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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Monday 28 January 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Homelessness: Death Rates

1. **Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the death rate among homeless people. [908829]

8. **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the death rate among homeless people. [908836]

16. **Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the death rate among homeless people. [908844]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Every death of someone who is homeless is one too many. That is why we are determined to end rough sleeping altogether. We have committed £100 million to the rough sleeping strategy, and we are spending over £1.2 billion to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Preet Kaur Gill: Official figures released by Office for National Statistics just before Christmas shockingly revealed that 597 people died homeless in England and Wales in 2017—an increase of 24% over the last five years. With further cold weather expected, will the Secretary of State back Labour's £100 million-a-year plan to make cold weather emergency accommodation available for every rough sleeper in every area?

James Brokenshire: As I said before Christmas, these figures are hugely shocking. As I have already indicated, one death is one too many. That is why we are committed to taking action across the board; I pointed to the £100 million rough sleeping strategy. At times like this when we have colder weather, we have also allocated an extra £5 million over and above some of our additional work with short-term capacity to support councils to ensure that we are actually giving the help that is needed to some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Rosie Duffield: This week I spoke to the Hepatitis C Trust and my local homeless charity, Porchlight, who highlighted rough sleepers as a significantly vulnerable group in terms of alcohol and drug dependency. What steps are the Secretary of State and his Department taking to help homeless people to access mental health and addiction services?

James Brokenshire: The hon. Lady is right to highlight the issues of mental health and addiction, with a much higher proportion of people who are rough sleeping having those particular needs. That is why in the NHS long-term plan there was the commitment for an extra £30 million designed specifically for health support for rough sleepers, because sometimes access can be really difficult. We are determined to ensure that that type of support is able to be provided to rough sleepers.

Anna McMorrin: We know that homelessness is getting worse. According to Shelter, 36 new people become homeless every day. One way to address this is to make more social housing available. To do that, England should be suspending the right to buy as we have already done in Wales. Does the Secretary of State agree?

James Brokenshire: I do agree that we require more social housing. That is why we have our affordable housing programme. We have also already taken off the restrictions on councils in England to enable them to borrow to build a new generation of council homes. *[Interruption.]* I would just point out to Opposition Members, with regard to some of their comments, that this Government have built more council houses in their time than in 13 years of the last Labour Government. But we know there is more to do and we are committed to doing it.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Homelessness is rising, and that is why we need action to stop it reaching the peak levels that we saw under the last Labour Government. What progress is being made to ensure that all councils—not some, but all councils—are taking the preventive approach envisaged in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017?

James Brokenshire: I agree with my hon. Friend about the Homeless Reduction Act—a really groundbreaking piece of legislation very much emphasising a preventive agenda to prevent people from becoming homeless at all. Local authorities have received an additional £72.7 million to implement the Act, and the homelessness advice and support team has been providing support. But we need to ensure that more is done and we will certainly be reviewing the implementation of the Act by March next year.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): It is often alleged, perhaps anecdotally, that a disproportionate number of rough sleepers are people with a military background, perhaps suffering from drug or drink abuse or from post-traumatic stress disorder. Does the Department have any statistical method for checking whether that allegation is correct? If so, there would be things that could be done with the armed services as well as through the Department.

James Brokenshire: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are working with the Ministry of Defence on support that can be provided to veterans who need our help and backing because they have ended up, for whatever reason, on the street. He is right to say that we need better data, and that is what we seek to achieve.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Of the 600 homeless people who died last year, 85% were men, one third died of drug overdoses and 10% died from

alcohol poisoning. Will the Secretary of State ensure that those groups and factors are specifically prioritised in order to tackle this issue?

James Brokenshire: I am pleased to say that our rough sleeping strategy is intended to give that prioritisation, through work not only by my Department but across Whitehall. My hon. Friend is right about that need, and that is what we are determined to provide through the strategy.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Centrepiece estimates that local funding for Bath and North East Somerset Council would need to double to deliver on new duties for homeless young people under the Homelessness Reduction Act. Can the Secretary of State confirm whether he will bring forward proposals to ensure that post 2020 Homelessness Reduction Act funding is based on the level of local demand for homelessness support?

James Brokenshire: As I have indicated, we will conduct a review of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and look at evidence about local authorities' pressures and needs. I want to ensure that the Act is implemented well and that we are preventing people from becoming homeless.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): To deal with homelessness, we need to deal with the housing shortage. Will my right hon. Friend join me in applauding the work of North West Leicestershire District Council, which has overseen the construction of more than 1,000 new homes in the last 12 months, including the first council houses to be built for more than 30 years? Does he think it is a coincidence that we again recorded no rough sleepers in the district over the last 12 months?

James Brokenshire: I commend my hon. Friend and his council for the work they are doing to build the homes that our country needs. Of course it is about the supply of affordable and social housing, which is why we are taking steps across the board to get people building.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): Last year, nearly 600 people died homeless in this country. The Secretary of State was right to admit, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), that this is truly shocking. In a country as decent and well off as ours, this shames us all. We cannot stop homeless people dying if we do not grasp the reasons why it is getting worse, so why does the Secretary of State think that the number has risen in the last five years?

James Brokenshire: I share the right hon. Gentleman's understandable and rightful concern about the number who were shown to have died and the increase in rough sleeping. I have certainly not hidden from that or from the challenges and responsibilities that we have as a Government to look at the complex issues that lie behind this. We also need to look at what we can do in terms of other issues, such as social policy, where changes have been made, and to look at the evidence, to ensure that we are making a difference and eradicating rough sleeping, preventing people from becoming homeless and ensuring that the most vulnerable are well supported.

John Healey: The Secretary of State is a decent man, but that was an answer of sheer irrelevance. People are dying on the streets, and the Government are ducking the hard truth that their decisions on hostel funding, on housing benefit, on social housing investment and on protections for private renters are the root causes of the homelessness crisis. With the first widespread winter snow forecast this week, there are still areas of this country where no extra emergency accommodation will be available. Will the Secretary of State think again? Will he save lives this winter and make Labour's plan the country's national plan, with £100 million for extra emergency accommodation for every rough sleeper in every area as the temperatures are set to hit zero?

James Brokenshire: I take the issue of rough sleeping, ensuring that lives are saved and that steps can be taken to provide further accommodation and support, extremely seriously. It is one of my priorities. It is why the rough sleeping strategy looks not only at accommodation, which of course is important, and we have taken steps through our rough sleeping initiative, with additional accommodation and additional support workers out there as a consequence, but at issues of health, addiction and mental health. That is why I am determined to make that difference; and our rough sleeping strategy will make that difference and will make rough sleeping a thing of the past.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

2. **Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP):** What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the devolved Administrations on the UK shared prosperity fund.
[908830]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): UK Government Ministers meet the devolved Administrations regularly to discuss EU exit matters, and the UK shared prosperity fund has been discussed several times in those conversations. Discussions have also been held by officials with their counterparts in the devolved Administrations and key external stakeholders.

Stuart C. McDonald: On 15 November, we were promised details of the replacement for EU structural funds, but more than two months on, groups across the country still have no idea what funding will be available to them after next year. Will the Secretary of State at least assure the House that the Government on this occasion will respect the devolution settlement, and that the Scottish Government's role in delivering the structural funds will not be subject to a power grab?

James Brokenshire: The Government will of course respect the devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and we will engage with the devolved Administrations to ensure the fund works for all places across the UK. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the guarantee that has already been given for structural funds through the 2014 to 2020 allocations, and we will certainly continue to discuss those issues with the devolved Administrations and others.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): It is incredibly important that the UK Government do not confine their engagement in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to the devolved Administrations. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that, in developing the UK shared prosperity fund, they will engage fully with businesses and third sector organisations in those three nations?

James Brokenshire: We are intending to move forward with the consultation on the UK shared prosperity fund, which will allow everyone to be able to participate—obviously with the devolved Administrations, but with other stakeholders too, as I have indicated—to ensure that this fund is well structured, delivers on the new arrangements for our priorities as the UK as we leave the EU and ensures that those funds are well used.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Has the Secretary of State taken cognisance of the recommendation of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that the UK Government should at the very least match the £2.4 billion a year that communities across these islands currently receive as a result of EU structural funds?

James Brokenshire: We will look very carefully at the representations we receive. Obviously, the UK shared prosperity fund is designed to tackle inequalities between communities by raising productivity following our departure from the European Union, harnessing those opportunities and making sure that we have a new fund—according to our own priorities—that is easier to administer and therefore better able to deliver.

Alison Thewliss: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. For the period 2014 to 2020, Scotland received €476 million from the European regional development fund and €465 million from the European social fund. We are losing this because Scotland is being dragged out of the EU against our will. Will he commit today to matching this at the very least, and will he devolve the shared prosperity fund in full to the Scottish Government?

James Brokenshire: Obviously, we will consult widely on the UK shared prosperity fund. We still have the spending review to be conducted later this year, but we are determined that, as we leave the European Union, we will have these new funding arrangements in place to deliver for all of our United Kingdom, to raise the sense of opportunity and prosperity, and to make a success.

Housing Ladder: Young People

3. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help young people get on the housing ladder. [908831]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Since 2010, over 500,000 people have been helped into home ownership through Government-backed schemes, including Help to Buy and right to buy. Our recent evaluation of the Help to Buy equity loan scheme found that 58% of people using the scheme were under 35 years old.

Robert Courts: As well as challenges, the Oxfordshire Cotswolds garden village provides a real opportunity for us to have the affordable starter homes that for so long have been lacking in places such as West Oxfordshire. What are Ministers doing to provide district councils such as mine with support to provide the housing mix that our area needs?

James Brokenshire: I warmly welcome the plans for the homes in the Oxfordshire Cotswolds garden village. My hon. Friend asks about supporting local authorities, and I would say to him that we have abolished the housing revenue account borrowing cap. That, alongside the £9 billion affordable homes programme and the revised national planning policy framework, empowers local authorities to deliver the right mix of homes for their area.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): When young people find themselves homeless, they are often sofa surfing and living in risky accommodation because of the lack of council homes. Living in a rented room is more affordable than renting a private flat. Will the Secretary of State say what steps the Government are therefore taking to protect vulnerable young people seeking housing accommodation in houses in multiple occupation?

James Brokenshire: As the hon. Lady will know, we have raised standards on fitness for human habitation in legislation that was supported across the board, and improved the support to ensure that we have a stronger, more positive private rental sector market. Conversations are continuing, and I recognise the point that she makes about raising standards and ensuring that the sense of opportunity is firmly in place.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): For many young people, the biggest obstacle to getting into the housing market is the value of the land. What discussions will the Secretary of State have with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about grading agricultural land to see if we can utilise some of the less good land for house building? [*Interruption.*]

James Brokenshire: Yes, firmly in Cornwall. The national planning policy framework is about empowering some of those local decisions and choices, in Cornwall and elsewhere. I am continuing to discuss how we can have that additionality—that positive benefit that we can unlock from our national environment through our planning work—with colleagues at DEFRA and others across Government.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): The Government's Help to Buy scheme has undoubtedly helped many families on to the housing ladder, but it has also driven many other families off it by pushing up the market price. How do the Government respond to research that suggests that the net impact is at best neutral and probably negative?

James Brokenshire: No, through our schemes more than half a million households have been helped into home ownership through Help to Buy and right to buy. The number of first-time buyers rose 82% between 2010 and 2017, and we have seen the first sustained rise in

home ownership among 25 to 34-year-olds in 30 years. That is a positive step forward, although we know there is more to do. It is through initiatives such as Help to Buy that we are making that difference.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) knows all about houses as a whizz kid estate agent. Let us hear from the fellow.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): If you are ever thinking of moving, Mr Speaker, do let me know.

Councils across North Yorkshire, such as Richmondshire and Hambleton, are delivering more affordable housing to purchase through the category of discount market sale. What plans does the Secretary of State have to roll this policy out nationally?

James Brokenshire: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the veritable skills he clearly has in so many different areas, and on championing this particular course of action. It is right to recognise that we have delivered more affordable homes in the last eight years than there were in the last eight years of the last Labour Government. It is the sort of schemes that he identifies that are helping to make that difference, and we are examining carefully how such initiatives can be rolled forward.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The average mortgage for today's 27-year-old on the Government's living wage is more than half of their pay packet, but the Government are still allowing "affordable" to be defined as up to £450,000. Why do the Government not take a leaf out of Labour's book and support our first-buy homes for which mortgages are no more than a third of average income?

James Brokenshire: I will take no lectures from the Labour party, given that when it was in government it saw house building fall to levels not seen since the 1920s. We are taking various steps to see more homes built and to ensure that people can get on the ladder to fulfil their dreams. That is something that we as a Government are committed to doing.

Local Authority Funding

4. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure an equitable distribution of funding to local authorities. [908832]

15. **Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure an equitable distribution of funding to local authorities. [908843]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): We are undertaking a review of local authorities' relative needs and resources to develop a new, more transparent funding formula that will be fit for the future. We are making good progress in collaboration with the sector and recently launched a consultation that will close on 21 February.

Henry Smith: This financial year the Government have granted Crawley Borough Council more than £700,000 for homelessness reduction, and this coming financial

year it will be more than £800,000. However, the leadership of the council are complaining about a lack of capital funding for a homeless shelter when it has reserves of more than £21 million. Can I have an assurance from the Department that local authorities will be asked to properly deploy their resources to help the most vulnerable?

Rishi Sunak: The people of Crawley are lucky to be represented by someone who had a very successful career in local government. My hon. Friend is excellently well placed to know that any council should look at using its excess reserves first, rather than refusing to invest in local services or unduly increasing the burden on hard-working taxpayers.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) has just been on the receiving end of a charm offensive, in case he had not noticed.

Damien Moore: Does the Minister agree that funding is often better distributed through town councils? Will he condemn Sefton Labour councillors who voted against Southport having its own town council?

Rishi Sunak: This Government support communities that wish to take greater ownership of local decision making. I encourage my hon. Friend and Southport residents to formally petition the council to undertake a community governance review. That will ensure they have the opportunity for their views to be properly considered.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Getting back to helping the most vulnerable, in the consultation document, the Secretary of State proposed to remove deprivation completely as a means of allocating resources from the foundation element of the formula, the non-care element, and rely totally on per capita allocation. Does the Minister not accept that people in the most deprived communities are more likely to use public transport, more likely to need the help of a housing officer and more likely to use council leisure facilities because they cannot afford those in the private sector? If he will not reinstate deprivation as part of the formula, does he accept that the whole review will become known as the very unfair funding review?

Rishi Sunak: This is a consultation, and I would be happy to receive informed opinion from the hon. Gentleman, the Chair of the Select Committee. I would point out, however, that the funding formula covers broadly universal services used by the majority, if not all, of a council's residents. As we disclosed transparently in the consultation document, population is by far and away the most important factor driving the need for those services. Deprivation was shown to account for less than 4% of the variation in spend in the area.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): South Cambridgeshire District Council, deprivation rank 316, has seen a spending power cut of just £21.85 per household this year compared to 2010. Knowsley Council, deprivation rank two, has seen a spending power cut of £1,057 per household, while Hackney, deprivation rank 11, has seen the largest cuts in spending power of £1,406 per household. How is that fair?

Rishi Sunak: I have some figures, too. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to take account of the fact that the spending power per household of the most deprived authorities is today 23% higher than those that are the least deprived.

Andrew Gwynne: There are lies, damned lies and statistics. The Minister cannot get away from the fact that poorer areas are poorer on his watch and that health inequalities are widening on his watch. The situation is set to get worse as he seeks to continue with his reverse redistribution, shifting funds from the poorest communities to some of the wealthiest. Will he now agree, in the interests of transparency, to Labour's call for the National Audit Office to independently scrutinise the fairness of his so-called fair funding review before it is implemented?

Rishi Sunak: I do not think that I heard a rebuttal of the statistics I outlined. It is clear that the Government are supporting people in every part of the country. We are providing £1 billion of extra funding to deliver social services and a real-terms increase in funding for local government in the next coming year.

Leaseholders: Removal of Dangerous Materials

5. **Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): What progress he has made in discussions with developers and freeholders on ensuring that leaseholders are not liable for the removal and replacement of dangerous building materials. [908833]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler): We have been clear that owners and developers should protect leaseholders from costs. As a result of our action to date, owners and developers have made a commitment to fund the cost of remediation, or have had a warrantee claim accepted, for 80 buildings so far.

Dr Offord: Although that is indeed admirable for those leaseholders, my constituents in Premier House in Edgware are still being told by the freeholder of their building that they must pay for the removal of the dangerous cladding. That has resulted in thousands of pounds of costs for legal fees and safety measures, and it has rendered their properties unsaleable. Will the Minister assure me that the Government have a plan B for leaseholders who are held liable for costs? Will she advise me when my constituents can reasonably expect their situation to be resolved?

Mrs Wheeler: My hon. Friend will have to excuse me for speaking with my back to him.

My hon. Friend works tirelessly to support the residents of Premier House in Edgware on the removal of cladding. I understand that that case will be brought before a tribunal at the beginning of April. The Government have made it clear that we expect building owners in the private sector to protect leaseholders from remediation costs. A growing list of companies, including Barratt Developments, Mace Group and Legal & General, are doing the right thing and are taking responsibility, and I can announce that Aberdeen Asset Management and Fraser Property have also joined that list. I urge all

other owners and developers to follow the lead of those companies. I will consider all other options if they do not do so.

Mr Speaker: The growing phenomenon of Ministers reading out great screeds that have been written is very undesirable. A pithy encapsulation of the argument is what the House wants to hear.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Last week, the Minister told me that the Department is keeping pressure on Ballymore Ltd, following the Secretary of State's letter of 19 December, for which I am grateful. However, the leaseholders have now received an offer from Ballymore saying that the bill is £2.4 million for fire safety work. They can have half a million pounds off, but they must pay the rest. That offer is only open until 31 March. What more can the Department do to help my constituents? Time is clearly running out.

Mrs Wheeler: I am not reading from any notes, Mr Speaker.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for that very useful information. If we can see the letter, we will take the matter forward.

Mr Speaker: Excellent.

20. [908849] **Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Housing Minister, in response to a debate on Wednesday 22 January, indicated that he had written to the owners and the developer of Northpoint in Bromley. It is exactly the same situation as that outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord). Has the Minister yet had a response, and what assurance can be given to Bromley Council about the guidance should it use emergency remedial powers under the Housing Act 2004?

Mrs Wheeler: It is a pleasure to be able to face my hon. Friend; I apologise to hon. Members behind me.

The Secretary of State has written, and we are awaiting the outcome to that. As soon as we get a reply, we will be in touch directly with my hon. Friend.

Mr Speaker: I call Jim McMahon.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op) *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: I beg your pardon; I am getting ahead of myself. I call Neil Coyle.

Local Authorities: Vulnerable Children

6. **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the ability of local authorities to discharge their statutory responsibilities to vulnerable children. [908834]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): Local authorities have been given access to more than £46 billion for the forthcoming year. That funding is largely unring-fenced, so councils can spend it on children's services

as they see fit. I am pleased that the number of local authorities whose children's services are ranked good or outstanding is continuing to increase.

Neil Coyle: More than 50,000 British-born children with parents legally in the UK are denied access to central Government support under pernicious Home Office rules. Councils are then forced to step in to provide emergency support through children's social services. London councils spend £53 million on that, and there is no recourse to public funds. Last year, my council spent £6.5 million. When will Ministers end their wilful blindness to the penury that the policy causes and stand up for councils in the face of this blatant Home Office cost-shunt?

Rishi Sunak: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We engage with the Home Office regularly to deal with the funds for unaccompanied asylum seekers and other such people. I am happy to realise that issue in the next of my regular meetings with the Immigration Minister.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Permitted development rights have been a disaster for my constituency of Harlow, as London councils have socially cleansed their residents and sent 400 troubled families to our constituency. We do not have the resources to look after them in the way they should be. Will my hon. Friend look at permitted development rights, undertake a review and ensure Harlow Council has the resources it needs to look after those 400 extra troubled families?

Rishi Sunak: I will be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that issue. Of course, vulnerable children must be housed appropriately and looked after, but we should ensure that that is done as closely as possible to where it makes sense for their communities.

Mr Speaker: I call Jim McMahon.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was frantically trying to think of a question when you called me just now. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The number of children in need is up, the number of looked-after children is up and the numbers of child protection plans and child conferences are up, yet the Government grant has gone down. This year, children's services face a £1 billion funding gap—£3 billion by 2024-25—and the Local Government Association, the Children's Commissioner, Action for Children and our councils have all warned that children will be at risk. So where's the money?

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Gentleman should know that last year £1 billion more was spent on children's services than when we came into office and that the recent Budget announced an extra £420 million that could be spent on children's services. Government Members are, however, concerned with outcomes, not just the amount of money we plough into things, which is why the Department for Education is working closely with the best-performing areas to spread best practice across the country.

Potholes

7. Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on funding for local authorities to reduce the number of potholes. [908835]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): Ongoing discussions before the autumn Budget led to the Government announcing £420 million of additional funding for highways authorities to fill potholes and carry out other works. The Conservatives: the party of filling the many potholes, not the few.

Mr Hepburn: The national problem of potholes has been caused by this Government and their 50% cut to local government funding for tackling it. While the new money is welcome, it is a drop in the ocean. North-east councils alone need £1 billion to sort out their pothole problem. Will the Minister press the Chancellor for more?

Jake Berry: Cycling UK estimates that it costs an average of £53 to fill a pothole, so the money announced at the last Budget in the north-east alone is enough to fill over 400,000 potholes. Rather than complaining about it, perhaps it is time those north-east councils got on with it.

Mr Speaker: I want to hear about the pothole situation in Huddersfield. I call Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Potholes are not a joke for cyclists; many are killed on our roads every year. The roads in Britain are becoming more dangerous, and our very good record in road safety is being lost to other countries. Is it not about time the Minister talked to the Home Secretary and others not only about potholes but about the number of police on our roads catching people who break the law?

Jake Berry: I am about to pick up my new bicycle tomorrow, so the issue of potholes is close to my heart. The Government are working cross-departmentally to tackle the problem, which is why we have created this £420 million fund—to fill potholes up and down the England.

New Homes for Social Rent

9. Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of new homes for social rent since 2010. [908837]

The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse): We constantly review the construction levels of all types of new homes.

Liz Twist: The Government's pledge to replace homes sold under the council right to buy scheme has been a failure, with only one home being built for every four sold. Why should anyone believe that things will be different when it is extended to housing association tenants? Is it not time to suspend right to buy?

Kit Malthouse: There are plenty of signs that the Labour party is detaching itself from its historic supporter base, but one of the saddest is its inability to grasp the aspiration of working families to own their own home. The concerted attack on one of the most popular policies of the past 30 years—the right to buy—is a very

sad spectacle. I am perfectly willing to acknowledge that the one-for-one replacement policy has not been sufficient to provide the number of social homes the country needs, and we are reviewing that policy at the same time as taking the cap off the housing revenue account and allowing councils, which frankly were induced out of council house building by the Labour Government, to get on and build the new generation of social homes.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Our excellent Housing Minister will know that parishes and towns with neighbourhood plans in place will have 15% more houses built as a result. He may also be aware that they are quite cumbersome to put in place. Does he have plans to make them easier to deliver, and will he hear representations from my parishes of Ticehurst, Robertsbridge and Salehurst about how they can be delivered a lot faster?

Kit Malthouse: I was wondering who my hon. Friend was referring to then—I thank him for that compliment. As somebody who represents a beautiful part of the country, he has long been a champion of local people ceasing to be victims of the planning system and taking control of it themselves, and he is quite right that neighbourhood plans are the way to do that. From my own experience in my constituency, I have been concerned that they take some time and effort to put in place. We are reviewing what we can do to smooth their passage, and we have some funding available to assist in that, but I would be more than happy to meet him and take representations from him and his constituents.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): City of York Council has presided over a net loss of social housing, and, according to a report published today by Centre for Cities, its level of house building has been one of the worst in the country. We have a serious housing crisis. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that our Tory and Liberal Democrat-controlled council builds the housing that is so desperately needed in our city?

Kit Malthouse: As I hope the hon. Lady knows, we have set aside significant resources to help councils achieve their housing aspirations. We will be helping with infrastructure and providing other assistance to help them over the line. Critical to that, however, is ensuring that they have a local plan. I am sure that the coalition that is in control of City of York Council would welcome the hon. Lady's participation in their creation of such a plan, rather than her antagonism towards it.

