
