Park Home Residents

10. **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to tackle the exploitation of park home residents. [908838]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler): The Government are committed to ensuring that park home residents are better protected. We have set out a range of measures to review the park home legislation

and tackle the abuse and financial exploitation of residents. New legislation will be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

Helen Whately: Residents of leisure park homes in my constituency appear to have been mis-sold their properties by rogue site owners, and they are now vulnerable to exploitative charges and intimidation. Will my hon. Friend consider extending the provisions of the Mobile Homes Act 2013 to give leisure home owners more rights and protections, and will she take a broader look at the mis-selling and misuse of leisure homes?

Mrs Wheeler: My hon. Friend has been a thorough champion on behalf of residents of leisure park homes. The situation is iniquitous. The Mobile Homes Act applies to residents of sites with residential planning permission, but leisure home owners are protected under consumer rights legislation. My Department is working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, which is responsible for consumer issues, to better communicate those protections to leisure home owners. I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend shortly to discuss the matter again.

New House Building

11. **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the time taken to build new homes. [908839]

19. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the time taken to build new homes. [908847]

The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse): As many Members will know, my mantra is “More, better, faster”, and we are very keen to accelerate the delivery of housing. Across England, house building is at its highest level in all but one of the last 31 years. We are going further by streamlining the planning system, creating more certainty for developers and local communities and looking at the recommendations of the build-out review conducted by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin).

Daniel Kawczynski: There have been some real delays in the Shropshire planning authority. What is the Minister doing to give Shropshire Council more resources so that it can attract more and better-qualified staff to streamline the planning process? This is starting to be a real problem.

Kit Malthouse: I applaud my hon. Friend's impatience to build more new homes in his constituency. He recognises that the next generation of Salopians would welcome the provision of those homes as soon as possible. We have already given local authorities a 20% uplift in planning fees, and we have consulted on further resources in the past, but I have given a public commitment that if it becomes clear that resources in planning departments are a constraint, we shall be more than happy to talk to our Treasury colleagues about what more can be done.

Chris Davies: I commend the Secretary of State for publishing last year's updated national policy planning framework, but may I encourage my hon. Friend to consider new ways to speed up the planning process?

Kit Malthouse: It is always a pleasure to be greeted by impatient Members who, as I say, want more housing for the next generation. My hon. Friend is right: we need to constantly examine the effect of the planning system on the production of new homes. As he says, we issued a new planning framework back in July. We are carefully assessing the impact of those policies, but if my hon. Friend has useful and constructive suggestions, I shall be more than happy to hear them.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The Government's expansion of permitted development rights has caused multiple problems across the country. Such developments make no section 106 contributions towards new social housing. There are reports of homes of appalling quality, with children forced to play in car parks on industrial estates, and of homes in some areas being used only for short-term holiday lets, while developments in other areas are causing the loss of valuable employment space. Last week, the permanent secretary confirmed to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee that the Government had undertaken no evaluation of this policy. Will the Secretary of State call time on the policy, so that a full evaluation of the impacts can be undertaken?

Mr Speaker: Order. There seems to be a competition between what I would call parliamentary essayists today. That was an extremely eloquent essay—very erudite—but we could do with a paragraph.

Kit Malthouse: We will not call time on a policy that has produced tens of thousands of homes for people who need them. We are aware that there have been some difficulties with properties converted under permitted development rights, but we are not entirely sure that local authorities are using the tools at their disposal to make sure that standards are maintained. However, as I said earlier, we keep all our policies under constant review and I would be more than happy to look at specific situations if the hon. Lady wishes to raise them.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Bristol was one of the sites for the first ever council houses built under the Addison Act 100 years ago—in Hillfields in my constituency. We are now building council homes again, but nobody from the Department has been prepared to come for our centenary celebrations this year—you have turned down the invites. May I ask why?

Kit Malthouse: The main reason is that I am impatient to visit and the hon. Lady will be pleased to know that if all goes to plan I will be there on Thursday.

Mr Speaker: Well, there is time for a keen sense of eager anticipation to build up before the hon. Gentleman arrives.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Will my hon. Friend the Minister pay tribute to the work of Homes England in its support for Mid Sussex District Council in providing the key that will open the development of 4,000 new houses in Burgess Hill? Will he see what further work Homes England, in its very constructive approach, can adopt to deliver more new housing?

Kit Malthouse: My right hon. Friend is to be admired in displaying yet more impatience for homes to be built, and he is right that the newly revamped Homes England is an impressive and entrepreneurial organisation which is using its skills to unlock sites across the country. In the six months that I have been in this job, I have been impressed by its work and I am now busy touring sites, as I was in Poole in Dorset, where it is applying its skills and industry to unlock precisely the kind of problem that he talked about.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): There is a three-year period for a one-to-one replacement to start at a site, but what is the average time for completion of one-to-one replacements? Of the one-to-one replacements that the Government say are in progress, how many are actually occupied?

Kit Malthouse: I am afraid I am going to fail the hon. Gentleman: I do not have that precise number at my fingertips at the moment. But I am more than happy to write to him about it. He will know, however, that we have consulted on changes to the one-to-one replacement policy and we will be coming forward with a response, and hopefully improvements, soon.

Private Parking Sector

12. **Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to tackle unfair practices in the private parking sector. [908840]

21. **Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to tackle unfair practices in the private parking sector. [908850]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): The Government fully support the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight). It will create an independent code of practice for private parking companies and deliver robust accountability, providing a much better deal for motorists.

Giles Watling: I was pleased to support and sit on the Committee for the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill, which my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire so expertly steered through Parliament, but parking scams have been operating in Clacton for many years and it is literally driving my constituents around the bend; they want a solution. When this Bill completes its journey and receives Royal Assent, how quickly can it be implemented?

Rishi Sunak: I thank my hon. Friend for his work on the Committee and for highlighting his constituents' problems. I am pleased to tell him that I have already placed a draft outline of the code in the House of Commons Library and as soon as Royal Assent is achieved a full code will be issued for formal statutory consultation.

Mike Wood: What assessment has the Minister made of the Bill of our right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire and its likely impact, and does he believe that more is needed to help to protect our constituents from cowboy parking enforcers?

Rishi Sunak: The current system is one of self-regulation and, sadly, the behaviour of some rogue operators using questionable or intimidating practices means that change is required and we must act. The new code will mean consistency and higher standards for parkers and will ensure that rogue operators are driven out of business.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My constituents—particularly disabled constituents and those, for example, attending hospital appointments—also suffer from punitive cowboy parking operators. What efforts can be made in the code to give special protection to them?

Rishi Sunak: These are exactly the kinds of things that the code of practice will cover, and I will be delighted to receive representations from the hon. Lady as the code is developed.

Local Government Funding: Low-income Families

13. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect on low-income families of changes in local government funding. [908841]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): The Government regularly publish analysis of the impact of changes in funding on households of different income. Next year's local government settlement sees a real-terms increase in funding and beyond that there is a range of council tax support schemes to assist those with low incomes.

Dr Huq: Up until now, Ealing Council has ring-fenced child and youth services, but seven of its 13 libraries and 11 children's centres are on a hit list for community management, which many see as the slippery slope to closure. The council says that it has been forced to do that because it only has 36p in every pound that it used to have. Will the Minister help to match up social enterprise buyers with these services, which help so many low-income families? Better still, when will the Government properly fund local authorities, as the age of austerity is meant to be over?

Rishi Sunak: Not to rehash the fact that local government will receive a real-terms increase in funding next year, it did not escape my attention that at Ealing there are non-ring-fenced reserves sitting at the council of more than £100 million.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Having campaigned for it, I am delighted that the Secretary of State has approved a new business rates retention pilot from Northamptonshire that is anticipated to lever in an additional £17 million for local services. What difference does he believe this will make for frontline services in the county?

Rishi Sunak: I am delighted that Northamptonshire will benefit from the new business rate pilot. Of course, that money can be used by the councils, working together to invest in the future prosperity of their communities.

Beyond that, it promotes cultural change to ensure that all local areas have a stake in the economic future of their community.

18. [908846] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): This month, the Scottish Government announced £4 million to provide free sanitary products in council buildings such as libraries and leisure centres. Such measures can make all the difference to low-income families' monthly budgets. Will the Minister commit to look at what Scotland is doing and to follow their forward-thinking approach?

Rishi Sunak: I welcome the cross-Government work on this issue. As the House knows, a couple of years ago the Government announced the £15 million annual tampon tax fund to support women's charities. There are no current plans to provide extra money to local authorities, but of course the Government keep that under review.

Business Rates Relief Scheme

14. **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): What steps he is taking under the 2019-20 business rates relief scheme to encourage a diversity of businesses on the high street. [908842]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): Working with Sir John Timpson before the Budget, we set out the action plan to support the transformation of high streets. That included a business rate discount of some £900 million for eligible retailers and a £675 million future high street fund.

Clive Efford: I am grateful to the Minister for the answer. I recently visited a new start-up in my high street that runs escape rooms and panic rooms—I commend them to the Prime Minister. They do not qualify for small business rate relief and will not qualify for the retail discount as they are deemed a leisure business. Is it possible that small business rate relief can be extended to such innovators on our high streets to ease the pressure as they start up their businesses?

Jake Berry: The point is that big or small, all rate reliefs benefit the entire high street. Healthy high streets are busy high streets, and businesses of whatever type benefit from people visiting them.

Rough Sleepers: Cold Weather Accommodation

17. **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of emergency cold weather accommodation for rough sleepers. [908845]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler): The severe weather emergency protocol provision ensures that people sleeping rough are provided with emergency shelter during cold weather. Alongside the £30 million rough sleeping initiative funding for 2018-19, we have launched a £5 million cold weather fund to help authorities to provide additional emergency and longer-term accommodation this winter.

Nic Dakin: I thank the Minister for that answer. New Life Church, together with North Lincolnshire Council, is providing temporary support for people in really bad weather. Good work is also being done locally with the Forge project. What will the Government do to ensure that such projects continue into the future to help homeless people?

Mrs Wheeler: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that excellent supplementary question. The straightforward answer is that I would urge all councils that have not applied before to apply to this new fund and we will see what we can do for north-east Lincolnshire.

Topical Questions

T1. [908855] **Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Local councils will play an important role in supporting communities as we leave the EU, and I am committed to working with them to ensure that they are prepared to respond to any Brexit scenarios. I can therefore confirm that local authorities will receive an extra £56.5 million to help them with their Brexit preparations and to help deliver essential services and keep residents well informed. We also remain in close contact with local councils through our rough sleeping initiative to support some of the most vulnerable in our society and help them to get the support they need.

Yesterday, Members across the House remembered Holocaust Memorial Day. I had the privilege to attend the incredibly moving national commemoration of those who lost their lives in the holocaust and subsequent genocides. Those dark events of the past call on us all to confront racism, bigotry and hatred wherever it may occur and to stand up for tolerance, reconciliation and stronger communities.

Lyn Brown: Councils in deprived areas such as mine are desperately scrambling to find the funds to meet their needs while facing almost double the spending cuts of the least-deprived area. The Minister says that this is about population, but London is home to 16% of the population and has suffered 30% of the cuts. This Government still favour wealthy areas over poor ones. Is that because they are mostly Tory areas?

James Brokenshire: The hon. Lady should look at the settlement that we have provided, which involves an extra £1 billion for local government across the board. Indeed, it represents a real-terms increase that is intended to make a real difference to how we support councils to meet pressures and challenges.

T2. [908856] **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): Proposals to convert empty high street shops into housing have raised concerns in rural areas such as West Oxfordshire that there may be a perverse incentive to close viable shops in order to realise the greater value of housing. Will Ministers agree to meet me and my district council to ensure that the policy is tailored for both rural and metropolitan areas?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): Embedding residential communities on our high streets is part of the future health of the high street, and I will with pleasure meet my hon. Friend and representatives from his constituency to take the discussions forward.

T3. [908857] **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Last week's National Audit Office report confirmed that councils have responded to dwindling spending power by reducing spending on non-statutory children's services. Despite evidence showing that preventive services work, they now account for just 25% of spending. Will the Minister assure the House that the upcoming spending review will explicitly address the lack of resources allocated to early intervention services?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): I share the hon. Gentleman's passion for ensuring that councils have adequate early intervention services. I have been championing the troubled families programme since I arrived in this job, and I would be delighted to hear from him and others about how best to ensure that a successor programme is available to councils.

T6. [908860] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): In many of my local towns and villages, the last bank and the last cashpoint have long gone, and the post office now provides essential services for my communities. Despite the Government investing £370 million in local post offices since 2017, post offices in East Dean, Alfriston and Newick are temporarily closed. What more can the Government do to support local community post offices across my constituency?

Jake Berry: We absolutely support the role of rural post offices, particularly as a hub at the heart of our communities. That is why the most recent Budget cut business rates for most small post offices, and through our support for "Pub is The Hub" we have helped post offices move into people's locals. Pints and parcels, Mr Speaker.

T4. [908858] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I thank the Minister for meeting me and local Changing Places campaigner Lorna Fillingham, and I welcomed his announcement before Christmas that changing places will be mandatory in new public builds. Will he update the House on how the scheme is getting on?

Rishi Sunak: It was a pleasure to meet the hon. Gentleman and his constituent, who made a powerful and compelling case for Government action. I am pleased to tell him and all campaigners that we will outline the consultation before the Easter recess to take this important measure forward, and I look forward to his contribution.

T7. [908861] **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Coastal erosion is a growing issue in Cornwall due to our more extreme weather patterns, and there is particular concern about the risk to cliff-top developments. The Newquay neighbourhood plan seeks to limit cliff-top development through declaring the whole parish coastline a coastal change management area. Will the Minister join me in congratulating the neighbourhood plan team

on their proactive approach? What more can we do through the planning system to limit inappropriate cliff-top development?

The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse): My hon. Friend is continually effective in bringing the issues of his constituency to this House. He will know that I am unable to comment on a specific neighbourhood plan, but I confirm to him that planning policy is clear that planning done through neighbourhood plans should be safe and should take coastal change into account.

T5. [908859] **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Liverpool city region is one of the poorest in the country, yet its councils have faced some of the biggest cuts. The Secretary of State knows that services cost more in more deprived areas. Is not the only conclusion to be drawn from this targeting of cuts at the poorest areas that this Government simply could not care less?

Jake Berry: How typical it is of the Labour party to measure success only by what is put in. We believe in the northern powerhouse, which is about creating a growing northern economy. We have created 200,000 jobs since 2010, we have created an historic mayoral devolution deal, including across Liverpool, and foreign direct investment in the north is growing at twice the national rate. Our approach has grown the northern economy by £22 billion in two years; the approach of the last Labour Government grew it by £4 billion in three years.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): What steps is the Department taking to help to ensure fire safety in buildings, particularly those with a residential sleeping risk?

James Brokenshire: I note my hon. Friend's experience of this, and we are working carefully across the board to implement the Hackitt review to ensure that building safety standards are raised. Indeed, we are currently consulting on approved document B. We are looking at continuing experience and, if there is experience from Scotland, we will certainly reflect on that, too.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Today's Centre for Cities report is absolutely devastating, highlighting that cuts have fallen hardest on deprived communities in the north of England—including Liverpool—that are enduring the highest poverty rates. It is very disappointing to see the Minister grimacing and laughing, because this is a very serious matter for the communities we represent. Does he agree with the conclusion of the Centre for Cities that the Treasury review of public spending, which is due for the autumn, must find extra funding for all councils if authorities are to remain sustainable?

Jake Berry: Issues of future funding are, of course, for the Treasury. As someone who was born and bred in the city of Liverpool, I delight every time I visit to see that this Government's mayoral devolution is driving Liverpool's economy in a way that we have not seen for a generation.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Will the Housing Minister extend his motto to "More, better, faster, safer" by introducing a requirement for carbon monoxide detectors in all new homes that have gas-burning appliances?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is to be applauded for the constant pressure he keeps up on the Government on safety issues. He is right that we are looking at the introduction of carbon monoxide detectors. We have gathered evidence, which we are looking at, and we will be coming forward with a response shortly.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): We had two debates in the Chamber last week on dangerous cladding, which shows the incompleteness of the Government's response. Can we have a comprehensive strategy from the Government this year that deals with all types of building, all types of cladding and all types of landlord?

James Brokenshire: We provide regular updates that specify the work taking place through the remediation programme to deal with this very serious issue of combustible cladding. The hon. Gentleman will well know the work that is in place, both in the public sector and in the private sector, but I underline to him the urgency I attach to this and how I am not keeping anything out of consideration in making sure that people are safe and feel safe.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I understand the desire to build a lot of new homes, but I share the concern of many of my constituents that this could lead to large housing developments of identikit houses. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to enable small builders to bid for smaller areas of development? That would support our excellent small builders and encourage a more beautiful built environment.

James Brokenshire: I recognise and appreciate my hon. Friend's championing of good design and the sense of place and space, which is something the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission firmly intends to achieve. We have specific funding to support small builders so that we can have a strong, diverse economy in housing.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Local Government Association chair, Lord Porter, recently said:

"We are unanimous that deprivation should be in" the foundation formula. Why does the Secretary of State disagree with his Conservative colleague?

James Brokenshire: As the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) said, we are consulting on the fair funding review in setting out that new arrangement for local government. As he has already set out, that is a means of ensuring that spending is felt effectively and fairly across the country and there are different ways of doing that.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): On council tax and rent to be paid during the migration period of universal credit, will the Minister confirm that local authorities will be asked to take into account these exceptional circumstances and provide leeway when tenants fall behind on payments?

James Brokenshire: We are working closely with colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions on the implementation of universal credit, issues relating to housing and the connection that local government

has on the frontline in the delivery of these issues. We are therefore ensuring that this will be done effectively, as my hon. Friend appropriately says.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Today, it has been revealed that Barnsley is the local authority hardest hit by Government funding cuts. Can the Minister really justify targeting cuts on the poorest in society?

Rishi Sunak: This Government are committed to ensuring that every resident in this country gets the funding they need to have the services they deserve. The upcoming fair funding review is based on transparent, simple analytics and I am happy to hear from any colleagues if they disagree with the numbers.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): Residents across my constituency and beyond are extremely concerned about the Rivenhall incinerator development, which was originally approved by the last Labour Government. With revised planning applications being considered, will the Secretary of State listen to my constituents and act by calling this application in?

James Brokenshire: I note the way in which my right hon. Friend is championing her constituents in her customary powerful and passionate way. She will understand, on the issue of calling in, that this is quasi-judicial and I am therefore unable to comment. However, I note the way in which she has championed the cause.

Mr Speaker: The fact that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) served with distinction as a headteacher and the fact that she has been waiting so patiently are, in my judgment, not unrelated.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Secretary of State tell me whether any assessment has been made of the number of homeless people who have a history of special educational needs that may not have been appropriately supported in the past?

James Brokenshire: I recognise the hon. Lady's own experience in raising that issue, some of the background, some of the challenges and some of the issues that may have led to someone falling through the gap and ending up on the street. We are determined to get better data and better analysis, so that we can provide more targeted help. That is precisely what we are committed to doing through the rough sleeping strategy.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Residents of Goxhill in my constituency are mindful that the village needs to expand and that new homes are needed, but does the Minister agree that local authorities and planning inspectors need to be mindful of the fact that there must be a limit on new homes in villages?

Kit Malthouse: Goxhill is lucky to have such an assiduous representative in my hon. Friend. I agree with him that we need to balance the aspiration for new homes for the next generation against the need for sensitive and appropriate development. I urge him to work with the residents of Goxhill to put in place a neighbourhood plan, which would mean that they would no longer be victims of the planning system, but its bosses.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that the battering of Birmingham next year will be all the more severe for his decision to rule out access to the council's reserves. Birmingham's MPs have written to him to ask for a meeting. When he finally wrote back, he refused to meet. May I say to him that he can take these decisions but it is incumbent on him to front them up to Members of this House?

James Brokenshire: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that I am happy to meet him and his colleagues because, obviously, I am focused on ensuring sustainability and stability in the finances in Birmingham. We took that decision carefully and in a considered way, but I recognise the points he makes and I am happy to meet him.

Venezuela

3.39 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Venezuela.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): Last week, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets to protest against Nicolás Maduro's continued presidency, after deeply flawed elections last May and his unmerited re-inauguration earlier this month. Those demonstrations were the latest of many that have taken place over the past two years, and represent what can be interpreted only as a cry for change in a country that has been rendered destitute by Maduro and his cronies. Venezuela is becoming a state that is run by cartels and criminal gangs. We know that it harbours groups such as the ELN—the National Liberation Army—that threaten to destabilise Colombia's hard-won peace agreement, and increase the threat of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons and drugs. The bomb attack in Bogotá last week was perhaps a recent example of just that.

Last Wednesday, on 23 January, Juan Guaidó, the president of the Opposition-controlled and democratically elected National Assembly, condemned the illegitimacy of Maduro's regime and declared himself, under the Venezuelan constitution, the interim President. Within 24 hours, regional countries from the Lima Group and the Organisation of American States, along with the United States and Canada, had declared their support, recognising Mr Guaidó as the interim President. The EU also issued a statement saying that the voice of the Venezuelan people could not be ignored, and called for new credible elections to take place.

On 24 January, the Foreign Secretary made it clear, in a statement made in Washington ahead of his meeting with US Vice-President Pence, that we no longer regard Maduro as the legitimate leader of Venezuela. On Saturday, I attended an emergency UN Security Council meeting in New York, where I said that we believe that Juan Guaidó is the right man to take Venezuela forward and that we will recognise him as constitutional interim President if new elections are not announced within eight days. This is a position shared by the French, German, Spanish and Dutch Governments. On 26 January, the EU also called for the urgent holding of free, transparent and credible presidential elections in accordance with international democratic standards and the Venezuelan constitutional order. We are in close consultation with our EU and international partners on this issue, and the Foreign Secretary will discuss Venezuela with EU Foreign Ministers later this week in Bucharest.

The UK and our partners cannot and will not stand by and allow the tyranny of Maduro's regime to continue. He has caused endless suffering and oppression to millions of his own people. He has grossly mismanaged the economy for his own benefit, and his regime stands accused of serious crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court. Alongside others in the international community, we must urgently help to pave the way to a brighter future for the Venezuela that Maduro has so culpably ruined. We stand shoulder to

shoulder with the United States and other allies in saying that the National Assembly and its president, Mr Juan Guaidó, are best placed to lead Venezuela to the restoration of its democracy, its economy and its freedom.

Mike Gapes: Venezuela should be one of the richest democratic countries in South America and the world. It has the largest proven oil reserves of any country, with 297 million barrels—more, even, than Saudi Arabia. It also has an educated population and large areas of arable land, yet today there is mass poverty and the economy has collapsed under the rule of the United Socialist party. The daughter of the late President Hugo Chávez, María Gabriela Chávez, is the country's richest woman, with an estimated worth of \$4.2 billion.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation says that there are 4.1 million people with malnutrition in Venezuela. The Catholic charity Caritas says that 41% of Venezuelans are now feeding on waste in markets. There is a shortage of medicines, including vital antibiotics for children, and blood banks are collapsing. Two thirds of buses in Caracas are out of action because there are no spare parts. An estimated 1 million people have sought refuge in neighbouring Colombia.

The economic collapse, as the Minister says, is a direct result of the corrupt, incompetent, kleptocratic regime of Nicolás Maduro. The Democratic Unity Roundtable coalition won the National Assembly elections in November 2015. It is a centre-left alliance, including two Socialist International member parties, the Popular Will and A New Era. It won 112 out of 167 seats, and that should have led to the end of 16 years of PSUV rule, but it did not. Maduro refused to co-operate and doubled down on his repression, and the country continued its economic collapse. The rigged presidential re-election has rightly been criticised by international observers. The decision by National Assembly president Juan Guaidó to be declared interim President is correct—it is a game-changer. So far, as has been said, that has been recognised internationally by many countries, and to that list, I add Australia and Israel, which have also done so recently.

The people of Venezuela do not need the weasel words of a letter to *The Guardian*, from assorted Stalinists, Trotskyists, antisemites and, apparently, dead people, and also from members of Labour's Front Bench. What they need is our solidarity with the legitimate, elected, social democratic president of the National Assembly: interim President of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. The European Union has called for credible elections, but Nicolás Maduro has already rejected that. What humanitarian assistance will we give to people in Colombia? What steps will we take within the UN? What further action can we take with the European Union? And when will our Government recognise Juan Guaidó as the President of Venezuela?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. These are most serious matters. I know that the hon. Gentleman will take it in good heart when I say that he is deeply versed in the history of Stalinism and Trotskyism, as many Members of the House can testify, because they have heard him expatiate on the subject, usually one to one, over many years, but

[Mr Speaker]

I notice that he did manage to include in his oration two or three questions right at the end. The normal form in an urgent question is to make a brief commentary followed by a series of inquiries. I have a sense that he was perhaps slightly more interested in what he had to say to the House than in what the Minister might have to say to him, but we shall see.

Sir Alan Duncan: May I profoundly thank the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) for enabling this urgent question to be discussed today in the House? I also thank him for his knowledge of, and passion and concern for, Venezuela, which we admire. They are, I can tell, widely shared across the House, except in some corners of it, which is, I think, to be deplored.

The hon. Gentleman is right that Venezuela should be pretty well the richest country in Latin America. It used to be, and it could be still. He painted an accurate picture of the human misery that has been caused by what he describes as the corrupt, incompetent and kleptocratic regime of Nicolás Maduro.

The National Assembly, which was elected, is legitimate, but as soon as it won and had a majority against Maduro, Maduro trumped it with the fake election of a Constituent Assembly, which he deemed, against the words of the Venezuelan constitution, to be more powerful than the National Assembly. The world knows that the National Assembly is legitimate, and the Constituent Assembly, and hence the subsequent flawed election of Nicolás Maduro, is not legitimate. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we should all be saddened that, in our midst, there are people who still seem to have sympathy for the regime of Nicolás Maduro despite what it has done to poor people. It has made them not just poorer but destitute, and, in many cases, has forced them to flee. Let the signatories of that letter in *The Guardian* today be pinned on every wall as a list of signatures of shame.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I pay enormous tribute to my colleague on the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), whose voice of clarity in this House has been missing for some time on the question of Venezuela. I also pay tribute to the Minister, whose work at the United Nations in co-ordinating a joint response against tyranny has been so essential. Does he agree that those Members who side with the despots and the dictators against the democrats and the free people should be ashamed of themselves? This is appeasement. This is wrong: it is a crime and it cries out for justice. Thank God we have the Minister in his place, and no one else.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, he has been following the situation closely, as have all members of that Committee. I am pleased to say that I am not the only one who is doing what he says. The entire Government are, and I sense that our view is shared by many Opposition Members.

We have clear opinions about what the plight of the Venezuelan people is, but some say that our concern is based on a colonial mentality. It most certainly is not; it is based on genuine concern for the plight of millions

who have had their faces driven into the dirt by Maduro. The steps that may have to be taken are based on law, and we are looking at the legitimacy of their Government, not just our view of the state of the people.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) for securing it.

Last Saturday, I condemned Venezuela as one of those countries where democracy has ceased to function in any meaningful way. Sadly, what we have seen over the past week has simply confirmed what I said then. The political, economic and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is totally dire and will get ever worse as long as the Maduro Government continue to ignore human rights, free speech and the rule of law. What the Venezuelan people need instead is a Government who respect the rule of law, and uphold human rights and democracy—a Government who understand the scale of the crisis they face and who have a clear plan to resolve that crisis. Judging by their record in recent years, the Maduro Government fit none of those descriptions.

I also believe that it is a mistake in such situations simply to think that every problem will be automatically solved by changing the leader, let alone the kind of US-led intervention being threatened by Donald Trump and John Bolton. Instead, if we all genuinely believe in resolving the crisis in Venezuela and in restoring peace, democracy and stability, I hope that the Minister will agree that our chief priorities should be encouraging all parties to engage in dialogue, working towards a peaceful resolution and, ultimately, allowing the Venezuelan people themselves to decide the way forward through the holding of new free and fair elections.

The Minister will be aware that, across the Caribbean sea in Honduras, there were similar violent protests this weekend against another repressive, authoritarian Government who abuse human rights and jail their opponents. But our Government do not criticise them; instead, they sell them arms and surveillance equipment. Only two months ago, they sent them what the Foreign Office boasted was

“the most senior British trade mission in...years”.

Will the Minister tell us why this double standard exists and why the Government are not consistent in their condemnation of all Governments who abuse human rights?

Sir Alan Duncan: May I, at the very least, welcome the right hon. Lady's condemnation of the Maduro regime? In that, at least, we find common ground, which I hope can be shared across the House. I am only sorry that it is not even shared across her own Front Benchers, as it is quite clear that the sympathies of the shadow Chancellor are at odds with the tone of her contribution to these proceedings.

This is not just about changing the leader, as the right hon. Lady put it; it is about applying the proper constitution of Venezuela, which is why the legitimate claimant to the presidency has been very careful to describe himself as the interim President, which is exactly what is stated in the constitution. On the back of that he, like every right thinking person, is calling for prompt fair and free elections so that the people of Venezuela can properly elect the leader they want to govern them.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): The catastrophe that has befallen Venezuela under Maduro—cheered on, incidentally, by the Leader of the Opposition, his chief lieutenant and various other Poundland Lenins—has led to the ruin of a nation. Does the Minister agree that we must take the greatest care that such ruin never happens here?

Sir Alan Duncan: I certainly share the opinions of my right hon. Friend in all senses. The sympathies of the Leader of the Opposition with the likes of Maduro are very distressing. Clearly, in terms of his sentiment, he finds himself more in line with Cuba, China and Russia than he does with all democrats across the world.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) for bringing this urgent question to the House and the Minister for his statement.

We would like to reflect the calls of the Minister and of Federica Mogherini that democracy cannot and should not be ignored. There is a desperate need for free and fair elections. We condemn the violence and we condemn the regime carrying out the violence. That has also been condemned by Amnesty International, and we would do well to reflect on its remarks. Venezuela should be a wealthy country, yet so many people have been left in dire poverty.

Let me say to the Minister—I am glad that he reflected on this, as did the hon. Member for Ilford South—that we cannot ignore the humanitarian situation and the millions of refugees, with 1 million, as the Minister rightly said, in Colombia alone, which is going through its own peace process at the moment. How are we working with our European partners, in particular, and what is our long-term strategy in terms of free and fair elections and standing up to this regime? Will the Minister set out his response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis, as some humanitarian organisations are concerned that that has been lagging a little bit in the past?

Sir Alan Duncan: May I thank the hon. Gentleman for—if I may put it this way—the responsible nature of his questions and observations? I had a very extensive conversation on Friday evening with High Representative Federica Mogherini on exactly his question. We obviously want to see the maximum possible unity between the views of the Lima Group, the Organisation of American States, the United States and the EU. The EU, of course, has many citizens living in Venezuela and therefore has a direct interest in the plight of that country.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, those who have left Venezuela are in staggering numbers: well over 1 million have gone to Colombia; well over 1 million to Peru; nearly half a million each to Ecuador, Argentina and Chile; and 180,000 to Brazil. This is the biggest movement of population we have ever seen in Latin America, certainly of those caused by one person's bad government rather than some kind of drought, famine or natural disaster. As I said, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will speak at length to EU colleagues in Bucharest on Thursday, when he will be at the Gymnich meeting, and we will do all we can to make sure that there is unity of approach should the eight days not be met with a promise of having elections from President Maduro.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Our thoughts must be with the people of Venezuela at this extremely difficult time, and they must also be with our embassy staff. Caracas is already a very dangerous capital. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that everything will be done to ensure their safety? Furthermore, will he look at reinstating the Foreign Office budget that allowed regional ambassadors to meet in the region at least twice a year so that they can come up with a better co-ordinated response? This budget was cut and I believe that that should be revisited.

Sir Alan Duncan: My right hon. Friend was a very distinguished Minister for the region when he was himself in the Foreign Office, and he knows an enormous amount about the subject. I can assure him and the House that I have been in regular contact with our excellent ambassador in Caracas, Andrew Soper. I am confident that, certainly at the moment, their wellbeing is fine and that they are not under threat. That must remain the case, of course. In terms of the budget, we are of course looking at where we will be when we leave the European Union, and Latin America is a very important focus for many of the bilateral and regional relationships that we want to develop and enhance.

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I was appalled by the letter in *The Guardian* this morning, but more importantly, it was factually incorrect. America still buys 500,000 barrels of oil a day from Venezuela and props up the economy. It could withdraw from that, but has declined to do so because it would have an impact on the Venezuelan people.

I am concerned about the 4 million migrants, half of whom are children. I think that Members will be deeply concerned about their welfare, because they are destitute and struggling in the countries that the Minister has named. I have written to him many times since we came back from the summer recess about what the United Kingdom is doing. We are organising nothing; we are not involved in anything. Ministers come to the Dispatch Box with warm words, but it appears from the replies that he has given to me that our aid programme is no more than £10.2 million. When are the Government going to step up to the plate and look after these vulnerable people whom we should be looking after and caring for?

Sir Alan Duncan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his concern for those who have fled. We have to recognise the extraordinary generosity of the neighbours of Venezuela, who have had to take these people on. Our scope to do an enormous amount is limited, in that we have to work largely through multilateral organisations, as this is not an area in which the Department for International Development has had much historical involvement. We cannot just turn that on a sixpence, as I well know from my time in DFID, but the UK always steps up to the plate when it comes to helping people who are in trouble. Most of all, we should applaud countries such as Colombia that have welcomed well over 1 million refugees and ensured that they have been able safely to escape the perils of remaining in Venezuela.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Though frightful for Venezuelans, this does serve as a powerful object lesson, does it not?

Sir Alan Duncan: In many respects, indeed it does. One always has to be aware of my right hon. Friend's very short and pithy questions. It is always better to just say, "Absolutely, yes; he is quite right."

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) on securing the urgent question. Maduro is presiding over a corrupt regime after rigged elections and is inflicting misery on his own people. He has no legitimacy. While the shadow Foreign Secretary suggests that recognising the democratically elected president of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, would be interventionist, does the Minister agree that these exceptional circumstances merit such an approach if no free and fair elections are forthcoming, not least because of the intensity of the human tragedy that is unfolding and the rigged elections that the presidency of Maduro is based on?

Sir Alan Duncan: I totally agree with the hon. Lady. What the Venezuelan people have had to suffer at the hands of Maduro is beyond contempt. Across the Floor of the House, we all believe that it is very important to champion human rights. I remind those who think that it is appropriate to support Venezuela at the moment on the one hand, and then on the other believe that they are also champions of human rights, that it is Venezuela's neighbours who have referred not only the person but the entire state, for the first time ever, to the International Criminal Court, citing 8,000 extrajudicial executions, 12,000 arbitrary arrests and 13,000 political prisoners in custody. If people want to champion Venezuela, they are also championing that, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I have been listening carefully to these exchanges because I visited Venezuela quite frequently until about 10 years ago. I remember it as a very attractive place with a rapidly emerging economy and a reasonably democratic constitution. Does my right hon. Friend share my slight trepidation and sense of powerlessness about exactly what the United Kingdom and our various allies are going to do? When he is consulting with the United States and the European Union, will he advise against just imposing more economic sanctions, which will cause even more poverty to the population of Venezuela, probably without moving the Maduro Government unduly? Will he consider targeted sanctions aimed at shifting the military elite, who are obviously solely responsible for keeping this dreadful Government in power? Will he consult not only the European Union and the United States, but friendly countries in the rest of Latin America? Governments such as that of Colombia will be the best guides to what might be done to change something in this completely failed and disgraceful regime.

Sir Alan Duncan: As usual, my right hon. and learned Friend offers the House some very wise advice and guidance, and I am able to say yes to pretty much everything he said. First, when it comes to sanctions, it is important to target individuals rather than cause increased pain to the citizens of Venezuela. On the other hand, most of the money that goes in gets stolen anyway and goes to the elite, so although one might think that sanctions would in normal circumstances often cause more damage to the country, they in fact do more broadly target the elite.

When it comes to talking to Venezuela's neighbours, that is exactly what we in the Government and I personally have been doing for well over a year. The Lima Group, which is championed, as the name suggests, by the Foreign Minister of Peru, have been acting very closely together, and they are the ones that have been very tough on Venezuela—in some cases, removing ambassadors and calling for early elections and the removal of Maduro—and we are talking to them. It is from Venezuela's regional neighbours that we perhaps take our most detailed steer and guidance in knowing how to approach this very difficult issue.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The Maduro regime has clearly been a disaster for the people of Venezuela, with the humanitarian catastrophe, as we have heard, and the appalling abuses of human rights documented by Amnesty International and others. I agree that pressing for fresh, free and fair elections must be our priority, but may I urge the Government to tread carefully in how we get there? Let us be honest, United States interference in Latin American countries has a pretty tragic and troubled history. Surely it is best for us to pursue the correct objective of seeking fresh elections via negotiation and mediation first.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, I think pressure is also needed to bring about those elections, which is why countries across the world are working very closely together. I think the unity of opinion among such a broad collection of different regions—America, including Canada; the EU; and the immediate neighbours—has the same view. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should be cautious, because the narrative of US interference in Latin America can stir up counterproductive voices. At the moment, what we want to do is solve the problem, rather than relive some of the difficulties of decades ago.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): It is only two weeks since the BBC 2 film "Revolution in Ruins", on the legacy of Hugo Chavez, was broadcast, previewing what became worse with Maduro. Will my right hon. Friend invite the socialists who had the letter in *The Guardian* to come and see him to get them to explain whether they think things went wrong because of the personalities of Chavez and Maduro, or because of the policies and practices followed by those two Presidents?

Sir Alan Duncan: Tempted though I am by my hon. Friend's suggestion that I should meet the signatories, it is a temptation I will choose to resist. Instead, I might send them the speech I gave in Chatham House last November about Venezuela so that they can learn a little bit more about history than they could perhaps impart to me.

Mr Speaker: Put it in the Library, if it is not there already. [*Interruption.*] Very good.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): When I visited Venezuela in 2009, I was shown around a theoretically brand-new hospital, which was meant to be fully operational. Those showing me around must have thought I was a complete and utter idiot because every ward I went into had exactly the same patients—they were scurrying around from one ward to another. The truth is that the

Venezuelan Government have lied for years and years to their people and to the outside world, particularly Russia and China, and the people who are feeling the damage are the poor children on the streets and the parents who are unable to feed their children because there is nothing in the shops.

My biggest fear is what this may do to Colombia, however, because the peace process is very tender and Iván Duque's election is not necessarily moving towards restabilising it. Could the Foreign Office in this country perform a very useful function in working with the Spanish Government to try to bring security and stability to Colombia, which is facing such an enormous influx from Venezuela?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. One of the reasons why the United Nations is interested is that this is not a domestic issue for Venezuela; it has regional and therefore international implications. One of those implications, as I said in my opening response, is that Venezuela is harbouring some of the elements who would undermine the peace process in Colombia. He is absolutely right, and he has a long-standing interest in and has supported the Colombian peace process. We need to understand that process fully and to realise that these matters are linked. Therefore, solving the problem in Venezuela can significantly help with the challenges, which are increasing, in Colombia.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): It is seven weeks since one of my hon. Friends wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the chairman of the Bank of England about the gold being held on behalf of the central bank of Venezuela. I followed that up with letters to the Governor, the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the first letter sent to a foreign Head of Government by interim President Guaidó was to the Prime Minister on 26 January about the gold being held on behalf of the central bank of Venezuela? The president of the central bank of Venezuela is unconstitutionally appointed, because he has not been approved by the national assembly. What are our Government going to do?

Sir Alan Duncan: I am aware of the letter, and, for the benefit of Members, if they do not know already, I confirm that the Bank of England holds a significant amount of Venezuela's gold under a contract. The answer to my hon. Friend is that this is a decision for the Bank of England, not the Government. It has to make the decision on this, and no doubt when it does so it will take into account that many countries across the world are now questioning the legitimacy of Nicolás Maduro and recognising that of Juan Guaidó.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Why does this matter to the streets of Harlow? It is because 50% of cocaine shipments come through Venezuela. If there is a new regime there, will the Government work with it to stop cocaine reaching our shores and affecting the millions of people on hard drugs?

Sir Alan Duncan: My right hon. Friend is right. This has significance across the world because large amounts of drugs are trafficked through Venezuela. Of course, one cannot tackle that problem with the Government of Venezuela because they are party to that inappropriate

drug trafficking themselves. Therefore, the solution for the streets of Harlow when it comes to Venezuela is to deal with a legitimate Government who are prepared to tackle the problem head-on in Venezuela.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): After a proper ballot and, hopefully, the election success of Juan Guaidó—whose party, incidentally, is a member of the Socialist International—Venezuela will still face an existential crisis, with the Maduro legacy of economic meltdown, a collapsing oil industry, hyperinflation, food shortages and 3 million citizens in exile. Should not the UK, the EU and the international community be preparing a Marshall plan for the reconstruction of Venezuela?

Sir Alan Duncan: One of the tragedies of Venezuela is that it has massive resources of its own. If only they were properly used, invested in and managed, no Marshall plan would be necessary in the way the right hon. Gentleman suggests. The country would be able to take advantage of having some of the greatest oil reserves in the world.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for North West Leicestershire is poised like a panther about to pounce. Let us hear the fellow.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): It is the only way to be noticed, Mr Speaker.

I welcome the urgent question. For too long, the House has stood by and watched Venezuela, which should be a prosperous country, slip into tyranny and destitution. Did my right hon. Friend hear the comments made on the radio by Ken Livingstone, the former Labour Mayor of London? He said that the reason for the problems in Venezuela was that the Marxist regime, when it seized power, did not execute enough people.

Mr Speaker: This is all very well, and I look forward to hearing the Minister of State, but it is fair to say that he has no responsibility for the pronouncements of Mr Livingstone, and is probably pleased not to have.

Sir Alan Duncan: It is always a pleasure not to even have to let the name pass my lips. However, it allows me to echo what I said earlier today—those who support the regime and make excuses for it, instead of focusing on the absolute degradation of human life that it has created, bring shame on themselves.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): The Venezuelan economy has been crippled by US sanctions. The first UN rapporteur to visit the country for 21 years is quoted as saying that US sanctions on the country are illegal and could amount to “crimes against humanity” under international law. Former special rapporteur Alfred De Zayas said that the US is waging “economic warfare” against Venezuela.

The issue is that there is a real danger. Venezuela is divided. There is no doubt about that. The truth is that millions support the Maduro Government and there is huge opposition to it. Intervention from the United States could precipitate a civil war and lead to a humanitarian catastrophe. Will the Minister explain why there are the double standards? Is it that he wants to facilitate another humanitarian catastrophe, as we are seeing in Yemen with British arms? Does he want to

[Chris Williamson]

see the same in Venezuela? Does he not support the self-determination of peoples around the world, rather than intervention from western powers?

Sir Alan Duncan: My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) referred to “Poundland Lenins”. I have just seen in this House one who is not even worth a penny, let alone a pound. I recognise when I see it, as do Members on the Opposition Benches, unreconstructed ideological nonsense—he is a throwback and he brings shame; indeed, I am astonished he has even been prepared to show his face in this House today. If he wants self-determination I can offer it to him: it comes from legitimate elections in Venezuela when the Venezuelan people can determine who shall run their Government.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It takes a special kind of socialist incompetence to turn a country with the largest proven oil reserves in the world into one where 90% of the population live in poverty and 3.5 million citizens, 10%, have fled to neighbouring countries. The Minister has quite rightly insisted that there be full, fair and free elections in that country. What role will the United Kingdom play in ensuring that the elections are fair?

Sir Alan Duncan: When it comes to elections, we often offer very substantial advice and assistance to ensure that electoral registers are properly drawn up, and that the conduct of elections is properly monitored and financed. In this case, I hope it will be far more than just the UK taking an interest. I hope there will be a global effort to ensure that, together across the world, we can help to rescue the country from the tyranny it has been facing from Maduro.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister not agree that the hundreds of thousands taking to the streets in Venezuela and the millions fleeing that country are not doing so because of some grand Trump-oil conspiracy, but because they are starving? They are starving and they are suffering because of Maduro’s corrupt communism. Would it not be better if those who have been hailing that discredited ideology took this opportunity to apologise and admit they were wrong?

Sir Alan Duncan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good sense and for his sense of humanity in analysing what is going on in Venezuela. I noticed that, as he said what he said, he cast a glance at his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson). It astonishes me that some of those who are so unreconstructed, who are nothing more than throwbacks to an old communist era, bleat about the poor and are then happy to support someone who has done nothing other than make poor people poorer.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend as shocked as I am that the average Venezuelan lost 10 kg of their bodyweight in 2018 as a result of this regime?

Sir Alan Duncan: As the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) said, there are very many in Venezuela who are absolutely starving. This could be the richest

country in Latin America, yet it has been reduced to poverty and destitution by the regime. Many are starving and many of the Venezuelans who are not are those who have managed to escape the country and go to generous countries next door.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): May I start by putting on the record my disgust at the fact that Baroness Massey, my friend who sits in the other place, had her name wrongly attributed to the letter in *The Guardian* this morning? That is a disgrace, as indeed is the letter. Every right-thinking Member of this House should unite in condemning the Maduro regime and call for his removal. Once that has happened, we will need significant support for Venezuela to organise free and fair elections. I know the Minister addressed this point earlier, but will the UK take a lead in ensuring that all necessary global support is given to Venezuela? It will be one of the biggest challenges faced by a country coming out of a dictatorship for many, many years.

Sir Alan Duncan: The Government absolutely recognise that Baroness Massey’s reputation is intact. We fully acknowledge that her name was wrongly put on that letter, and we in no way associate her good reputation with the other signatories.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right that it will take a lot of international effort to replace the corrupt electoral practices with ones that can be trusted. I will speak to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, and it will be absolutely central to the Foreign Office’s policy for Venezuela that we do all we can to assist in the holding of free, fair, trustworthy and properly democratic elections as soon as possible.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) on securing this urgent question, and I support the Minister’s words.

Since the 1530s, the indigenous nations and peoples of both Americas have suffered untold cruelty due to the political elites that have ruled them. When a legitimate, democratic Government returns in the future, will the UK Government, through the United Nations and other support agencies, support the immediate return of those indigenous peoples to Venezuela and ensure that the land that is rightfully theirs is given to them?

Sir Alan Duncan: One of our hopes is that most of the many millions who have fled to neighbouring countries will want to return. Venezuela is not like Syria, where the infrastructure has been completely flattened by conflict. We will design plans with our allies and partners, and I hope that many of those millions will want to and will return to their homes and livelihoods in Venezuela.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his very strong answers and his determined stance on TV last night—well done! We all endorse that. A Venezuelan teacher who was fleeing across the border was interviewed on the TV news last night, and she said that her teacher’s wage could buy only 12 eggs because of the inflation under a communist regime. Does the Minister agree that that is indicative of the shocking state of Venezuela? Shame on Sinn Féin for its unsurprising,

disgraceful support of a system that put President Maduro in place with no hint of a democratic process! This House must send a strong message, and that dictator must not be endorsed.

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is one of those rare moments in history when a country's inflation must be measured in millions of per cent. It is almost impossible to get one's mind around that extraordinary statistic.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words about my appearance on television. Normally, I appear much more on foreign television screens, and therefore am much better known and popular abroad than at home.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful to the Minister and all colleagues, led by the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), in this important matter.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy

4.23 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the teacher recruitment and retention strategy.

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): Last year, we recruited more than 34,500 trainee teachers into the profession—more than 2,000 more than the year before—but the growing number of pupils means that we need even more teachers at a time when we have the most competitive labour market on record. Today, the Government launched the teacher recruitment and retention strategy, outlining our priorities ahead of the spending review. First, we are creating the right climate so headteachers can establish the right culture in their schools. Secondly, we are transforming the support for early career teachers. Thirdly, we are building a career structure that remains attractive as teachers' lives and careers progress. Fourthly, we are making it easier for great people to become teachers.

At the heart of the strategy is the early career framework. Developed with teachers, headteachers, academics and experts, and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation, it underpins what all new teachers will be entitled to be trained in at the start of their career, in line with the best available evidence. The early career framework will underpin the fully funded two-year package of structured support for all early career teachers, including additional time off-timetable for teachers in their second year and fully funded mental health training.

By the time the new system is fully in place, we anticipate investing at least an additional £130 million every year to support the delivery in full of the early career framework. This will be a substantial investment, befitting the most significant change to the teaching profession since it became a graduate-only profession. In addition, the recruitment and retention strategy outlines how the Government will create the right climate for headteachers to establish supportive cultures in their schools in which unnecessary workload is driven down. This includes consulting on replacing the floor and coasting standards, with Ofsted's "requires improvement" as the sole trigger for an offer of support.

The recruitment and retention strategy, including the early career framework, has been developed closely with the sector. Its publication marks a crucial milestone for the profession, as well as the start of a conversation between the Government and the profession about how best to deliver on the promise of this strategy.

Angela Rayner: The publication of this strategy is a credit to the school leaders, teachers and trade unions who have campaigned for years on this issue. Any serious attempt to tackle the workforce crisis, however overdue, is welcome, but today's words must be matched by actions. Perhaps the Minister could start by acknowledging the scale of the problem. He has missed his targets six years running, and teacher numbers are declining as pupil numbers are increasing. Can he confirm that between 2016 and 2017 the number of full-time equivalent teachers in our classrooms fell by over 5,000?

[Angela Rayner]

The Minister mentioned the £180 million of funding, but at least £42 million of it was announced back in December 2017. How much is new money? The framework talks about

“at least an additional £130 million pounds a year”.

Is that new funding from the Treasury, or is it being taken from other education spending, and if so, where from? Has the Treasury committed to this funding in the upcoming spending review, and does the “at least” mean that more money will be available if needed?

The concept of the new framework is welcome and long overdue, but can the Minister guarantee that every new teacher will be able to benefit from it? Specifically, will academies also be required to offer the additional time off-timetable for newly qualified teachers in their second year? For many schools, timetabling makes part-time work challenging. Where will they find the additional staff needed to make job shares work? Has he made any assessment of the number of teachers this could keep in or bring back into the profession?

On initial teacher training, how will the Minister ensure that smaller teacher training providers, such as school-centred providers, will not lose places? He pledged a review of teaching schools. What issues will this address and how will it be carried out? The strategy suggests that their functions will be taken on by multi-academy trusts. Will other schools be excluded? Will the strategy offer something for more experienced teachers? His most recent pay deal means that 250,000 teachers—the majority, in fact—are facing another real-terms pay cut. Can he confirm that today’s strategy does nothing to stop continued real-terms pay cuts in our schools? Surely he can acknowledge that teachers need more than the offer of part-time work.

Finally, the teaching workforce crisis cannot be separated from the years of cuts to pay and education budgets. Our teachers do invaluable work every day raising our next generation, and I thank them all. I hope that the Government will start valuing them with more than just warm words.

Nick Gibb: I do not really know how to react to the hon. Lady’s tone. This is a very effective recruitment and retention strategy, which has the support of the sector, and I should have thought that she would want to support it as well. The concept and structure of the strategy were driven by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and the details were developed by officials and by me in close consultation with the profession, the teachers’ unions and academics. I do not regard that as a matter for criticism.

The hon. Lady asks whether the £130 million is new money. It reflects what we think schools will need to support a 5% timetable reduction for early-years career teachers, for mental health training and time and for the training programme. The Government are clear that they are committed to that funding, and it is new funding. It does not include the £42 million teacher development premium.

The hon. Lady asks about more experienced teachers. As she will see when she has a chance to read the strategy, it includes support for non-leadership career pathways for teachers who want to remain in the classroom. There will be a teacher development national professional

qualification to enable them to enhance their careers without necessarily taking on leadership positions. We shall be announcing a procurement tender for initial teacher training providers and others.

The principal challenge that we face in teacher recruitment is the fact that we have a strong economy, with record numbers of jobs and the lowest unemployment since the 1970s. We are competing with other professions, such as commerce and industry, for the best graduates in our economy. A strong economy is not a challenge likely to face any Labour Government. Whenever Labour is in office, it damages the public finances, damages the economy and destroys jobs, whereas the Conservatives repair our economy, take a balanced approach to the public finances and create jobs—millions of jobs.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome this announcement—particularly amid the Brexit fog—and I welcome the work that my right hon. Friend and the Secretary of State are doing. Has either of them considered the idea of establishing local teacher training colleges in areas of strong deprivation, possibly linked to further education colleges, to encourage people in those areas to take up teaching?

Nick Gibb: The purpose of the phased bursaries that we have piloted with maths in particular is to stagger the payments of those bursaries after three years. For those training to teach maths, there is a £20,000 bursary, followed by a £5,000 payment after three years and a further £5,000 after five years. In areas where there is a record of recruitment challenges, or areas of deprivation, the £5,000 figure becomes £7,500. There is a range of other measures intended to incentivise people to train in the areas to which my right hon. Friend has referred.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, welcome the new strategy, but it is long overdue. We have been raising these issues in the House for a number of years, and the Minister, and other Ministers, seems to have been in denial about what is causing them. That has been echoed in some of the Minister’s comments today. Tackling teacher recruitment and retention is not about a growing economy; it is about pay, workload and job satisfaction, so will the Minister now address those three key issues in a more strategic and substantive way than we have seen them addressed thus far?

Nick Gibb: We have been addressing those issues. For instance, we started to deal with workload in 2014. The workload challenge produced 44,000 responses identifying the top three issues: excessive marking work, data collection and lesson preparation. We addressed those with some workload review groups, and accepted their recommendations. This strategy, however, includes more measures to deal with workload. For example, the new Ofsted framework will include tackling teacher workload as an element of the leadership and management judgment that schools will face.

We are also doing more to ensure that the culture of schools is right. We are changing the accountability regime. There will not be a “football manager” approach. We are consulting today on replacing floor and coasting as triggers for support for schools with the simple “requires improvement” judgment of Ofsted. We have been engaged in a range of measures since 2010, and we

are taking a strategic approach to these issues as well. I think that if the hon. Lady reads the strategy, she will find that it addresses all her concerns.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Does he share my hope that this new strategy marks the end of excessive marking and data entry, so that our teachers can spend more time doing what they came into the profession to do, which is teach, and not be overburdened by administration?

Nick Gibb: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Department and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State take very seriously the issue of tackling excessive workload. Teachers in this country work eight hours a week above the OECD average but work the same number of teaching hours as the OECD average. Those extra eight hours are spent, as my right hon. Friend said, on things such as excessive data collection and excessive marking. We have been addressing those issues, and this strategy continues to address them including through a new approach by Ofsted.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): I appreciate that the strategy announced today is urgently needed to address the growing crisis in our schools, but should the Government not be taking time to recognise why there is such a dire need for a recruitment and retention strategy, and is it not a fact that stripping schools of resources and inflicting years of pay cuts have left teachers demoralised by the current regime in our schools?

Nick Gibb: The hon. Lady will know that we are spending a record amount of money on our schools: £43.5 billion by next year. Every local authority is seeing an increase in funding for every pupil in every school in the country. The School Teachers Review Body recommended a 3.5% pay rise for teachers on the main pay scale, and we have accepted a 2% pay rise for teachers on the upper pay scale and have agreed a 1.5% pay rise for headteachers on the leadership pay scale. We are funding that through a teacher pay grant over and above the 1% already budgeted.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I welcome the fact that this plan has been co-signed by all the teaching unions. What measures will the Minister put in place to support rural teachers, particularly in underfunded areas such as mine in Cheshire, where they often face additional hurdles around accommodation and transport?

Nick Gibb: As I have said, we are taking a number of measures to tackle areas that have suffered particular historical challenges in recruiting teachers, including rural and coastal areas and areas of deprivation. The evidence suggests that within those areas different schools face different challenges, so it is often a school-level challenge, but we do have measures in place to direct funding particularly to areas of challenge, and we are rolling out this strategy to areas, including the north-east, Manchester and Bristol, that we know face particular social mobility challenges.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Is it not the case that to reduce workload in any significant way we simply need more teachers and more support staff in

schools, so does the Minister agree that until the Treasury commits to a long-term plan that includes a significant real-terms increase in the education budget, the most he can hope for is to make marginal improvements?

Nick Gibb: Teaching remains an attractive profession. There are 450,000 teachers in the profession. Last year, we recruited 34,500 teachers, which is over 2,000 more than the year before, and that year we recruited more teachers than the year before that. We accepted the recommendation of the STRB of a 3.5% pay rise for teachers on the main pay scale. We added an extra £1.3 billion of school funding, which we announced in the summer of 2017. The Chancellor announced an extra £400 million in his Budget for small capital projects. We have announced an extra £250 million recently for special needs funding. And we have issued a pay grant to fund the pay increases over and above the 1% that schools will already have budgeted.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): May I put on the record my thanks to all the teachers in Redditch, who give all our young people such a great start in life? I, too, welcome this strategy, and note in particular the comments from the body that brings people from other professions into teaching as well as the support for the early career framework. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will continue to use best practice to attract the best people into the teaching profession?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The early career framework is built on best evidence of the approach to teaching. It is a welcome framework and focuses on those issues that teachers need to be trained in to be effective as teachers. I was struck by how different it is to enter into the teaching profession compared with other professions, such as chartered accountancy. There is a lot of support in the first few years of training to be an accountant, once one is in work. In the teaching profession, there is a steep learning curve in those early years, and we have been concerned about the high drop-out rate in the first few years of people's careers.

The strategy seeks to give more support to teachers in those early years, because it is not just a recruitment strategy; it is also about increasing retention of those highly able people so that they stay in the profession—a profession they almost certainly love when they come into it, and which they can be driven out of by excessive workload and a lack of support.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Having done both that job and this one, I can absolutely agree that starting out as a teacher is harder than starting out as an MP. Although I welcome this strategy, which is long overdue, it does nothing to stem the real reasons why teachers are leaving: the toxic culture created in large part by this Government, the reduction of children to data points, and cuts to school budgets that have spread teachers' good will as thin as it can get. The strategy will not fix that. We need to tackle the core issues, for example by abolishing Ofsted and putting in place something that teachers absolutely trust and by increasing massively the amount of high-quality professional development. What are the Minister's plans to tackle the real reasons why teachers are leaving in the first place?

Nick Gibb: I agree with some of what the hon. Lady says. Data collection has been a burden and there has been an over-obsession with data and its collection. Ofsted has made it very clear in the new framework that it will not be seeking that data; it will not want to see any internal assessment data on the progress that pupils make. It will be looking at the wider curriculum and more substantive issues when schools are inspected.

The hon. Lady is right about workload, and both I and the Secretary of State take that very seriously. That is why we had the workload challenge in 2014 and why we have taken a series of measures to reduce both workload and data collection. We have a data collection toolkit and we have a leading academic from the Institute of Education looking into the question of data collection to try to get rid of some of the unnecessary data collection points that she mentions. Ofsted has just published its new framework for consultation, and that has landed well with the sector. When the hon. Lady has a chance to see it, she will see that it focuses on those things that really matter to a child's education.

On CPD, one aim of the recruitment and retention strategy is to create a more diverse range of options for career progression, including a new teacher development national professional qualification—[*Interruption.*] I think I have said enough, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I have known the right hon. Gentleman for 33 years and I must say that he has a mildly eccentric approach to these matters. Nobody could accuse the Minister of State of excluding from his answer any matter that might at any stage to any degree be judged to be material—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) has not stood, but I have just been advised that he has been twitching. Let's hear the fellow.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): As I said in October 1990 when I raised the question of leadership with the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher—especially mentioning Peter Dawson, who had run Eltham Green before becoming general secretary of the Professional Association of Teachers—the culture that good heads can set, followed by other senior teachers, can bring people in not just to teach first but to teach second, bringing the experience of their own careers to expand our schools and academies. They can do a great deal of good for children across the country.

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Headteachers play an important part in creating the right culture in schools, and the Government have a role to play in helping headteachers to create that culture. We want schools to acknowledge that we live in a strong economy with low levels of unemployment and a competitive jobs market so schools, like other employers, will need to be more flexible in their recruitment approach to allow more professionals to come into the profession on a part-time or flexible basis. We had a flexible working summit last year, because we want to encourage people to teach more flexibly.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It is good that the Government finally accept that there is a recruitment and retention problem, but when does the Minister hope to wake up to the budget problems that

are causing neglected repairs, reduced swimming and music lessons, curtailed extra-curricular activities and insufficient teaching assistants, particularly for special needs children?

Nick Gibb: We acknowledge the cost pressures on schools. As I said before, we are spending record amounts on schools, but there are of course increased pressures. We are asking schools to do more. Standards are rising, more children are reading more effectively earlier, we have better maths teaching, and more young people are taking at least two science GCSEs today than several years ago. That is why we are helping schools to tackle budget pressures, including through buying schemes for energy, insurance, computers and so on. We are also helping schools to balance their budgets when it comes to deploying staff. Tackling workload will be an important part of easing the cost pressures on schools.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I welcome this strategy. Two primary schools in the villages of Breachwood Green and Redbourn in my constituency have talked to me about the specific challenges they face because they are small rural schools. Will the Minister explain how the strategy will help to deal with such problems? Will he also meet with me to discuss the specific issues in those particular primary schools?

Nick Gibb: I am happy to discuss funding issues relating to particular schools with my hon. Friend. Small schools receive a fixed sum that helps to deal with some of the fixed costs appropriate to such schools, and there is also the sparsity funding element of the national funding formula. The formula is geared towards helping small or rural schools, but I appreciate that they will face cost pressures, and we are helping schools to tackle them with a range of measures.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): After talking to school leaders in Bristol South, I challenge the Minister on whether the money is sufficient to support them in delivering on the commitment. Given the existing large burdens on headteachers, what will he do to support the middle tier of teachers into becoming headteachers and future leaders?

Nick Gibb: We are investing in new and existing leadership qualifications and will do so disproportionately in more challenging areas of the country. As I said before, we are also developing our new national teacher development professional qualification for teachers who want to rise but do not necessarily want to go into leadership positions.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I welcome the intention behind the strategy, but I would like it to contain more than warm words. What measures will the Minister put in place in high-cost areas that do not receive outer-London weighting and where there is severe pressure on schools?

Nick Gibb: The national funding formula contains an area cost adjustment that takes into account the cost pressures of employing both teachers and non-teachers in such areas. This strategy involves £130 million of new funding, because we strongly believe that we want teachers

in the second year of their careers to have time off-timetable so that they can develop their teaching skills with support from a mentor and teacher training programmes.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): It is welcome that the strategy finally acknowledges the need to tackle excessive workloads for teachers if we are to bring the recruitment and retention crisis to an end. Given that secondary school pupil numbers are set to rise by 15% in the next decade, can the Minister guarantee that the funding that our schools need to implement the strategy will be provided quickly and effectively?

Nick Gibb: The funding will be provided when the strategy is fully rolled out in September 2021. We are rolling it out earlier, in September 2020, to Bradford, Doncaster, Greater Manchester and the north-east—I think I said Bristol earlier, but I actually meant Bradford. The strategy will be fully funded, and £130 million has been agreed with the Treasury despite the fact that it goes into the next spending review period.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I very much welcome this long overdue strategy. There is some evidence of burnout for teachers in mid and later career. Is the Minister looking to see which academy chains and local authorities perform well in teacher retention and which perform less well, and is he learning appropriate lessons from that?

Nick Gibb: As I mentioned earlier, the new Ofsted framework will be looking at things like teacher workload, as part and parcel of the leadership and management judgments made about a school. The Government take

teacher workload extremely seriously, which is why we set up the three review groups to look at data management, excessive marking and lesson preparation. We have accepted all the recommendations of those three review groups.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): By definition, the most experienced teachers are the most expensive. One of the reasons for poor retention is that schools, particularly smaller primary schools, have to lay off those teachers because they cannot afford them within their budget. Will the Government look at how we can keep those teachers teaching, as they are the best because of that experience?

Nick Gibb: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The national funding formula is distributing funding across our schools system in a far fairer way than in the past, and this recruitment and retention strategy should ease the cost pressures on schools. We have also introduced a teaching vacancy website, which is a free resource to enable schools to recruit free of charge, as the profession has been calling for a long time.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Now that the Minister has acknowledged the scale of the recruitment and retention crisis, will he commit to funding the 3.5% pay offer in full? No ifs, no buts: in full.

Nick Gibb: We have already said that we are funding the pay rise to which we have agreed. The 3.5% is being funded, over and above the 1% that schools have already budgeted. That is what the pay grant is all about, and we are distributing over £500 million this year and next year to fund that pay rise.

Point of Order

4.52 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As a result of being moved on to universal credit, some disabled people lose out on vital premiums, including the severe disability premium. I have tabled multiple written questions asking how many severely disabled people have been naturally migrated or moved on to universal credit since June 2018, and the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work has responded that the information could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. That is despite information having been provided for the period between May 2015 and February 2018.

This information is of national importance, as the Government have tabled secondary legislation to backdate payments for severely disabled people who have lost out on these vital premiums as a result of moving on to universal credit. Mr Speaker, can you advise me on how I can obtain this information from the Department for Work and Pensions and ensure that it is published?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving me advance notice of her intention to raise this point of order. It is understandably frustrating, disconcerting and irritating for an hon. Member not to receive substantive replies to the questions that she or he has put, so I understand and empathise with her. It is an experience that I often had as a Back-Bench Member. The words, “Can be provided only at disproportionate cost” were always, at the very least, disappointing.

My advice to the hon. Lady is that she should make the short journey from here to the Table Office, where she can be advised as to the avenues open to her to try to extract the information. That may be through the reformulation of questions, it might be by pursuit of a debate, or it could be by use of other means to ensure the public provision of the information she seeks. The distinguished staff of the Table Office are always keen to help and, if she beetles across to the Table Office, I feel sure that they would be keen to do so.

BILL PRESENTED

DRONE (REGULATION) (No.2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Jonathan Lord, Philip Davies, Henry Smith and Steve Double, presented a Bill to require drones to be marked and registered and to broadcast certain information electronically; to place restrictions on drone flight near aerodromes; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 February, and to be printed (Bill 325).

Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: I should inform the House that I have not selected any of the reasoned amendments that appear on the Order Paper.

4.55 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Concern over uncontrolled immigration was at the heart of the debate in the run-up to the European Union referendum. The result left no doubt: people in the UK want control over our borders. They want a fair system that works for the entire UK, that attracts the brightest and the best from around the globe, and that allows access to the UK based on what someone has to offer, not where they come from. Leaving the EU means just that. For the first time in more than 40 years, we can deliver this by putting control over who comes to the UK firmly in our hands. Ending free movement is the first step, and that is what the Bill delivers.

This is not about closing our doors—far from it. That is something I would never allow. We will continue to be an open, outward-looking and welcoming nation, because immigration has been invaluable to Britain. Immigrants to this country, such as my own parents, have been essential to the success of our society, culture and economy. They have powered—indeed, they have often created—many of our businesses. They have helped to deliver vital public services. Their experience has brought new perspectives and expertise, stimulating growth and making us the tolerant, outward-looking nation we are today. Far from slamming the door on immigration, the end of free movement will be a clear path to a fairer immigration system, helping us to welcome the most talented workers from any country while cutting net migration to sustainable levels.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The Home Secretary is giving a good account of why immigration is good for this country. Does he think that people who voted leave voted against free movement of labour as a policy, or against immigration?

Sajid Javid: For many people who voted leave in that referendum, immigration was one of the big, key issues. Many of them would have wanted, first, to see immigration coming down to more sustainable levels. It was certainly my experience that many of them wanted us to end freedom of movement and reform the process so that we could have more control over our borders.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I am sure that the Home Secretary, like many of us in the Chamber, has received emails from people expressing concern about how the health service will get labour from abroad—from Europe or wherever—and asking what protections British nationals abroad will have. Those people also perform a function at work in the various countries that make up Europe, so what protections will they have, as a quid pro quo on this?

Sajid Javid: There are two issues there. First, on protections for British nationals working in other parts of the EU, we very much hope that other EU countries respond in the way we are doing—we are guaranteeing EU citizens' rights whether there is a deal or no deal. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the importance of immigration to our public services, including the health service, which I just referenced a moment ago. That will very much be retained under the new immigration system.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Is not the crucial balance to strike between people's ability to come here in search of work rather than for a specific job, which is what has caused so much tension in constituencies such as mine, and our ability to make sure that we do all we can to attract the vital skilled labour that the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) mentioned, such as nurses and doctors?

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with how my hon. Friend describes the issue. This is about putting the UK in control of who comes to the UK, so we can be certain that that will benefit our economy and society.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The Home Secretary makes a good case for the importance of a firm but fair immigration policy, but does he accept that when we implement such a policy, it also has to be civilised? With that in mind, does he intend to do anything about the national shame of the 10,000 migrants in holding centres in this country?

Sajid Javid: I assume that my right hon. Friend is referring to detention centres. He will know that detention policy is not covered by the Bill, but he asks an important question and I want to make sure that I answer it. Our policy makes it absolutely clear that detention should be a last resort in respect of immigration control. Some 95% of individuals who are subject to removal are managed in the community—I know that my right hon. Friend would approve of that—and if anyone is detained, it is absolutely a requirement that we must be certain that there is a reasonable prospect that they can be removed in a reasonable time. Despite those protections, I have also tried to make sure that we are doing all that we can, which is why I welcome the work that has been done independently through the Shaw reports. We are trying at all times to see what more we can do further to improve the policy.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is deep concern on both sides of the House about administrative detention in excess of 28 days. Under the leadership of the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who chairs the Joint Committee on Human Rights, I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), and the right hon. Members for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) will seek to amend the Bill, at the appropriate stage, to stop people being administratively detained for more than 28 days.

Sajid Javid: I welcome the raising of this important issue, because it is important that we constantly look into how we can improve our detention policy to make

sure that at all times it is seen as fair and compassionate. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend has raised this issue, his concern about which seems to be shared by other Members. If it would be helpful, I would be happy to discuss the issue further with my right hon. Friend and other right hon. and hon. Members who are concerned about it. It is important that we continue to look into the policy and see what more we can do to improve it.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): How can we talk about fairness and compassion? My Bridgend constituency office takes on very few immigration cases; most of the immigration into Wales comes from England. Where I have problems—despite the English—is in cases in which my constituents have married abroad and cannot then get their partners and children back into the UK. One of my constituents, Mr Jenkins, has been told that his wife will have to leave when their youngest child reaches their 18th birthday. How can that be fair and compassionate? How can I tell EU citizens in my constituency to trust the new legislation when we do not even know what it is?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady refers to the policy on family reunion or bringing spouses to this country. The rules, which include a minimum income requirement, are the will of the House. They are what the House has previously decided in legislation, and I think it is fair to have rules on bringing spouses from abroad into this country and on family reunion. That is right, but it is also right that we constantly review the rules to make sure that they continue to be fair at all times.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): A part of being fair is dealing with matters promptly. When the former Labour Government were in power, about 15,000 people who were here illegally were dealt with every year and returned. That number fell to 5,000. Does my right hon. Friend aim to improve those numbers so that we actually deal, fairly and quickly, with people who are here illegally, rather than detaining them for a very long time in the sort of circumstances that were described earlier?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. I think that the 5,000 number to which he refers is with respect to foreign national offenders only. When it comes to removing people from this country, or deporting them because they are here illegally, the number is, I think, a lot higher, but his point is important, and we need to make sure that we properly enforce the rules that we have in place.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Are we not already conflating issues in a way that clouds the whole of the immigration debate? There are people who come here primarily to work who are legally entitled to do so either because of our membership of the European Union or because they have the requisite visas. There are people who want to come here to work but do not have a right and often enter illegally, and then there are those who, in escaping the terrors of war or some other horrors, quite rightly seek asylum in our country. It is important not only to draw these very distinct differences between them but, in any event, to treat everybody fairly and with dignity.

Sajid Javid: I agreed with every word that my right hon. Friend just shared with the House. She reminds us that there are different parts of and different routes within our immigration system, and that we should always try not to conflate them. I very much welcome her intervention.

It is also important that we get the tone of the debate right, which is why my message to the 3.5 million EU citizens already living here has also been very clear. I say, “You are an incredibly valued and an important part of our society; we want you to stay. Deal or no deal, that view will not change. Our commitment to you is very real. We have listened to your concerns and we are, for example, removing the fee for the EU settlement scheme.” There must be no barriers to those who want to stay, and I urge other EU countries to follow suit and to waive any fees for UK citizens.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Some people have already paid that fee. Will my right hon. Friend reassure everyone by confirming that those who have paid the fee will be reimbursed?

Sajid Javid: Yes, absolutely. Anyone who has paid the fee under the scheme will be reimbursed in full.

Sir Edward Davey *rose*—

Sajid Javid: I will make some progress and then give way later.

Given the concerns that were raised in the referendum, we must control immigration to make it fairer and more sustainable. We wanted to ensure that our proposals were based on the very best evidence, which was why we commissioned the independent Migration Advisory Committee to review the impact of European migration on the UK’s economy and society. It was clear that, with free movement, we could not guarantee that we would maximise the benefits of immigration, so it recommended a system that was focused on skilled workers. We heard that, and our White Paper, which was published before Christmas, proposed a skills-based system welcoming talent from around the world, with no automatic preference for the EU.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): May I caution the Home Secretary about setting too much store by the Migration Advisory Committee? For years, as he will know, I have been talking to various Immigration Ministers—they come and they go—about trying to get fishermen from other parts of the world to work on boats on the west coast of Scotland. Northern Irish Members and Members on the east coast of Scotland have been talking to them about that as well. The advice that comes back is that fishing is not a skilled business. If it is not skilled, can I get some of these guys from the Migration Advisory Committee to go and work on the boats so that they can understand the business? The point is that we need people to come, but they are not coming, because the Secretary of State is setting too much store by the Migration Advisory Council.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I say to the hon. Gentleman that he is down on the speaking list—save something for later.

Sajid Javid: Mr Deputy Speaker, I think that that was the hon. Gentleman’s speech, so you can take him off your list.

The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Let me emphasise that the evidence that the MAC has considered is reflected in its recommendations. He will know that, in our response in the White Paper, while we have very much based things on the evidence presented, there are still things that require further engagement before we design and settle on exactly what the future system looks like.

We also asked the MAC to review the position of international students. It recommended that there should continue to be no limits on the number of international students we welcome to study in our country, and that will of course remain our approach. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation has strongly campaigned for, we will continue to be an open and welcoming country for international students. Our world-class universities will continue to be able to attract global talent, and we will make it easier for the brightest and best graduates to stay and work here.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary just confirm for the record that the Government are formally dumping their commitment to a net migration target—to reducing migration down to the tens of thousands? If I am wrong, will he at least confirm that international students will not be included in that ridiculous target?

Sajid Javid: There are no targets in our White Paper, which sets out our approach to the future immigration system. That said, we are still very clear, as I have already set out, that we must continue to work to bring net migration down to more sustainable levels.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Would the Home Secretary just clarify the exact position of students? He only half answered the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) regarding international students, and he knows my hon. Friend’s commitment to excellent tertiary education here in the UK.

Sajid Javid: I am happy to clarify that there is absolutely no cap on student numbers. There is no limit on the number of students we wish to welcome into our country.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State share my concern that the rhetoric that has built up around migration is already having an impact on student recruitment? The University of Nottingham tells me that there has been a significant drop-off in recruitment, particularly at postgraduate level. Is not his policy simply exacerbating those problems?

Sajid Javid: I am sorry, but I do not accept the hon. Lady’s point. The current number of international students in this country—I believe that the figure is more than 450,000—is the highest we have ever had, so the facts do not bear out the hon. Lady’s comments.

This Bill is fundamental to our future immigration system. First, it will end freedom of movement. All related EU legislation that is retained in UK law under the withdrawal Act will be repealed. This will make European economic area and Swiss nationals, and their families, subject to UK immigration rules. Like people from other countries around the world, they will need permission to enter and remain in the UK. In place of

that, we will introduce a new system that will level the playing field by ending preferential treatment for EU citizens. It will mean that everyone will have the same opportunity to come to the UK, regardless of where they are from.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): As the Home Secretary is well aware, the soft fruit industry is vital to my constituency. Will he therefore assure me that our future immigration policy will also take account of seasonal labour?

Sajid Javid: I can give my hon. Friend some assurance. I know that she has welcomed the pilot for seasonal agricultural workers that we have already announced. Once we have had the pilot, we will look at how we can incorporate such a scheme in the future immigration system.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend when he says how valuable all the people who are already here under free movement are, because they all have to be self-sufficient when they are here and they are all doing vital jobs. I also agree with him when he says how valuable international students are, and that we have no wish at all to see any reduction in bona fide students coming here from Europe. What I do not quite understand is which of these vital and valuable categories of people he intends to reduce the numbers of in the future, given that he keeps repeating the slogan, “Ending freedom of movement”. What is the policy point of changing our present arrangements if they have brought such valuable people to this country over the past years?

Sajid Javid: I am very happy to answer that question. First, our new system will allow us to help people to enter the UK based on their skills and not their nationality, so it is going to be their skills that will count. My right hon. and learned Friend also questioned how, in that case, by still welcoming the people with the skills, and the students, that we need, we will reduce net migration to more sustainable levels. The answer is in the approach that has been set out in the White Paper based on the evidence from the Migration Advisory Committee. The MAC clearly says in its evidence that if we have a policy that is focused on skills and not nationality, and focus more on high skills than low skills, that is consistent both with meeting the needs of the economy and reducing net migration down to more sustainable levels.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Farmers in my constituency, particularly dairy farmers, have for many generations welcomed EU migrants who have come to work on their dairy farms. They are worried that the £30,000 cap will affect their ability to recruit. Will the Home Secretary outline whether he plans to look at the amount that the cap is set at?

Sajid Javid: I can give my hon. Friend an assurance that the final threshold for the high skills determination has not been set yet. As we set out in the White Paper, we recognise that the recommendation from the Migration Advisory Committee is £30,000, but we will be engaging thoroughly over a number of months to determine what the actual threshold should be so that we can be comfortable that it works for the economy.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sajid Javid: I will give way once more, to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), and then make some progress.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am glad that the Home Secretary is looking at the £30,000 threshold, but does he accept that the salary may not be commensurate with the skill level, and that what is important is that we look at the skills needs and do not set some arbitrary figure as a proxy for that?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady will know that there is already such acceptance in the current immigration system for non-EEA migrants. For example, within the current system there is a shortage occupation list—a system that we will keep in place going forward—which recognises that in some cases where there is a shortage, we need to change the salary threshold. There will be flexibilities built into the system going forward, and a lot of that is explained in the White Paper.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sajid Javid: I will make some progress and give way later.

Secondly, this Bill will protect the rights of Irish citizens. We are very proud of our deep and historic ties with Ireland. When free movement ends, Irish citizens will continue to be able to come to the UK to live and work as they do now. British and Irish citizens have enjoyed a special status and specific rights in each other's countries for almost 100 years. The Bill will preserve rights that Irish citizens currently have in the UK—the same rights that British citizens enjoy in Ireland. This includes the right to work, to study, to access healthcare and social security benefits, and to vote. The only exception is where an Irish citizen is subject to deportation exclusion orders, as now, or to an international travel ban. Our close ties with Ireland will remain. Our historical bond is unbreakable. The Government have always been firm in their commitment to preserve the long-standing common travel area arrangements. This Bill reaffirms our intention to preserve our special relationship and to continue to stand side by side with Ireland after we leave the EU.

Thirdly, the Bill gives us the basis to build a legal framework for the future immigration system. It includes a power to make amendments to primary and secondary legislation that become necessary after the end of free movement. This will enable us to ensure that UK legislation remains coherent once we leave the EU. It means that we can align our treatment of EU and non-EU migrants depending on the final design of the UK's future skills-based immigration system, and that we can accommodate any trade deals that we agree with the EU and with other countries.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary talks about aligning treatment of EU and non-EU citizens. It currently costs £1,220 to apply for leave to remain whereas it costs only £120 to administer that service. Will he at least commit in this Bill to stop profiteering from people's immigration status?

Sajid Javid: No one is profiteering from charges that come through the immigration system. In fact, those charges currently do not even cover the full cost. The rest of the cost is covered by general taxes.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I wonder how the Secretary of State will align things for the economy of the highlands, where a full 20% of the economy is based on tourism and unemployment is traditionally low. How can that be reconciled with the threshold he is introducing for workers' wages? What does he say to people who are running businesses in the tourism industry across the highlands and islands?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman will know that immigration is a reserved matter, but it is very important that we engage with all nations, regions and communities. As we develop the new immigration system set out in the White Paper, I will ensure that that engagement happens and that we set up a system that represents the needs of the entire UK.

Fourthly, in addition to immigration measures, the Bill will allow us to adapt our benefits system as we leave the EU. It will enable the UK to change the retained social security arrangements for EEA and Swiss nationals. British people living abroad will also benefit. The social security powers in the Bill will allow amendments to the retained EU social security co-ordination regime. That will help us to deliver effective support for UK nationals abroad, including pensioners living in the EU. The rights of EU nationals already resident in the UK will be protected, but the powers will allow us to rapidly respond to the outcome of negotiations and to provide reassurance to those who are affected. Any future changes using those powers will be subject to normal parliamentary procedures.

This Bill is just the beginning of our future border and immigration system. We plan to phase in that system, to give individuals and businesses time to adapt. Of course, if we leave the EU without a deal, there will be no implementation period, but we will continue to deliver on the referendum result and end free movement. The automatic right to come to the UK will stop once the Bill is commenced. We will not hesitate to take back control of our borders.

As set out in our no-deal policy paper, which I will publish later today, we will also introduce transitional arrangements to minimise any disruption. Copies of the policy paper will be placed in the Library of the House. This will ensure that we take a practical approach and that the UK stays open for business. Under the arrangements, EEA and Swiss nationals will be able to come here for up to three months without a visa. They will continue to use e-gates, as they do now, and they will not face additional checks at the border. They will be allowed to work temporarily but will need to apply for leave and pay an application fee if they want to stay longer.

We plan to grant them three years' leave, subject to identity, security and criminality checks. That will give us the time needed to run our EU settlement scheme for EEA and Swiss nationals who are already living here and ensure that there is no sudden shock to UK businesses as the future system is put in place. But the leave will be

strictly temporary. It cannot be extended, and those who wish to stay will need to meet our future immigration requirements.

The transitional period will last until 31 December 2020, when our EU settlement scheme closes, and from that point on, businesses will be expected to check that EEA citizens have an immigration status before allowing them to start work. Let me be clear: this policy does not apply to those here before exit day, whose rights to live and work here in the UK will be protected by the EU settlement scheme. We want them to stay, and we value them hugely.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I thank the Home Secretary for giving way; he is being very generous. What is the Government's estimate of the economic cost of these changes? Why does he think it is worth damaging the economy, with the effect that this may have on jobs and livelihoods?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have set out an economic analysis of the deal and exit from the EU, including in a no-deal scenario. I point him to that.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the Home Secretary recognise that ending freedom of movement is a huge loss for many people—not just for businesses and for our economy, but for families and friends here in the UK now? Will he actually own up to the fact that, as we should be reminding people, ending freedom of movement means that the freedom of movement for young people in this country to visit, stay and work in other countries will be massively reduced—we are shrinking our young peoples' opportunities—and that if our goal is to reduce immigration, this is perverse because immigration from non-EU countries is actually going up while immigration from EU countries is going down?

Sajid Javid: I think the hon. Lady and I will have to agree to have different points of view. I respect her view, but I think one of the clear messages from the referendum result was that many people felt we needed an immigration system that is designed in Britain and built in Britain and which is designed specifically to meet the long-term needs of our economy and our society, and that is what we have set out in the White Paper. The independent work by the Migration Advisory Committee—the analysis it has done by looking at the immigration systems of other successful industrialised economies—shows that it is not necessary to have freedom of movement or something similar to freedom of movement in order to have a successful country and society.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): First, as the daughter of Irish immigrants who came here to rebuild England after the war, I welcome the Home Secretary's comments on the common travel area. That is hugely welcome, because it has been a source of great concern.

The Home Secretary has just used "Britain" as opposed to the United Kingdom. Earlier today, I met businesses and civic society from Northern Ireland that are already losing people from Northern Ireland who are going back to their country of origin or, indeed, moving a few miles south. Who is he talking to in Northern Ireland to

address some of these issues, and what are his Government now doing about that in the event of a no-deal scenario in only 60 days' time?

Sajid Javid: As I mentioned following the question from the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), it is important that we have an immigration system that represents the needs of every part of the UK, of course including Northern Ireland. In developing the White Paper, we have already talked to people from Northern Ireland—businesses, elected representatives and others—and we will continue to do so as we finalise the policy set out in the White Paper. Over the coming year, we will have a year-long engagement that will include every nation, every region and every community in the UK.

We are planning on the basis that, deal or no deal, from 2021 the future immigration system will be in place. It is right that we deliver on our promise to the people of the UK and that we legislate to end free movement, but if the future system is to be truly fit for purpose we must also learn the lessons from Windrush. We must put people first and make it easier for them to navigate the system. This work is under way, and we have already commissioned the Law Commission to review the existing immigration rules. I welcome its work to find ways to make them more accessible, and I look forward to receiving its recommendations later this year. They will help to inform the next stage of our future system, developing new immigration rules to set out that approach.

The proposals outlined in the White Paper have already prompted some debate. I have said that they are the starting point for a national conversation on what the future system should be. We will be discussing the detail with businesses, organisations and community representatives across the UK during this year, and I look forward to those conversations progressing. We are listening and we are taking our time to ensure that we get it right, but there can be only one end result. We must deliver what the British people asked for: exiting the EU and seizing this once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine our immigration system. This Bill is a key part of that process. It ends freedom of movement and it gives us full control, building a fair and sustainable system that people can count on. It is a system fit for the welcoming and diverse nation we all love, and a system designed in the UK for the UK. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.29 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): This is an important debate, not least because issues around migration lay at the heart of much of the debate on Brexit. I would make the following point to Ministers. To the extent that they continue to confuse migration in general with the specific issue of freedom of movement, they are not helping the clarity of the debate.

During the recent debate on the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, the Home Secretary said that he was

“determined to continue to have an immigration system that welcomes the very best talent from across the world, helping us to build an open, welcoming and outward looking post-Brexit Britain.”—[*Official Report*, 11 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 700.]

If only that were the case. The truth is that the Bill, the immigration White Paper and the accompanying media narrative play to some of the very worst aspects of the Brexit debate. In the process, the Bill risks doing irreparable damage to business, the economy and society.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): On the basis of what my right hon. Friend has just said, with which I very much agree, can she confirm that the Labour Front Bench will vote against the Bill tonight?

Ms Abbott: I can only thank my hon. Friend for her helpful intervention. She will have to wait for me to complete my remarks.

Let me quote:

“The new immigration system must command public confidence and support the economy. These proposals would achieve neither. The proposals don't meet the UK's needs and would be a sucker punch for many firms right across the country”.

Who said that? It was not a Labour MP but the Confederation of British Industry.

One example of how the Government, far from seeking the best talent, will potentially make it harder for industry and the public sector to recruit the best talent is the suggested salary threshold that the Home Secretary has put out to consultation. He has spoken about

“focussing on high skilled migration not low-skilled migration”.

But he is actually proposing an income-based system. It would allow derivative traders, private equity investors and merchant bankers in, but it would exclude nurses, social care workers, scientific researchers and many more. Salary is not a proxy for the level of skill, and a salary-based immigration system will not work for incentivising high-skilled migration. For example, many science research roles have starting salaries of around £22,000, and the 1% pay cap imposed on the public sector has held down wages in public sector science in particular. A salary threshold is wrong in principle and setting it at £30,000 would have an extremely damaging impact on science and public services.

The Home Secretary has pointed out that a salary threshold currently applies to non-EEA migrants, but we would argue that we should not be levelling down at this stage, but assuring fairness all round.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I read my right hon. Friend's article in the *Morning Star* on Saturday, which said that “The...Tory Immigration Bill will deepen the exploitation of workers.” We are not abstaining on the Bill this evening, are we?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for quoting from my article in the *Morning Star*. I am not sure if that is the first time he has read that paper, but I will expand further on that issue in my remarks.

I now turn to the very serious issue of the proposal for new 12-month visas. Nowhere is this flouting of the right to family life more blatant than in the case of the proposed new category of temporary workers. They will only be allowed to come here for 12 months at a time, without the right to bring their families, and perhaps then be deported. Do the Government not realise that their 12-month visas will be attractive only to the most desperate workers? It will potentially lead to huge churn in the workforce, and create a category of

[Ms Abbott]

second-class workers with no rights who are open to unscrupulous exploitation in the growth of the informal economy.

We oppose the creation of a two-tier workforce. That would have the effect, which some incorrectly claim freedom of movement does, of lowering wages and rights for all. Workers should have rights as workers and not be prey to some of the most unscrupulous employers. There is a genuine need for temporary workers in a certain number of sectors, such as agriculture and some aspects of the hospitality industry. We appreciate that the Government are piloting a new seasonal agricultural workers scheme, but there is no requirement for this type of insecure temporary work to become the norm across the economy. It should not become enshrined in a widely cast law.

Let me turn now to the flimsy nature of this proposed legislation. This may be one of the flimsiest pieces of proposed legislation on a major issue that I, and many others, have ever seen. Worse than that, it is supplemented by a whole slew of Henry VIII powers that the Government and the Secretary of State intend to grant to themselves. It is easy to demonstrate just how undemocratic those powers are. The Government claim they are a tidying up exercise and no new powers will be granted or exercised. However, our current immigration system is so untidy that it has the capacity to ruin lives—indeed, it frequently does ruin lives. If this were a Labour Government attempting to grant themselves these powers, we would be denounced for making a constitutional power grab and mounting a coup, to coin a phrase. We will be opposing the assumption of these sweeping powers without tying them to specific policies. We will not be offering a blank cheque, which the Government can redeem at any time they are in trouble and are tempted to whip up anti-migrant sentiment as a distraction. We on the Labour Benches also say that the Government need to accept the recommendations of the Law Commission. We need to simply and clarify our existing immigration system first before changing anything in relation to EU citizens here.

Moving on to the question of freedom of movement, the Labour party is clear that when Britain leaves the single market, freedom of movement ends. We set that out in our 2017 manifesto. I am a slavish devotee of that magnificent document, so on that basis the Front Bench of the Labour party will not be opposing the Bill this evening.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ms Abbott: I remind Members that I have spent almost all my political career trying to help individuals deal with the excesses of an unfair immigration system. They would not be amused by seeing and hearing Members turn that into some kind of parliamentary game.

The Labour party reserves the right to reconsider its position on this proposed legislation when it comes out of Committee. There is no question but that freedom of movement can work. My parents came in the 1950s when there was effectively freedom of movement between the United Kingdom and the colonies. More recently, freedom of movement has worked well for key industries

in the UK such as science, telecoms, heritage, aviation and the public services—in particular, the NHS. For many young people in particular, the removal of freedom of movement will be an absolute loss.

The Home Secretary risks being accused of complacency on the subject of EU citizens. There is still a great deal of concern among EU citizens about what the reality of the registration system will be and about whether the Government are equipped to register millions of EU citizens effectively, and there is uncertainty among not just EU citizens themselves but their employers.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I am very grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. I do not wish to launch any type of personal criticism of her, as she has actually been making an extremely coherent, root-and-branch criticism of the Bill, and she has an excellent record on these things. The problem is that we are meant to be debating whether this House of Commons should approve the Second Reading of a Bill. She has denounced it from beginning to end but says that the official Opposition do not intend to vote against it. That makes the proceedings quite absurd.

The right hon. Lady is in the same position as the Home Secretary, who could think of no reason why any group coming under existing EU law should be reduced, except that we have to say that we are against freedom of movement. All the right hon. Lady can say to explain her Front-Bench colleagues' extraordinary decision—I suspect it was not hers—is that they must be seen to be saying that they are against freedom of movement. That is no way to legislate, and it demeans her speech.

Ms Abbott: I am loth to disagree with the Father of the House, but he will be aware—more than any other Member, because he has been here longer—that this is not the end of our deliberations on the Bill. As has happened many times before, we will see how it is amended in Committee before we take a decision on how we vote on Third Reading, which will be the end of the deliberations.

One thing we hope will be addressed when the Bill goes into Committee is indefinite administrative detention. I was a Member of Parliament when immigration detention as we now know it was introduced. When some of us queried the lack of due process surrounding it, we were told not to concern ourselves because people would be detained for only short periods immediately prior to being deported. Now we have a monstrous system where people are held in administrative detention for a year or more. Ministers insist that detention is not indefinite, but if someone is in a detention centre, cut off from their friends and family, with no idea when they will be released, it certainly feels like indefinite detention to them.

It has long been my view that we should end indefinite detention, and the Labour party's commitment to ending it was set out clearly in the 2017 manifesto. I welcome the fact that Members on both sides of the House are coming round to that point of view. One can only hope that the Bill is amended along those lines in Committee.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: Before I bring my remarks to a close, I have a few questions to ask Ministers. First, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, when will the Government actually implement the Bill and repeal free movement? Does the Secretary of State accept that there is some lack of clarity about the position of Irish citizens? *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are laughing about the position of Irish citizens, but Irish citizens have come to Opposition Members to express their concerns about the current lack of clarity.

Anna McMorris: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: Will the automatic deportation regime imposed by the UK Borders Act 2007 also now apply to Irish citizens? Do the Government accept that ending free movement for EU citizens would also end free movement for other groups of UK workers, including UK scientists, and limit their ability to work on pan-European research projects? Do they accept that, unless each EU country legislates otherwise, British citizens travelling to EU countries will be immediately treated as third country nationals, so they will lose their free movement rights?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ms Abbott: In conclusion, the Home Secretary said in the debate on the withdrawal deal:

“Concern over uncontrolled immigration from the EU was a major factor in the decision to leave the EU.”—*[Official Report, 11 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 698.]*

Who whipped up that concern? Could it have been the political party that introduced completely bogus immigration targets—targets that have never been met, were never intended to be met and were just a vehicle for anti-immigrant sentiment and targets that the current Home Secretary seems unwilling to stand by? Could it have been whipped up by the “Go home” vans? I saw them driving through my constituency in east London, and I have to tell the Home Secretary—in case he is not aware—that they represent a low point in our migration policy, having been designed to intimidate and strike fear into the hearts of people who were here perfectly legally.

Or was the concern whipped up by the introduction of the hostile environment? I would be the first to say that some of its elements were introduced under a Labour Government, but the majority were brought in post 2010, when the current Prime Minister was Home Secretary, and I voted against the legislation. As a consequence of the hostile environment, sick people were denied cancer treatment, which horrified the public when they read about it for the first time, and people were evicted from their homes because they could not get the benefits they were entitled to. People were detained—I met women detained under the hostile environment on my visit to Yarl’s Wood last year—and deported, and people who had gone home to the Caribbean for a holiday—

Sajid Javid *rose*—

Ms Abbott: I give way to the Home Secretary.

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Lady will know that the historical review of what has been known as Windrush shows that almost half those affected were under a Labour Government. This Government have apologised

for their role. Does she want to take this opportunity to apologise on behalf of the previous Labour Government for their mistakes?

Ms Abbott: The Home Secretary knows perfectly well that I never voted for those aspects of Labour policy, and I made the point that some of the aspects of the hostile environment, particularly in relation to the health service, were introduced under a Labour Government.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Home Secretary should not be trying to score political points on what is quite a serious issue and that it is not for her to apologise for what a past Labour Government did? We are talking about what this Government have done in relation to the Windrush scandal and the hostile environment policies they introduced.

Ms Abbott: Rather than trying to score the political points, the public would want the Home Secretary to move much faster in sorting out the Windrush scandal and to look further into its effects, because persons from the Caribbean were not the only Commonwealth cohort affected. Unless the Home Secretary moves faster and with more will, other cohorts of persons from all parts of the former British empire will be treated in the way in which the Windrush persons were treated.

Anna McMorris: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: Above all, the consequence of the Windrush scandal was that a whole generation of people who came here after the war to what they thought of as the mother country, to rebuild that mother country, were humiliated and degraded. I think that that generation and their relatives and friends would appreciate a more serious contemplation of this issue in the House tonight.

Anna McMorris: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: Finally, let me say this. Migration has been a question for heated debate in this country over the decades. The Bill represented an opportunity for us to start to build a fairer immigration system across the board.

Anna McMorris: On that point, will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: We will wait to see how the Bill emerges from Committee, but I say to Ministers who are sitting there smirking that literally millions of people in this country have been detrimentally affected by poor immigration legislation—not just under this Government, but under previous Governments—and want to see reform. We will not be supporting the Bill tonight, but we will be watching to see what emerges from the Committee stage.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I must say to Back Benchers that we will start off with a nine-minute limit.

5.51 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): One of my early speeches when I was a new Member of Parliament was made during a debate on immigration, facilitated by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames). You may well have been in the Chair at the time, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wanted to speak in that debate because immigration had been prevalent in the run-up to, and during, my 2010 election campaign, and it continues to be of interest today.

In that speech, just over eight years ago, I focused on the fact that our British sense of tolerance and generous manner, which had welcomed many to our country for hundreds of years, had been overstretched and taken for granted during uncontrolled immigration under the last Labour Government. I referred to the impact of mass eastern European immigration in my own constituency—particularly in the two most deprived wards, where at the time tensions ran high and social divisions deep. The years since have passed with highs and lows, but, although integration is undoubtedly better, there remain enormous challenges, including the stretching of public services, the sudden change in population, and the perceived unfairness that free movement bought entitlement to welfare and housing structures that others did not have.

However, the debate, then as now, was balanced and constructive. There was overwhelming warmth towards, and appreciation of, the hundreds of thousands who come to the UK from across the European Union and the rest of the world to work in all sectors, including our health and social care services. I think of the phenomenally hard-working staff at my two local hospitals in Maidstone and Medway, the seasonal agricultural workers at the Chapel Down vineyards in Aylesford, and the workforces in the manufacturing, construction and warehouse hubs around Larkfield, to name but a few.

There are many settled European citizens in my constituency who have paid their taxes, worked hard, contributed to society in a variety of ways and brought up their children, and are now supporting grandchildren; it is for them in particular that I welcome the Government's decision to scrap the fee for those seeking settled status. It is a symbolic but important announcement, which shows that we appreciate them and what they have brought to our country.

I support the Bill because it will enable us to deliver a future immigration system that is right for our country, not one that suits the political ambitions of the European Union. Although the Bill itself will not set out the specifics, the immigration rules will. The Government have rightly noted that they need to command the confidence of the public and reflect the wider economic, social and political context of immigration.

I think that we are all to blame for the public's loss of faith in the immigration system. I shall try to put this as sensitively as possible, but we have allowed asylum seekers and refugees to be confused with economic migrants: we have allowed people to think that they are one and the same. We must have a grown-up conversation, one that is sensitive but sets a respectful tone, and one that discusses what our population should be in the future and what constitutes a balanced migration approach. I am confident that the immigration rules will enable that to happen.

I absolutely respect the fact that there are very important matters to be covered this evening. What has been said so far has demonstrated the breadth and depth of the issues surrounding immigration. I thank all the organisations that have sent us briefings for the debate, and I hope to be able to sweet-talk the Whips so that I can sit on the Bill Committee and have a chance to consider some of those issues in more detail. To be honest, I did not expect to be the first Back Bencher to be called, and I assumed that all the important points would have been made earlier. I do not want people to think that I am being shallow in raising one rather niche issue relating to immigration. We talk about talent. Given that you can take the girl out of the sports Ministry but cannot take the sports Ministry out of the girl, I am sure many Members will not be surprised to learn that I want to make a brief point about the connection between the future immigration rules and football.

Because we are friends, and because I have no doubt bored the Immigration Minister to tears with sports stuff over the years, I know she understands that football is not just about people running around on a pitch kicking a ball; I know she “gets” the fact that the Premier League and the English Football League bring a phenomenal amount of money to our economy. That success depends largely on Premier League clubs' having the access that they require to world-class talent both on the pitch and in the dugout, while allowing our home-grown talent the opportunity to play with and for the world's best, day in, day out. The impact of that is clear from England's most recent World cup results—and ours was the only national team 100% of whose players came from their home league.

Other European leagues are licking their lips in the belief that Brexit will present them with a recruitment and competitive advantage over the Premier League, and that, post-Brexit, the Premier League will have to work within an immigration system that presents hurdles to the recruitment of the world's best talent, both within the EU and outside it. The last thing that Brexit should be is a gift to leagues that, despite already having far fewer visa requirements for players, have so far been unable to match the popularity of the Premier League on equal terms. I recognise that those principles can be applied to any employer in any sector, but I hope that the House will generously forgive me for raising that issue here, given I am no longer in a position to do so behind the scenes as a Minister.

This important Bill takes forward the will of the people as set out in the referendum result on 23 June 2016. I wish that I could raise far more of the important points that have been made, and I look forward to hearing other Members' speeches. I also look forward—hopefully—to sitting on the Bill Committee.

Anna McMorris: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Tracey Crouch: Of course.

Anna McMorris: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. I wanted to make this point during the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott).

I disagree with the hon. Lady. The majority of people do not want this immigration crackdown, which will damage our economy and harm our communities. The

Bill goes against our values of openness and inclusiveness. I want a country based on fairness and tolerance, but the Bill provides for neither. That is why I will vote against it, and I hope that Opposition Front Benchers will, too.

Tracey Crouch: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I am pleased that I was able to give way to her so that she could make her point, which was well made. Members in all parts of the House will have strong views on this issue. I was going to say, before the hon. Lady completed her final sentence, that if she wished to vote against the Bill, she would not need the permission of her Front Bench to do so.

This Bill is needed, regardless of whether we have plan A, plan B, or no deal. I look forward to supporting my Government—and, indeed, my friend the Minister—during its passage.

5.59 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is always nice to start with a note of consensus, so let me say that I agree that we need an immigration Bill and I welcome the one solitary clause in relation to Irish nationals. Sadly, that is where the consensus ends. Let me say unequivocally that the Scottish National party opposes the Second Reading of the Bill.

There is so much wrong with the UK immigration system that needs fixing, but this Bill will not fix anything; in fact, it will make things much worse. The UK immigration system is built on the flawed twin pillars of a ludicrous net migration target and an obnoxious hostile environment policy exposed in all its nastiness by the Windrush scandal. That scandal is yet to be adequately and fully investigated or resolved. Meanwhile, the chief inspector of borders and immigration points out that the Home Office makes no effort to measure the effects of the hostile environment, but we know that turning NHS workers, landlords and bank staff into border guards has had terrible implications for too many people. This Bill does not end the ludicrous net migration target or the hostile environment; instead it will see more people ensnared by both.

We have the disgraceful situation of being alone in Europe in insisting that indefinite detention is perfectly okay simply for immigration purposes. Report after report flags up the terrible effect it has on detainees, yet there is nothing in this Bill to fix it.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is making excellent points about indefinite detention. Does he agree that one reason why the Government and Conservative MPs argue for indefinite detention is that they claim that otherwise there will be a pull factor and more people will come in? Actually, that has been disproved: academic studies show that there is no pull factor in this, so there is no need to have indefinite detention.

Stuart C. McDonald: There is absolutely no need for indefinite detention and the fact that we are the only country in Europe that has to have it shows that every other country manages perfectly well without it. Basically,

it is an affront to democracy and the rule of law. It is a human rights disgrace and the Bill should be used to scrap it altogether.

We have among the most anti-family immigration rules in the world, splitting up partners, spouses and parents from children if the UK sponsor cannot meet the £18,600 financial threshold.

Drew Hendry: My hon. Friend might recall the family who ran the village shop in Laggan in the highlands, the Zielsdorfs. The shop they ran was a vital component of the community and well loved by the community, but they were deported to Canada by this Government under the current rules. Does my hon. Friend also agree that even under the current rules the Government cannot even support our armed services personnel to be put together with their families, as raised by me in Prime Minister's questions this week in the case of Denis Omondi and Ann in Kenya?

Stuart C. McDonald: I saw my hon. Friend's question to the Prime Minister and it gave yet another horrendous example of the types of family these immigration rules are splitting apart.

Some 40% of the total population is not able to meet the financial threshold set out in the immigration rules, but that proportion is significantly higher for women, ethnic minorities and certain communities across the country. Every week we hear stories such as the one referred to by my hon. Friend. These rules are wicked, but this Bill will result in their application to hundreds of thousands more families in future. Some 500,000 UK citizens currently live here with an EU partner or spouse. That gives an idea of how many future relationships will be impacted in the years ahead. Rules for other families are just as outrageous. This Bill does not end these anti-family policies; it will destroy more families.

We put families with children on "no recourse to public funds" visas, increasing the risk of exploitation and cost-shunting on to overstretched local authorities. Again there is nothing in the Bill to fix that, but more people will end up with "no recourse to public funds" visas. The UK immigration system has become ludicrously complicated and is characterised by poor decision-making and massive expense and bureaucracy. Those who seek to challenge decisions so that they can access their rights struggle because appeal rights have been swept away, while legal aid has become a rarity in England and Wales. The Bill will leave even more people subject to poor Home Office decision-making but without the means or procedures to challenge that effectively.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the objective of Tory immigration Bills is to achieve two things: to stop people coming to this country, and to make life as miserable and difficult for the poor souls who have managed to make it here? Does my hon. Friend also agree that with this Bill they have triumphed in both respects?

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend is spot on. So much of this is about immigration theatre; it is about the politics of immigration and being seen not to stand up to those who are anti-migrant—almost trying to be seen to be hard on immigration for electoral purposes. It is a disgrace.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful point. I want to take him back to the threshold figure of £18,600, because it is so unfair, so unequal and so unjust. That is not even the minimum wage, so it deliberately splits up families, depending on the wealth of one person in that family. The Supreme Court says it has a particularly harsh effect on citizens who have lived and worked abroad. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is cruelty and callousness at the heart of this Government's policy?

Stuart C. McDonald: I absolutely agree. We could spend many hours debating, and highlighting the flaws of, so many of the features of the family migration rules. Another is the fact that this threshold only takes into account the earnings of the UK sponsor; it does not take into account, for example, the potential earnings of those who want to come and join their family members here. So these rules achieve absolutely nothing but keeping families apart—families split apart and destroyed.

Our asylum system also urgently needs important reform: to fix and extend the “move-on period” that forces newly recognised refugees into homelessness and poverty; to end the poverty support rates for asylum seekers and allow them the right to work; and to respect the vote in this House on the Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill to extend family reunion rights.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fundamental point is that those under a certain age who have been designated as refugees should have the same rights as people over that age, and it is very nasty not to give those rights to children in particular?

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and the UK is once more an outlier in terms of the refugee family reunion rules it has in place. Sadly, the Bill does not mention asylum at all, and gives us little chance to address those issues.

These and a million other things need to be fixed, but this Bill does not do that; instead, it provides the Government with a big blank cheque to extend many of these flawed features to hundreds of thousands more people, each and every year.

On EU nationals who are already here, although scrapping the fee for settled status is welcome, much more needs to be done. The Home Secretary says he is listening, but the biggest concern just now is what happens in the event of no deal. Unilateral promises from the Government are fine so far as they go, but promises can be here today and gone tomorrow and, being unilateral, they are no help to the UK in Europe, nor do they have the force of international law. That is why MPs across the House have repeatedly urged the Government to seek to ring-fence the deal on citizen rights so that they can be guaranteed once and for all sooner rather than later. But the Government have shown absolutely no interest so far. We should use the Bill to try to make them at least attempt to secure such a deal, and we should use the Bill to enshrine the rights of the 3 million in primary legislation so that they cannot be changed in the blink of an eye via immigration rules.

Other questions remain. Why are there differences between the positions of EU citizens in a no-deal scenario compared with if a deal is agreed? Why are there to be

settled status appeal rights if there is a deal, but not if there is no deal? Why are the appeal rights not in the Bill? Why are voting rights not protected? Why are the 3 million to be refused physical documentation despite calls from the Exiting the European Union Committee to make that available? Where is the clarity about rights for Surinder Singh cases, and the different rights of carers from Chen, Ibrahim and Teixeira case law?

Perhaps most significantly of all, we still do not know anything about what will happen to those who fail to apply for settled status in time. Why should there be such a severe cut-off date? It is inevitable that hundreds of thousands will not apply in time: many children; people who have been resident for many years; those who think having a permanent residence document is sufficient; people who struggle with language or technology; vulnerable and exploited people; people who were born here and do not think they need to apply—the list goes on. We must also remember that in a recent British Medical Association survey, 37% of EU national doctors were unaware of the scheme. That does not bode well.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: When Conservatives are on the stump or going around the country, they always talk about getting rid of red tape and taking the Government out of the centre of people's lives. Right now, through this sort of legislation, they are putting massive amounts of red tape in people's lives and putting Government right in the middle of people's lives. Where things are currently going seamlessly, they want to introduce a ramping up of bureaucracy. That is shocking.

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; the Bill will catch hundreds of thousands of people into one of the most horrible bureaucracies that the Government have managed to create, and we should have absolutely nothing to do with it at all.

All the people—inevitably, hundreds of thousands of them—who fail to apply in time for the EU settled status scheme will be cast into the hostile environment, and that will make this a Windrush crisis writ large. The Bill creates that danger, but provides no clarity on, or protection from, the danger it creates.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Does he appreciate that many of my constituents will be EU nationals whose partners are non-EU nationals, and that that causes double the uncertainty for those families, who now do not know what the position will be?

Stuart C. McDonald: That is a fair point. That is the Surinder Singh route, and we still need clarity from the Government about what happens to people in that position.

One part of UK immigration policy continues to work pretty well: free movement. I would hope that continuing free movement would answer many of the questions I have just posed, but the Bill seeks to ditch it. An end to free movement will make the UK poorer economically, socially and in terms of opportunity. Ending free movement means ripping up mutual rights to live, study, work and enjoy family life across Europe, depriving future generations of the extraordinary opportunities that ours have enjoyed.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill, apart from being appalling, is premature, given that we do not know what will happen in the Brexit debate? There may be a public vote; we might stay in the EU; we may have a Norway model; we may have free movement. Why are we prematurely legislating for a position in which we will not get free movement when we do not know the future?

Stuart C. McDonald: The hon. Gentleman is spot on, and I shall come on to that point in a minute. It is premature, because it is tying Parliament's hand on not just the future relationship, but the question of oversight of the future of the immigration system.

Free movement has been fantastic for people in this country and across the continent. As all the research shows, it has been good for our economy and for our public finances. That is true for Scotland and for the UK as a whole, and we will not support a Bill that brings those benefits to an end.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way yet again. He makes a point about free movement's benefits to Scotland, and has it not been even more important for the highlands where, decade after decade, we have seen our population decline? Free movement has helped to arrest that situation and to turn it round to a point where we have a healthy population in the highlands, although we actually need more people there as well. Is it not the case that this is a "one size fits no one" policy as far as the highlands are concerned?

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend is spot on, I will come to the particular importance of the free movement of people for Scotland in a little while.

The other advantage that retaining free movement brings is, as the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) said, that it opens up the possibility of different future relationships with the EU. The relationship that my party would prefer is, of course, continued EU membership, but the Prime Minister's red line means that not only membership but other close relationships are not possible. If Parliament is serious about having a proper say on the future relationship, it should reject this Bill.

It is not only Parliament's say on our future relationship with the EU that the Bill could diminish, but our say on the future immigration system. The Government launched their White Paper just a day before introducing this Bill. Their consultation has a year to run. Why would Parliament give the Government a blank cheque to introduce any system by subordinate legislation at this stage? We should be moving in the opposite direction; we need a totally different approach to how immigration laws are made. There have been thousands of changes to the immigration rules since 2010, but they are not noticed or understood, never mind debated, in this Chamber. There is no other public policy area in which such important changes attract so little scrutiny. Parliament must start getting involved in how we operate and design our immigration system.

The Bill is dominated by totally inappropriate Henry VIII clauses. This is about not only the incredible breadth of powers that are sought to change legislation, including primary legislation, simply because Ministers think that

that is appropriate, but even the type of statutory instrument procedures. Why are "made affirmative" clauses the order of the day?

It is especially important not to give the Government a blank cheque on future immigration policy, given what their White Paper tells us that they will do with such a blank cheque. There has been a lot of talk about division in the country, but at least the Government have brought a broad coalition together in opposition to many of their White Paper's proposals. Business organisations, trade unions, universities, charities and non-governmental organisations are all hugely concerned. Extending the bureaucracy and huge expense of tier 2 to EU employees is understandably unpopular, even if some tweaking around the edges is proposed.

The proposed retention of the £30,000 financial threshold has sparked incredulity, as it would mean that 80% of EU workers coming to the UK would no longer qualify. Some 60% of jobs at the so-called intermediate level would not make the grade. Technicians in our universities, medical research charities and the NHS would struggle. Nurses, paramedics, junior doctors and social care workers will be implicated. Hugely significant sectors will find it impossible to adjust, including retail, food and drink, and hospitality. Housing and infrastructure targets will be totally unachievable. Such a financial threshold fails to recognise the need to recruit right up and down supply chains.

The proposals for stop-gap, temporary one-year workers' visas are, frankly, totally unacceptable. The Government say, "You can come to work, but don't bring your family. You'll have no recourse to public funds, and however well you do and however much your employer wants to retain you, you'll need to leave again for at least another year." That is an astonishing way to treat people, and such short-term schemes, under which people never develop support structures and have only a short period of employment to pay hefty recruitment and visa fees, are known to significantly increase the chances of exploitation. They are hopeless for integration—so they involve exactly the type of migration that the public are most frustrated about—and they are expensive for employers, who have to start again each year with a brand new recruit.

The White Paper is pretty much silent on the self-employed, which is again a matter of huge significance for certain industries in which self-employed contractors fill key roles. Universities have again criticised the failure to come up with anything approaching a sensible and competitive post-study work offer. If this is even roughly how the Government want to use the blank cheque provided by this immigration Bill, we should not be even remotely considering letting them near it.

Let me try once again to wake the Home Office up to the fact that this Bill, and the White Paper proposals that accompany it, would be a disaster for Scotland, both socially and economically. The White Paper proposals look set to result in an 85% reduction in the number of EEA workers coming to Scotland. Scottish Government modelling estimates that real GDP in Scotland will be around 6.2% lower by 2040 as a result of a Brexit-driven reduction in migration than it would have been otherwise. That is a fall of almost £6.8 billion a year in GDP by 2040, and a fall in Government revenue of £2 billion.

We need people to come, not additional hurdles to stop them coming.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he recognise the particular problems faced in the western highlands of Scotland, where there is a depopulation crisis? Urgent action is required, yet the Government have turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the needs of rural Scotland time and again. Even after an offer by Argyll and Bute Council to host a pilot scheme to test a regional immigration policy, they absolutely refused to do that. Will he join me in calling for the immediate devolution of immigration policy to the Scottish Parliament, because a "one size fits all" policy cannot and will not work for the whole UK?

Stuart C. McDonald: I am happy to support my hon. Friend in that call. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), he makes an important argument about rural Scotland.

If the Government were to succeed in reducing net migration to the tens of thousands, it is projected that Scotland's working age population would decline by 4.5%, or 150,000, between 2016 and 2041. It is time that the Home Office engaged with these concerns. So far it has veered between platitudes about the useless Scottish shortage occupation list and total disinterest in the issue. I ask the Home Office: please, look at the analysis that has been done and proposals about how a differentiated or devolved system can work—not just from the Scottish Government but from academics such as Christina Boswell, Sarah Kyambi and Eve Hepburn. Look at what think-tanks such as the Institute for Public Policy Research are saying; see what works internationally in Canada, Australia and other countries.

Whatever our differing views on Scotland's constitutional future, migration and demographics must be recognised as huge issues for the future of Scotland. The total lack of interest from the Home Office is just shocking. If it fails to start engaging and addressing the issue, there is no better illustration of why we need decisions on immigration to be in Scotland's hands.

For all those reasons, the Bill must be refused a Second Reading. For such a short Bill, it risks remarkable damage. We will all be poorer if it passes. We say no to terminating our mutual rights to free movement and no to giving the Government a blank cheque to implement a disastrous alternative policy. We say no to extending the hostile environment and anti-family policies, and no to damaging Scotland's future. For all those reasons, and all the reasons set out in the reasoned amendments tabled by the Greens and the Liberal Democrats, as well as that tabled by the SNP, the Bill must be refused a Second Reading.

6.18 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Each of our lives—all lives—is characterised by change and challenge. We attempt to rise to the second and cope with the first. How successful we are in that depends on context, individuals and circumstances. What is absolutely certain is that the familiar touchstones of enduring certainty, by accentuating what we know, affirm our personal sense of belonging and communal notion of identity.

In trying to build a society in which the things that unite us are greater than any which divide us, mass migration proves difficult simply because of its scale and the difference it makes. When communities quickly

change beyond or nearly beyond recognition, people find it hard to cope. That was precisely why the people decided to say, as expressed through the referendum, that they wanted no more of free movement, and that was what the Home Secretary and shadow Home Secretary drew the House's attention to. Of course, that was not the only thing that the referendum was about but, emblematically, what people saw as migration "out of control" became a proxy for not being able to command their own future and not being able to govern themselves.

Free movement has that problem at its heart. The idea that people can come here at will, regardless of need and of what they do when they get here, and can choose where they go and what their life is like thereafter, seemed to be at odds both with immigration policy before, which was based on applications, visas, needs and specificities of various kinds, and with what the people who are here already feel is fair and reasonable.

Pete Wishart: The right hon. Gentleman is correct that immigration was the cold beating heart of the case for leaving the European Union—there is no doubt about that. However, he is just making a traditional, right-wing Tory speech on immigration, saying that immigration somehow changes communities and drives down wages. Does he have even a shred of evidence to support all these lazy, right-wing Tory views about immigration? We have never seen any evidence.

Sir John Hayes: I do not mind being called a traditional Tory, but I am not so keen on "lazy". If I am articulating that view and if it reflects a view that is held by many of my constituents and a large number of other people, I am doing the House a service.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Sir John Hayes: I will give way in a second.

Trevor Phillips, the founding chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, argued that there is a liberal consensus not to speak about such things. There is what he described—I do not know whether I am being unfair, but perhaps the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) matches this description—as "touchy", "smug", "complacent" and "squeamish" unwillingness on the part of bourgeois liberals to address the issue. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is a bourgeois liberal, but I do know that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) is, and I will happily give way to her.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way with the customary courtesy that we all appreciate so much—*Hansard* could perhaps put "sarcasm" in brackets there. To address his point, of course he needs to respond to his constituents, but would he accept that his constituents may have reflected such a view back to him because of things such as the poster put up by Nigel Farage during the referendum campaign that actually showed Syrian refugees while implying that that was something to do with freedom of movement being out of control? Perhaps he would be doing his constituents more of a service if he based his arguments on evidence, and the evidence, time and again, is that freedom of movement does not reduce wages. We need a Government who are willing to enforce a minimum wage. I wish this Government would do that, but that is not the fault of freedom of movement.

Sir John Hayes: To be clear, I started this contribution by saying that change and challenge were part of every life. Change is inevitable and constant, and advanced societies of course have people coming and going to and from them. Indeed, that has been the case in our country for a long time, but the level and extent of net migration into this country over recent years have been unprecedented. If we look at the numbers, over the past 10 years, roughly speaking in net terms, 250,000 migrants have entered Britain each year.

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con): Contrary to what the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) says, as a first-generation immigrant, I know that it is wholly inconsistent to say that immigrants have not changed this country or communities in any way whatsoever. Sometimes there is positive change, and sometimes there is negative change—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman shakes his head in disagreement, but I am merely repeating his words. Does my right hon. Friend agree there are both positive and negative changes, and that we want more of the positive and less of the negative?

Sir John Hayes: I do agree, and part of that is about scale. Part of that is about the absorption of new peoples, about building the kind of common sense of identity that I called for, and about ensuring that what we share is more important than that which divides us, as I also said a few moments ago. If we are to build that kind of social cohesion and that civil harmony, it is important to recognise, as my hon. Friend says, the consequences of immigration, where they are both positive and less so. Many communities across Britain felt at the time of the referendum—using that as an expression—that some of the changes were not positive. That is partly because free movement tended to bring people to particular communities in the east of England, including in my county of Lincolnshire, and other similar places, so that the number of people who came was not spread out evenly. People were often concentrated in small towns that changed very radically very rapidly, and it is the extent of that change that causes some of the concerns that I have attempted to amplify.

Brendan O'Hara: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that those of us in areas that have had a positive experience of immigration should continue to have the right to have that experience? Will he therefore back our call to devolve immigration to the Scottish Government so that we can continue to have that positive experience of immigration?

Sir John Hayes: I take the view that this is our sovereign Parliament, that Home Office policy should be made here, and that the Government govern for the whole of our kingdom. That may seem a bit unconventional to Scottish nationalist eyes, but it is certainly my view. As I recall, it was also the view of the majority of Scots when their opinion was tested in a referendum, so let us move on from the idea of devolving this policy.

As I said, the figures speak for themselves. There have been unprecedented levels of mass net migration for a decade. Of course, the fact that most of those migrants came from outside the EU goes back to the point made quite persuasively by the shadow Home Secretary, which

is that this debate must be contextualised. We need to talk about migration as a whole, rather than simply immigration from the EU. Nevertheless, in the views of many, free movement became a totem for the kind of lack of control of our destiny and our borders that the EU embodies.

Stuart C. McDonald: What I did not do in my speech was to set out alternative ways of addressing some of the concerns that the right hon. Gentleman is raising, such as by investing in public services in communities where there has been migration and in integration strategies, and through proper labour market enforcement of standards and wages. Those are ways of addressing community concerns without the whole country having to cut off its nose to spite its face by ending the free movement of people.

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Gentleman is right that growing the population significantly creates great pressures on health, housing, roads and schools. He is right that public services struggle to respond to population growth of the kind that I have outlined, and it is time that we had what was described earlier as a grown-up debate about population growth, and its effect on the provision of public services and how they are funded.

However, the point that I really want to make is that the Government have only partly responded to that public call for tougher action. Returning to the figures that I quoted earlier when I challenged the Home Secretary, the number of failed asylum seekers removed from this country has fallen from 16,000 in 2005 to just 5,000—despite what the Home Secretary said, that figure does not include the returns of foreign criminals, although I understand that he made a genuine mistake in that respect—and the number of overstayers returned has dropped from 31,000 per annum to about 21,000 per annum. We are perpetually failing to deal with such matters as effectively and efficiently as we ought to, and that is actually rather unfair to the individuals concerned, because they sometimes end up in unacceptable conditions, whether in housing, in detention centres or wherever. It is actually fairer to deal with these things quickly, as previous Governments clearly did to a greater extent—I do not say that with any great relish.

It is also important to understand what this new White Paper is likely to lead to. There is a real risk that the focus on low-skilled migrants, and certainly on the one-year limit, may mask immigration figures. There is an argument for seasonal workers. The seasonal agricultural workers scheme is to be welcomed, and we should extend it to horticulture, but those workers tend to go home. They do not settle and they are not migrants; they are people who simply come to work.

Let us build an immigration system that is fair and that reflects public understanding of the need to build communities that cohere. And let us build a shared sense of Britishness; that should be at the heart of what the Government do.

6.30 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) made a wide-ranging speech, but I will address the narrower, more specific issue raised by the right hon. Members for Sutton

[Ms Harriet Harman]

Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) in their interventions on the Home Secretary, which is the question of immigration detention.

This Bill repeals the law relating to free movement, thereby bringing EEA nationals and their families within general immigration control and requiring them to have leave to enter and remain under the Immigration Act 1971. The Government told the 3 million EU citizens who are here:

“You are our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues. We want you to stay.”

The Government said that they only have to register, as they are existing residents. I do not doubt the Home Secretary’s sincerity on that, but it is, of course, exactly what was said to people of the Windrush generation. Everyone now acknowledges that terrible mistakes were made by the Home Office and that people who have been here for years were wrongfully detained as illegal immigrants.

If we are to subject 3 million EU citizens to our immigration system, it is right that we should now ask ourselves whether we have learned the lessons of the Windrush cases so that we do not repeat those injustices on EU citizens. We do not want the new level playing field to be a detention centre.

I have the privilege of chairing the Joint Committee on Human Rights and, following our inquiry into immigration detention, we are clear that two problems need to be addressed. The first is the lack of independence in decision making on detention, and the second is indefinite detention.

If a person is suspected of a crime, they cannot be detained by the Government; they can be detained only by the police, who are independent of Government. If the police want to continue to detain a person beyond 36 hours, they have to bring that person before a court, which is, of course, totally independent of Government.

But if the Home Office suspects a person of being in breach of our immigration laws, there is a complete absence of independence in the decision making. A civil servant—nameless, faceless and behind closed doors—just ticks a box to detain them. The first that person will know about it is when someone bangs on their door in the early hours of the morning to bundle them into an immigration enforcement van and take them to a detention centre.

With no independence in the decision making, and with no scrutiny or accountability, mistakes are inevitable. Those we get to hear about are probably only the tip of the iceberg, but we do know that £21 million was paid out by the Home Office in just five years to compensate for wrongful detention, and terrible mistakes are certainly what happened in the Windrush cases.

It is routinely said those people were unable to prove their residence here, which is not the case for the detainees we saw. We looked at their Home Office files, which the Home Secretary was good enough to release to them, and it was not that there was no evidence of their residence here. There was masses of it, including records of national insurance contributions going back to the 1970s. If there had been any independence in the decision making, these people would never have been detained,

yet they were detained not once but twice. The papers in their files were ignored, and the pleas of their families were swept aside.

After the right to life, the right not to be unlawfully detained is one of the most important human rights. It should not be the case that a person has fewer protections from wrongful detention as an immigrant than they would if they had actually committed a crime. We should ensure that, in future, no one is detained unless the decision is taken independently. The Home Office should make its case, but someone independent must take the decision if a person is to be deprived of their liberty. The Joint Committee on Human Rights will table an amendment to that effect, and we hope the Government will agree to it.

Another deplorable aspect of our immigration system, to which EU citizens are now to be subject under this Bill, is that there is no time limit on detention. A person is taken from their home or workplace, and they have no idea whether they will be in the detention centre for a day, a month or a year. Evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights identified the indefinite nature of such detention as one of its cruellest aspects.

The criminal justice system imposes time limits at every stage, from first bringing a defendant before a magistrate to the sentence that sets out their time in prison, but the Home Office can hold a person in immigration detention indefinitely. The Joint Committee on Human Rights agrees with the right hon. Members for Sutton Coldfield and for Haltemprice and Howden, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) and my right hon. Friends the Members for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) that there should be a time limit of 28 days on immigration detention, and the Joint Committee will table an amendment to the Bill so that if a detainee is not deported or released by then, they should be brought before a judge where the Home Office can apply for just a further 28 days. We hope the Government will accept an amendment on detention that I believe has widespread support in the House, including from the SNP—we have heard from the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), and the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) is a leading member of our Joint Committee—and the Lib Dems, and I know the DUP has long complained about indefinite detention.

This is not a party issue. It seems to be the Home Office versus everybody else. The Labour Government should have ended the scandal of indefinite detention when we were in office, but we did not, and I am now happy to apologise for that—it is something we should have done.

Geraint Davies: I support my right hon. and learned Friend’s amendment, and she may be interested to know that a Swansea resident, Otis from Congo, was ripped from his bed on the Thursday before Christmas and was due to be sent back to Congo, where he had previously been tortured, on Christmas Day. He was detained for 21 days and, luckily, following our intervention he is now safe and sound back in Swansea, but does it not show that, if the system is used as it currently is, people who have a case, and who are in jeopardy if they are taken back, can be taken from their bed, kept indefinitely and then just carted away?

Ms Harman: I absolutely agree. For people who believe they have a good case, or who are here perfectly lawfully, it is a terrifying experience to be grabbed and swept away. That is not the sort of thing that should happen in this country.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Building on what the right hon. and learned Lady said, I formally indicate that the DUP will give serious consideration to what I think is a positive and worthwhile proposal that will be a step forward in affording constitutional norms, which we take for granted, to those who only want to live in this country and build a life alongside us.

Ms Harman: I am heartened by the hon. Gentleman's intervention, and I hope he will join us when we take up the Home Secretary's offer to go and talk to him about how we can make progress.

Caroline Lucas: The right hon. and learned Lady is making a powerful case. When I finally got into Yarl's Wood, what came over to me from my conversations with the women I met is the mental torture, the arbitrariness, of not knowing why they had been taken. Although I respect that she is trying to get a majority for a particular timeframe, which is why she has chosen the 28 days, does she agree that, if we were not trying to make that compromise, there is an argument for ending indefinite detention altogether, without any timeframe?

Ms Harman: But the point is that it would not be indefinite—it would be finite. It would be for up to 28 days, and then with the possibility of a further 28 days—the cap would be there, with no more days after that. Perhaps I could talk to the hon. Lady about this further.

Here in the UK we pride ourselves on our commitment to human rights, so how is it that indefinite Home Office detention has been a feature of our system for so long? I suspect one reason is that immigration detention used to be used for a very small number of people—exceptional cases. In 1993, there were only 250 detention places, and for the most part many of them were not full. Now, 27,000 people are detained every year, with 7,000 of them for more than 28 days. I am very encouraged by the Home Secretary's offer to meet us to discuss a way forward on this. I am grateful to the Immigration Minister for the evidence she gave to the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

Unaccountable, arbitrary, indefinite detention is a human rights abuse. It is a cruel anomaly in our system, and I hope the Government will use the opportunity of this Bill to end it. They will have then done something that the last Labour Government should have done and did not, as was rightly pointed out by my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary.

6.40 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and I warmed to many of the points she was making. It is long overdue that we address the issue of indefinite detention.

I very much welcome this Bill as an important step in taking back control of our borders as we leave the EU. It is important that we deliver on this promise we made

to the British people. Unfortunately, too many Members of this House seem to be reneging on promises they made to the British people at the last election. It is essential that we deliver on this promise to end the free movement of people and take back control of our own immigration policy. Beyond this Bill, which is just one step in that process, leaving the EU provides us with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset our immigration policy.

As we do that, it is vital that we are able to have a grown-up, mature and constructive debate about immigration. We have to avoid the polarisation that too often takes place, where people are either labelled as being for free movement and immigration, or against it and seeing it as a bad thing, because the reality is that it can be both good and bad. It is clear to me that, on balance, immigration has been good for our country. It is a very positive thing for our country, and we have heard many hon. Members make the point about the benefits of immigration to our economy. It has also been good for our nation in the wider context and has largely contributed to our being the richly diverse nation that the UK is today. But we also need to acknowledge that for some communities immigration has been a mixed blessing. If we do not listen to and acknowledge the legitimate concerns of communities who have seen the negative impacts of free movement affect them, we do the positive case for immigration a disservice.

There are some parts of our country and some communities where people feel that uncontrolled immigration has had a largely negative impact on their communities. It has brought about sudden change to the make-up, culture, nature and identity of those communities, and they see that as something that has been taken away from them. Although we should not be shy, as I have not been, in speaking up for the benefits that immigration has brought to our country, neither should we avoid addressing the challenges it has also created in some cases.

Sir John Hayes: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the public concerns about mass migration. In every poll taken, about 75% of people think immigration should be reduced and are concerned about the growth in population to 70 million over the next few years. Indeed, many think the Government should be going much further than reducing free movement and should be cutting immigration per se.

Steve Double: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention, as he makes the good point that many UK residents believe that migration has to be brought under control and that the numbers need to be reduced. In leaving the EU, we have that once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset our immigration policy and manage it in a way that is right for our nation.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My hon. Friend was talking about the benefits of immigration, and I could not agree more with him on that. Does he agree that the problem is not so much immigration, but administration? He rightly says that in many communities where there has been more immigration public services have been put under strain. The Migration Advisory Committee report outlined that funding should have followed that level of migration. Does he see this as an opportunity for us, as if public money were to

[*Luke Graham*]

follow the levels of immigration, it could benefit some areas that have had high levels of immigration and some that require immigration, such as certain areas in Scotland?

Steve Double: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the point he makes, which was exactly the one I am coming on to. In being able to take back our own immigration policy, we are provided with the opportunity to manage it in a way whereby the Government can ensure that any of the impact of large numbers of people moving into different areas of our nation can be addressed by investment and finance being put in place to support the services. We will be able to manage the number of people coming into our country in a way that does not put that undue pressure on public services. Many of the negative impacts, sometimes perceived and sometimes real, can be handled in a much better way and, thus, we will be able to extol the virtues of the positive elements that immigration brings to our country while managing some of the negative perceptions that people have.

As I said, I very much welcome the Bill as a first step towards resetting our own immigration policy. I want to say a few words about the immigration White Paper that the Government produced, and I am glad to see the Immigration Minister on the Front Bench, because I am sure she will not be surprised at the points I am going to make, as I have made them to her many times. I do, however, want to put them on the record. There is much to be welcomed in the White Paper, in developing a fair system that no longer discriminates between where people come from, but assesses people on the basis of their abilities and what they will bring to our country. That absolutely should be welcomed. But as I have listened to businesses in Cornwall, I have heard about a number of elements of the White Paper that cause them concern, and I wish to highlight those here today.

We very much welcome the pilot scheme for seasonal agricultural workers. It is good that the Government acknowledge that this sector has a particular requirement for seasonal migrant workers that we need to make sure we are able to meet. The latest figures from the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly local enterprise partnership state that there are about 7,000 migrant workers working in our agriculture and food sector in Cornwall. Many farmers rely on migrant workers. My own father-in-law, who at the age of 89 is still farming on the Isles of Scilly, keeps making the point about how vital his seasonal workers from eastern Europe are to making sure he can pick his flowers and get them to market. It is vital for our farms that we continue to be able to meet that seasonal requirement for labour. The pilot scheme is therefore very much to be welcomed, as is the Government's acknowledgement of the need of that sector.

The agriculture sector is not the only one that relies heavily on seasonal workers. In Cornwall, the tourism and hospitality sector, which is even bigger than our food and agricultural sector, has exactly the same requirement for seasonal workers from overseas. They are needed to come to man the hotels, bars, restaurants and the tourist resorts in Cornwall to make sure that those businesses are able to continue to function and provide the services for the many, many thousands of tourists who come to Cornwall every year. So I urge the

Government to look beyond the agricultural sector and to other sectors that have a particular requirement for seasonal workers. I welcome the steps that have sought to address this need through the 12-month low-skilled work visa, but I urge the Home Secretary and the Government to look at this again, because we clearly have a balance to strike here. At the moment, in this country, we do not have an army of people waiting to take up these jobs.

We have almost full employment, so there is a need to make sure that we have the workforce that our businesses, particularly those that require a heavily seasonal workforce, need. I am concerned that the 12-month low-skilled visa will put additional costs on businesses, in terms of the need both to keep recruiting staff every year and to keep retraining them every year. I am not convinced that it will help to meet the requirements of many of our businesses, so will the Government look again at what more we could do, particularly to help the tourism and hospitality sector?

Like others, I have concerns about the £30,000 threshold for skilled workers. A salary threshold is a fairly blunt instrument for identifying the skilled workers we need. That is particularly true in an area like Cornwall: when the average wage in the constituency that I represent is only around £18,000, that £30,000 threshold is unrealistic and will mean many people will be unable to come and work in businesses in Cornwall.

Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that most graduates who come out of British universities cannot expect to earn £30,000 in their first year, although many can? The threshold is ridiculous.

Steve Double: I agree that the limit needs to be looked at, particularly on a regional basis, and ask the Government to consider whether we need regional variations to the threshold. A policy that works for the south-east of England almost certainly will not work for places such as Cornwall and other parts of the country where average wages are so much lower.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): In the north of Scotland we have similar issues relating to hospitality, care, food and farming, but does my hon. Friend not agree that these issues are spread throughout the United Kingdom, and while the issues may be regional, we have to recognise that although London may have a higher salary level, the rest of the country may have a lower level?

Steve Double: My hon. Friend makes the point well. The Government do need to exercise some flexibility on this issue, particularly in respect of some of our public services, because we really do need workers to continue to come here. Particularly in health and care, that £30,000 limit is probably not going to meet the needs.

To sum up, I ask the Government to look into two things in respect of introducing a new immigration policy. First, we must ensure that we give enough notice and time for businesses to readjust to whatever the new regime is going to be. There must not be a sudden change and they should have plenty of time to plan, adjust and prepare for the change. Secondly, we really need to make sure that any policy is flexible enough to respond to the needs of our economy and to the different levels of employment in the country over a period of time. We must make sure that our policy responds to the

needs of the economy. I welcome the Bill and will support it as a first step, but we need to make sure that we take this opportunity to reset our immigration policy and get it right for the future.

6.53 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): This Bill is yet another power grab by a Government who are intent on riding roughshod over Parliament, and who view scrutiny as something to fear rather than a fundamental resource of democracy. Parliamentary scrutiny is there to enable a better, more effective, evidence-led approach, but it requires the appropriate powers to do that. The Bill does not allow Parliament to analyse, query and question the Government. Instead, it gives them sweeping powers to impose the immigration system that they set out in their White Paper or, indeed, any other whim that may take their fancy. We do not know what Home Office Ministers will do, and parliamentarians will be unable to challenge them when they do it. Having said that, we can have a good guess. Under the stewardship of a Prime Minister motivated more by ideology than facts, the Government have decided to stick with arbitrary targets and have looked to appease unjustified and unsubstantiated anti-migrant sentiment.

For Members from all parties, but particularly those on the Government Benches, I wish to outline a few key findings from the Government-commissioned Migration Advisory Committee report “EEA migration in the UK”. The report found no evidence that migration reduced wages, employment opportunities or training opportunities for UK-born citizens. Furthermore, it included strong evidence that EEA migrants have a positive impact on productivity, pay more in taxes than they receive in welfare benefits and consume in public services, and make a larger contribution to the NHS, in terms of both money and work, than they receive in health services.

As it stands, EEA nationals who want to come to the UK will be faced with our existing, creaking and failing immigration system, which is simply not fit for purpose. We know the damage that the Government’s hostile environment has caused for individuals and families throughout the country, and the Bill will push more people into this unjust position.

Geraint Davies: Is my hon. Friend aware of reports that have shown that on average migrants contribute 35% more in tax than they consume in public services? Will the new restrictions not mean higher taxes and lower services for the rest of us?

Preet Kaur Gill: I thank my hon. Friend for contributing to my previous statement.

The Bill will remove the rights of individuals and families without guaranteeing that sufficient rights are put in their place. If the Minister and the Government are serious about protecting people’s rights, will they put those rights in legislation?

I wish to raise a few other concerns. The first is the proposed £30,000 minimum salary threshold, which will also apply to migrants from the EU27. According to the 2018 annual survey of hours and earnings, the average earnings for a full-time male in the west midlands are £30,231, so just over the threshold. Meanwhile, the average earnings for a full-time woman are £24,030. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the

inequities of a policy that would disproportionately impact women and shut them out of the possibility of coming into this country? Will he commit to conducting a comprehensive gender impact assessment of all policies in the white paper?

In the light of the plans for a salary threshold, my constituents are concerned that we will see staff shortages in our NHS and care sector worsen.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): My local hospital in Croydon already struggles to recruit nurses, and we have struggled to recruit social care workers. The arbitrary £30,000 has no correlation to the skills that we actually need in our economy. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill will get us nowhere and really should go back to the drawing board?

Preet Kaur Gill: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, on which I am about to expand. Staff shortages in our NHS and care sector will leave our loved ones waiting longer in hospital corridors to see a nurse. As my hon. Friend has just pointed out, we must ensure that we have nurses and care workers. We must ensure that our NHS and our care sector have the people that they need with the right level of skills. That is why I cannot support the Bill on Second Reading. Does the Secretary of State agree that equating pay and skill undermines the desire for an immigration system that, to quote the Prime Minister’s foreword to the December White Paper,

“welcomes talent, hard work, and the skills we need”?

The second concern I wish to raise is about indefinite detention. As it stands, there are no limits on the length of time a person can be held in immigration detention in the United Kingdom. Anyone who has met those who have faced indefinite detention will know the pain and harm it causes. With the Bill potentially expanding the number of EEA nationals liable for detention, will the Government listen to the range of voices asking for an end to indefinite detention?

Finally, on the social security element of the Bill and the immigration White Paper, the latter proposes a more restrictive system for EU citizens’ entitlements, including longer waiting times before entitlement, so what guarantees will the Secretary of State give to protect EU citizens? With the EU likely to reciprocate any new restrictions on social security entitlement, what does he say to the more than 1 million UK citizens living in the EU who will have to face confines, or even become ineligible?

We in this House have a tendency to view issues as intrinsically good or bad, so I call on Members from all parties to reflect on a vital section of the MAC report that says that

“the impacts of migration often depend on other government policies and should not be seen in isolation from the wider context.”

I hope the Government heed that advice.

6.59 pm

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con): I mentioned earlier in this debate that I was speaking as a first-generation immigrant. Immigration is an issue that is very close to my heart. My personal experience, especially through my immediate family and relatives, has been not from an EU perspective, but from a non-EU perspective. One good thing about the Bill is that we are no longer

[Mrs Kemi Badenoch]

focusing on nationality, but, really importantly, on skills and ending this form of discrimination. I know that, in the future, most of the red meat will be coming with the immigration rules, so I shall speak on the substantive points in the Bill.

One of the primary reasons that I supported the withdrawal agreement was because of the reciprocal guarantees on citizens' rights. As leaving the EU is such a huge fundamental change to this country, it is only right that we have clear rules and that we think very carefully about what the new regime will be like. Quite clearly, this is a country that welcomes migrants; the numbers speak for themselves. For every British citizen who is in the EU, there are four EU citizens in this country, so we know that this is a country that welcomes immigration—that is just EU migration, let alone migration from the rest of the world. One huge challenge has been the language that we use to discuss immigration and, in particular, freedom of movement. I thank the Home Secretary, who is no longer in his place, for taking a lot of the emotion out of this debate, allowing us to focus on the logic, the reason and the substantive issues.

One Opposition Member—I cannot remember their name—talked about negative media rhetoric and about the language that is used to talk about migrants. I think that a lot of that starts from this House. It comes not, as Opposition Members may think, from the language that is used on the Government Benches, but from the whipping up by the Opposition of things that are not necessarily to do with immigration, so that they can get good headlines. I ask to Members to look, for example, at how the shadow Home Secretary conflated illegal and legal migration in her opening statement when she was talking about those “Go home” vans. This is not in any way an endorsement of that sort of technique, but it was quite clear that those things were used to talk about illegal migration. This constant conflation of legal and illegal migration is one of the things that whips up the rhetoric. It starts from here and ends up going out there.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who is not in his place, intervened on his colleague to say that Tories do not want to see anyone coming to this country at all. That is completely ridiculous.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP) *rose*—

Mrs Badenoch: No, I will not give way. I want to make this point.

The same people who say that we on these Benches do not want anyone to come to this country will also complain that we are letting in more non-EU migrants such as me and my family.

David Linden: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Badenoch: I will take the intervention.

David Linden: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I just wanted to remind her of some history. It was the Conservative party that, in an election, had huge billboards saying, “Are you thinking what we're thinking?” That was the kind of rhetoric that was whipped up by this Tory party, so I will take no lectures from her on that point.

Mrs Badenoch: In that case, nor will I take any lectures from Scottish National party Members. We can see from their sparkling racial diversity just how much they care about immigration. As someone who came to this country as a first-generation immigrant, I have seen at first hand both the positives and the negatives of immigration. There are not enough people who are willing to speak the truth on the subject.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Come and join us.

Mrs Badenoch: No, I am not interested in joining any nationalist party, but I thank the hon. Gentleman whose constituency I forget for inviting me to join. The fact is that if we are to have a calm debate about immigration, what we need are facts and figures, not smug self-righteousness, which is all that we get from those on the Opposition Benches.

I will continue on the topic of free movement, which is what this Bill is about. We all have different constituency experiences, which will have an impact on this discussion. I have had many positive discussions with Conservative Members. For instance, my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark) talked about positive impacts in relation to immigration in his constituency. I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) talk about some of the difficulties that his constituency has had. We have both positive and negative experiences.

What creates the problem is when Members on the Opposition Benches, and perhaps some on these Benches, feel that only they have the best intentions and that anyone else who speaks with concerns is speaking from xenophobia and racism. That is absolutely wrong. We cannot think the very best of ourselves and the worst of anyone else who is not in our party, or who is not sitting on our side of the House. I am very, very willing, even as an immigrant, to hear arguments against immigration, because I know that immigration is a global issue. It is not a UK issue. Every single country in the world is talking about it. It is completely crazy for us to have this discussion as if it were a UK-only issue, or even an EU-only issue, and believe that no one else has the experience to be able to speak on it.

From the perspective of my constituency, immigration has, perhaps, an indirect effect. The north of my constituency has a huge biotech and pharmaceutical industry, and many of the arguments that people make there are very, very similar to those that have been made by SNP Members and by my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and others, about the need to ensure that we continue to have a strong relationship with the EU—that is something that I support. Speaking as someone who was a former London Assembly member, I have also seen how immigration has an indirect effect on those of us outside London. My Essex constituency has seen a huge rise in house prices and house building, which is having an effect on its population in a very significant and profound way. It is not because loads of immigrants are coming to take on our jobs, but because lots of people who migrate to London raise prices and take up housing there, causing a push-out effect on other parts of the country, which we do not get the resources to deal with. As was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), who is no longer in his place, we

should be looking at trying to reduce the impact of negative consequences on places such as Saffron Walden and Uttlesford District Council.

Sir John Hayes: The point that my hon. Friend is making, and her willingness to tackle what Trevor Phillips described as the “liberal delusion” about the problems of mass migration, are important in respect of housing, because immigration is the single biggest driver of housing demand.

Mrs Badenoch: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. We need to look at what is actually happening and to think of an immigration system that will work for the very north of our country as well as for the very south. There will not be a one-size-fits-all approach. I am very willing to listen to arguments from Opposition Members about how much they need it, but they also need to extend the same courtesy and not pretend that everyone on this side of the House, including people like me who grew up in Nigeria, are racist. That is completely mad.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The hon. Lady talks about the UK’s one-size-fits-nobody migration policy. Like other countries such as Canada and Switzerland, does she support decentralising or devolving the issue, or is she still of the mindset that we must hold things centrally in London, and that London knows best?

Mrs Badenoch: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point, and I can see why he is making it. I am not someone who supports devolution, and I do not think that that would necessarily solve the problem. *[Interruption.]* I am talking about the devolution of this issue. We have a national border, so devolving national border issues to specific places will not solve the problem, but I take his point.

Social security co-ordination is another reason why I support the Bill. Those of us with long memories will remember that this very matter was one reason why former Prime Minister David Cameron went to the EU to seek a negotiated change to some of these things. Perhaps if we had been able to resolve this issue, we would not be having this debate now.

We can do better. We should be asking ourselves more questions around migration. On free movement, is it fair, for instance, for us to absorb all the youth and young people from southern Mediterranean countries and not to give back? We do not talk enough about brain drain, for example. We do not talk enough about villages in eastern Europe that are losing all their young people. Migration is not going two ways. Not enough people from this country are going to eastern Europe. We talk about going to France and to the Netherlands—

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con) *rose—*

Mrs Badenoch: I will give way to my hon. Friend.

David Duguid: On that point, my hon. Friend talks about the brain drain from eastern European countries to here, but does she not also recognise that the economies of many of those countries are improving to the point that people from those countries no longer wish to come to the UK? They want to stay at home and develop their careers there, which is why we need this Bill to extend our reach beyond the EU.

Mrs Badenoch: My hon. Friend is right. There is no one-size-fits-all picture. There are lots of different things happening in lots of different places, and piecing together the pieces of this complex picture will give us the solution.

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

Mrs Badenoch: I am afraid that I cannot take any more interventions because I am running out of time.

We can and should do better. We need a moral migration policy that is right for everyone—not just the migrants coming in, but those going out. We should also be looking at the polling numbers. It is not a coincidence that attitudes towards migration are more positive than they have been for a very long time, and that is because we are tackling people’s concerns not about immigration, but about uncontrolled, open-borders immigration. It is difficult to control free movement, but people want to see more control. It is not a coincidence that now that we are tackling the issue, we are seeing concerns about migration fall. That is why I am very happy to support this Bill.

Anna Soubry: Can we just make it very clear that we do control our borders? The last time that I went overseas on holiday, I had to show my passport and so did everybody else.

Mrs Badenoch: Perhaps I was a bit too loose with my words. I am not saying that there is no control whatever, but that people want more control and do not feel that free movement is enough control.

7.11 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch), who gave an impassioned and well-delivered speech, almost all of which I disagreed with.

This Bill has taken its time to arrive. And now that it is before us, it is a disaster waiting to happen. Right the way through, it is based on an assumption made by the Prime Minister in her Lancaster House speech that what 17 million people meant when they voted leave was that we needed to end freedom of movement, not just for EU citizens in the UK, but for UK citizens throughout the European Union. I am 100% certain that 100% of the 52% did not mean that, but the Government’s assumption that they did is essentially why the red lines set by the Prime Minister have left the Government in a position where they are incapable of delivering any form of Brexit that does not wreck the British economy. If the Prime Minister wanted more time to reconsider her position, reconsidering those red lines would be the wisest thing she could do. If she then reached across to the other side of the Chamber, she might well find reasonable people on the Opposition Benches who are prepared to listen to her.

The Bill abandons freedom of movement. With a slash of a pen, the rights of people in this country will be drastically reduced. British people, young and old, will lose the right to travel freely, to study overseas, to make friendships in other countries and to build careers. I am afraid that the Minister and the Home Secretary are both young enough to live long enough to have history judge them very harshly for this Bill, and they

[Tim Farron]

should be warned in advance. There are people who have made their homes here, and 3 million of our neighbours and colleagues are being told, not very subtly, that they are not wanted here. Britain is surely much better than this.

Alex Sobel: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that EU citizens living here who are trying to get settled status and do not have access to a computer can only apply on an Android phone? The Government cannot even make their software available for iPhones, which many people use. How can this give us any confidence for a future immigration system for EU citizens?

Tim Farron: I am deeply worried about that. The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point that I am just coming to. The settled status scheme has been rolled out just this month, and with it has come the grotesque sight of families who have built their lives in the UK being forced to register just to carry on with their lives as normal. As the hon. Gentleman has just stated, every glitch in the technology—every moment that the computer says no—will have a devastating effect on people who should feel welcome here. Research estimates that one in 10 EU citizens could fall between the gaps and never be registered at all. People will get the wrong status as a result, which means more problems for them and massive problems for the Home Office years down the line. Mark my word: this is the beginning of a Windrush mark 2.

What will replace freedom of movement? Well, this Bill does not even really tell us. We have to guess, and businesses will have to guess. The Bill is silent on the very issue on which it is supposed to be legislating. It just extends powers to future Governments to do as they please—any future Government with any intentions, without any security or scrutiny from this House. Are we really supposed to trust the Home Office, no matter its future leadership, to do whatever it pleases on this vital matter—the very Department that brought us the Windrush scandal, with British citizens kicked out of their jobs and homes, and even locked up in detention cells, and that brought us the hostile environment of harassing immigrants in their homes, workplaces and even when they went to their local A&E?

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Gentleman, with typical straightforwardness, is making a case for the perpetuation of free movement. He believes in freedom of movement from the European Union, but presumably he does not believe in freedom of movement from New Zealand, Canada, Australia or the West Indies, which he has just spoken about. What is it about Europe that is different from those countries that have such historic ties with the United Kingdom?

Tim Farron: The right hon. Gentleman does not believe in freedom of movement of any kind whatever. I assume that he is a free-market Conservative. If he believes in the free movement of capital—in fact, if he believes in the free market at all—not to support the free movement of the people who are the backbone of any free market is absolutely ludicrous and does not stack up.

There is nothing in this Bill about Britain's proud record as a humanitarian leader—nothing on helping people who have been persecuted around the world for who they are, what they believe in or who they love. I would have thought that the Home Office wanted to talk about how Britain is at its best when it looks after people who come to us, ask for our help and seek safety and sanctuary. I remain deeply affected and humbled by meeting parents in refugee camps who took appalling risks to shield their children from horrific danger. Many other Members have seen the same terrible sights, and we know what it means to those people to know that Britain is a safe haven. Yet the Bill is totally silent on this matter. Perhaps the Government do not want much scrutiny of their record on refugees.

Let me tell the House what this Bill could do if it were to follow Britain's proud humanitarian tradition. It could let people work. At the moment, asylum seekers are barred from working. They cannot even earn to take care of their own families, and that makes it harder to integrate and harder to play a part in their own communities and economies—the very things that help every community to thrive. Let us fix this. If asylum seekers do not get a decision after three months, let us lift this ludicrous ban, and let them work and contribute. The Chancellor might be more interested than the Minister, given that this would bring a net gain to the economy of around £40 million every year. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), whose Asylum Seekers (Permission to Work) Bill, which is before the House, calls for exactly that.

The Government's Bill could also ensure that we do not lock people up indefinitely, as has already been mentioned by one or two right hon. and hon. Members. At the moment, immigrants can be detained with no idea of when they might be removed or released. This is unacceptable, unjust and un-British. At the very least, let us set a 28-day deadline on how long someone can be detained.

This Bill could also make sure that families are united, not separated. I have a private Member's Bill, the Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill, before this House that would reunite refugee children with their parents. The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), who is sitting in front of me, also has a Bill—the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill—which has the same aim, but has a greater chance of getting passed. Why have the Government not accepted the proposal offered by either of us?

The failures of this Bill affect the local as well as the global. Last week, this House celebrated, with great gusto, Cumbria Day—a proud day for us all. But it masks a reality, which is that people in my constituency only earn roughly £20,000 pounds a year on average. Yet last year's immigration White Paper suggests that we ban all migrants who earn less than £30,000 because apparently they will not have sufficient skills. The Government say that this would not have an impact on areas such as mine, but they have refused to say how they reached this conclusion, so let me attempt to draw the Government back into the real world, if that is possible.

The hospitality and tourism industry in Cumbria employs more than 60,000 people. It contributes £3 billion to the economy every year. It contains the Lake district and much of the Yorkshire dales. Outside London, we

are Britain's most popular tourist destination. About 10,000 of this vital industry's workers in Cumbria are from outside the UK. My constituency has low wages, and it is a disgrace that over 2,000 local children are living in poverty, but it has only 270 people registered as unemployed. There is no untapped pool of local labour waiting to fill the thousands of vacancies this Government will force on our industry. It does not take a genius to work out that if we stop people working in the UK if they are on less than 30 grand, if the average wage in tourism is nowhere near that and if the local workforce is not big enough, we will damage, if not destroy, that industry by imposing these restrictions. It does not take a genius to work that out, which is quite useful given that this Government are singularly lacking in genius.

This Bill is heartless, but more than that, it is witless. We will oppose the Bill tonight. It is an awful Bill, which makes it all the more stunning that Labour's Front Benchers will not oppose it.

7.20 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). Indeed, I will be following him into the No Lobby this evening, because I, too, will be voting against this Bill.

It is a funny old world when—

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Anna Soubry: No, no—I have only just begun. I will give way in a moment.

It is a funny old world that we live in when, faced with this Bill, Her Majesty's Opposition—the Labour party—find themselves in the bizarre and, I would argue, appalling position of abstaining on it. What shame they bring on a formerly great party.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I want to give the right hon. Lady some breaking news: apparently Labour has U-turned on its abstention and is now going to oppose the Bill. Is that right?

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Wait and see.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: My goodness, we have breaking news in the Chamber: "Wait and see."

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he addresses his remarks through the Chair, not directly to the Front Bench.

Anna Soubry: I am not going to reply to the hon. Gentleman's intervention because there is nothing for me to reply to, but I am sure we will all be enlightened later.

This is a very serious matter. I object to this Bill, and I will not be voting for it. First, I happen to believe in the free movement of people, and I have yet to hear anybody advance a single argument why the free movement of people has been anything other than good for this country—not one solid argument advanced. Secondly, the Bill does not provide the surety to EU citizens already living in this country that it should. Thirdly—many would say that this is the most important point and

main failing of the Bill—it contains Henry VIII powers giving unbelievable, and simply unacceptable, powers and measures to Ministers.

I want to nail a few lies, not told in this place but put about in common parlance. We are told that in June 2016 the will of the people was to reject the free movement of people. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) nods, but that is not true. Of those people eligible to vote, 37% voted for us to leave the European Union. Even with my poor maths, I can see that 63% of the people of this country—in other words, the will of the people—was actually for us not to leave the European Union and not for us to abandon free movement. Those are the facts. That is the will of the people—the 63% who we never hear about. Ever since that referendum, we have had put about almost a tyranny of mistruths and myths. It is a shame on every politician that nobody has ever really stood up and spoken the truth of this matter. The majority of people in this country did not vote to leave the European Union, and they did not vote to end free movement. In any event, although 52% of those eligible to vote did vote for us to leave the European Union, one cannot extrapolate from that, on the basis of no evidence at all, that immigration was the overriding feature that led them to do so. In my constituency—the vote that was recorded was actually for the borough, which is larger than the constituency—we reckon that about 52% of those who voted did vote for us to leave.

Certainly in Broxtowe, and I think across the rest of the country, people voted for a variety of reasons. It is true that immigration played an important part. I think that one of the darkest moments in this nation's history was when Nigel Farage stood up in front of a poster that showed a long line of people who had certain features in common. First, they were mainly men. Secondly, they were fleeing war, rape and terror, seeking refuge in a safe place. Oh yes, they all had brown faces as well, quite remarkably. The other feature of that long line of people, who had the headline above them, "Breaking point"—we all know what the dog whistle was in that headline—was that it had absolutely nothing to do with our membership of the European Union, if for no other reason than that we are of course not a member of Schengen.

Make no mistake about it: fears were undoubtedly fuelled and prejudices were undoubtedly preyed on by the leave campaign wrongly to make a phoney case to the people of this country that somehow by our leaving the European Union there would be a dramatic decrease in the number of migrants in our country. It was a great lie; a great con. The overwhelming majority of people who come to this country come here to work—they are givers, not takers. Therefore, if we want to reduce immigration, there is a very good way to do it—we trash the economy. We make sure that there are fewer jobs for these people to come to our country to fill. *[Interruption.]* Ah, Brexit, of course: whichever way we cut it, it will mean that our economic prosperity and the number of jobs available will be reduced. Perhaps that is actually the cunning plan.

I get irate with and frankly appalled by Conservative Members who should know better, because the truth and reality is, as I say, that people come here to work. What are hon. Members actually saying when they say, "Reduce the number of migrants."? Send them home: is

[Anna Soubry]

that what they are saying? No, of course not, because we need these people to work, not just in the fields of Lincolnshire, in our care homes or in our NHS, but throughout every stratum of industry in every piece of our economy. We need these people. As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) reminded us, this is a two-way process, because people in our country—my children and the grandchildren I hope to have—benefit, or would have benefited, from the free movement of people, but our country has benefited from immigration for centuries. I am saddened to the bottom of my boots that for so long we have never made the positive case for immigration in our country. Not surprisingly, we have found ourselves in the situation that we are in, where mythology, rhetoric, misinformation and downright lies have been spread by all manner of people to support their own ideological, short-term vision, with absolutely no foundation and at a real cost for our country and its future.

I am appalled and ashamed when I meet people with brown skins who were born and bred in this country—probably some of them more British than I am, because my great-grandfather was an immigrant—and who tell me that since the referendum they have been pointed at by people and asked, “Why haven’t you gone home?” I met one such constituent only the other week, who, when someone said that, turned round and said, “Well, actually I am on my way home, to Nuthall,” which is a place in my constituency. How many of us have heard from friends, from our constituents or from people we just come across with Polish or Slovakian accents who have been asked, “Why are you still here?” or have been spat at on public transport? This is not a country that I recognise. This is not a country that I feel proud to be a member of. I take the view that this is not our country. I also take the view that the majority of people in this country are good and they are tolerant, but too many of them have been told these lies.

It is now absolutely up to each and every one of us to stand up and make the case for immigration and to tell the truth about immigration. As I say, it is not just about the huge positive benefits for our economy—I think the last Treasury analysis showed something in the region of £4 billion extra going into the Treasury coffers—but it is for the culture of this country as well.

It is funny when people talk to their MP about immigration and say, “We’ve got too many of these immigrants,” and we say, “Do you mean the people running the Chinese takeaway, who have been here for decades?” and they say, “Oh no, not them.” We say, “Well, what about the people of Asian origin who are running the corner shop?” and they say, “Oh no, not them”. When we have that discussion and debate with them, we can make the case, because we are inherently a good and tolerant people.

As we have seen in many parts of our country, in any circumstances where there is a sudden influx of people—I am not being rude or disparaging about students—whether it is students or migrant workers, if we do not get the resources right, there will be people who are somewhat pickled off. But that is not a problem of immigration; it is a failure of this place and of local authorities, because it is a failure of resources. Most importantly, it is a failure of people to stand up to dog-whistle politics. I

say to my party: if we pass measures like this Bill, the people of this country in time will not forgive us, because this party will become totally unelectable—and rightly so.

7.30 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who said so much that I agree with.

The Secretary of State said earlier that immigration was the issue of the referendum and that we must have a fair system. I agree that we must have a fair system, although I dispute the premise of the first part of his statement. I believe that our immigration system should be based on rules that are grounded in human rights; that value the contribution of migrants and allow them all to work, including asylum seekers; that do not put desperate people in desperate conditions; that are operated by well-trained, skilled and adequately resourced staff; that give a warm welcome to those fleeing war and persecution; and that show those who have already made their homes here that they are still properly and warmly welcome. We need a system that values our European neighbours—not with platitudes, but with a real practical understanding of the nature of their lives.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Thangam Debbonaire: I am aware of the time limit, so I am afraid I will not give way.

This immigration system’s design should have learned and inwardly digested the lessons from the Windrush system. It should have involved the nation—leavers and remainers, those concerned about immigration and those concerned that it treats neither long-term legal migrants nor newly arrived people fleeing persecution well—in discussing what a new immigration policy should be and how it should operate. I want that system, and this is not that.

There is a real risk that we are putting people who have legally made their lives here through an undignified, barely tested process of applying for the right to remain here—people who have contributed to their communities, raised children, worked hard, paid taxes and helped their neighbours. This is in the wake of an immigration scandal in which other people who had legally made their lives here, contributed to their communities, raised children, worked hard, paid taxes and helped their neighbours were made to feel unwelcome and told to go home. Some lost their jobs or homes and suffered great hardship. Forms were lost, time and money were lost, and hearts that felt British were truly broken.

A constituent of mine whose life has been here for decades but was born in another EU country said to me at the time of Windrush, “We, the EU 3 million, are going to be the next Windrush generation.” There is no sign in this Bill or the White Paper that the lessons of that scandal have been learned and that my constituent can be reassured. The Home Office, which my staff and I deal with daily on behalf of constituents, has many compassionate staff, but it is already struggling. It is buckling under the strain, and we propose to add 3 million more people to the system.

The Home Secretary says that this is the start of a national conversation about our immigration system. The start should have been years ago. As the result of the EU referendum has so many times been identified as closely tied with concerns about immigration, surely this conversation should have started in 2016. If not then, why not in 2017 or perhaps 2018? We should have talked about this in more depth than simply trotting out platitudes about valuing people who have made their home here, when so much pain has been caused to so many who have made their homes here.

There should have been honesty about the mutual benefits of reciprocal movement of people who live, work and study across the EU—I declare an interest: one of those is my husband. There should be honesty, not lies, which is what we were fed during the referendum campaign. We should discuss how we want to welcome people, who we want to welcome and why, and we should do that in a way that is informed by our country's history, our way of life and our knowledge that those two things have always been intertwined with migration. We should talk about the consequences of migration policy for jobs and for our care homes, universities, creative industries, aerospace sector and tech, digital and IT companies. We should have been discussing this as a country. This Bill should have been introduced in the concluding stages, not the starting stages, of a national debate.

When people's worries about immigration—whatever their motivations—are not dealt with, there are serious consequences. People who think that there should be more controls grow resentful if they feel their concerns are ignored, and they feel alienated from a political system that they rightly think should serve them. They may feel that they are labelled as racists, which they may also feel is unfair, and that does not help their feeling of alienation. This is a context in which the far right benefits. It is not a context in which good immigration policy is created.

My constituents in Bristol West often write to me about migration. They never tell me to help refugees or Windrush victims or EU citizens less. They tell me to fight harder, and I always will, but they also do not feel that the system is working. They campaign to stop indefinite detention of migrants. They campaign to keep all EU citizens not just here, but here and welcomed. They are losing trust in our system. Nobody is satisfied except the far right, who see opportunity in the frustrations of those who feel that the system is not working for them.

Reasonable people, including the Immigration Minister and the Home Secretary, would agree that if we were fleeing war or persecution in this country, we would expect a safe welcome in another. We would probably go to the nearest country, but we would understand that it might need to run a programme of resettlement to a third country if numbers were large. We would hope not to be put in such dire circumstances that we felt forced to leave the first safe country, as so many people do from countries around the Mediterranean to flee to us, a country that people see as a sanctuary—something we should be proud of.

If that country could not or would not help us or left us unable to live, work or provide for our families—the circumstances that so many people in Libya and other countries find themselves in—we might also be so tempted. We would not expect to be put in substandard, unsafe

accommodation paid for by the taxpayer or be prevented from getting a job. We would expect to contribute. We would not feel it was right that we were kept on a subsistence allowance, yet left with the blame for a system that is rooking the taxpayers as well as not serving us.

Our asylum system is flawed. In a report published in 2017, the all-party parliamentary group on refugees, which I chair, put forward many recommendations that I beseech the Home Secretary and Immigration Minister to look at again. We should end indefinite detention, and I am glad to hear vocal cross-party support for ending it, which I hope the Government will take heed of.

This Bill could have dealt with all these issues, but it barely touches the surface. The Bill fails. It fails to provide a route for planning a fair, efficient, good-value, humane and caring system that those who voted leave and those who voted remain can believe in. It could have provided the framework for an immigration system that we could all put our trust in, but it does not. Instead, it creates huge powers but provides no clarity. The White Paper could have given that clarity, but it does not. It misses by a mile the vision and values that our country's immigration system should have been built on—British values of tolerance, openness and fair-mindedness.

This Bill could have been the nourishing meal that gave us what we needed to get through the economic woes of Brexit, which I still hope we will not have to suffer. Nobody will be satisfied. Everybody will cry for more. I would despair, but I want to keep hope that the Home Secretary and the Immigration Minister will reflect on what has been said around the House today and seek to amend the Bill themselves. Leave voters deserve better, remain voters deserve better, and our country deserves better.

7.39 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): As I have said on more than one occasion, we have already had a people's vote and the people voted to leave the EU. My constituents in Stoke-on-Trent South were particularly clear when they voted by 70% to leave. One of the key reasons for doing so was a desire to take back control of our own borders.

Last year, Parliament passed the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, under which the same rules and laws apply on the day after we leave the EU. That currently includes the EU's rules on free movement, and Parliament must legislate to bring free movement to an end. Without this Bill, the EU's free movement rules would continue to have effect after we leave. Were that to happen, it would be completely unacceptable and we would have failed to address our constituents' legitimate concerns about EU immigration. We need to pass this Bill to deliver the firm but fair and efficient system that my constituents want, regaining control of our own borders.

Anna Soubry: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Jack Brereton: No. I have to make some progress.

I know from the many conversations I have had with my constituents on the doorstep that a significant number voted to leave primarily to take back control of our borders and to secure the chance to reform our immigration system. People in regional towns and cities felt that Brussels was far too remote and technocratic to realise

[Jack Brereton]

the practical local consequences of continent-wide free movement, especially the impact of increased pressures on local services, school places and housing. That was squared against a feeling that the EU had delivered very few beneficial improvements in local residents' quality of life, particularly outside the M25.

There has been a feeling that my constituents were not allowed to talk about their genuine concern about the impacts of immigration and that, if they did talk about it, they would be ignored, pilloried or shunned. They certainly do not feel there is anything wrong in believing, given our unique history with Ireland, that Irish citizens should enjoy more rights here than, say, citizens from south-east Europe. People voted to end free movement for EU citizens outside the common travel area because it did not work for them and they wanted to regain control.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jack Brereton: No. I want to make some progress.

Freedom of movement did not result in tangible improvements to my constituents' own quality of life and future prospects, even as it improved the quality of life and future prospects of those who found themselves entitled to move freely here. Free movement in practice worked instead as a mop for clearing up the EU's chronic unemployment problem, suppressing wages here in exactly the kind of communities that I and other hon. Members were elected to represent.

Sir John Hayes: The chairman of the Migration Advisory Committee has made exactly that point—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): He didn't.

Sir John Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman listen? The chairman made exactly that point. He said that the policy of free movement tends to perpetuate a low-skill, low-wage economy. That is precisely what we have ended up with, with a consequent displacement of investment in skills, in automation, in technology and in recruitment.

Jack Brereton: I totally agree with my right hon. Friend.

Certainly, Stoke-on-Trent South has some of the lowest average wage levels in the country, and we need to continue to build on the work we have been doing in government to ensure people take home more.

Anna Soubry: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Jack Brereton: No, I am making some progress.

My constituents want London-based policy makers to focus on doing what it takes, across every nation and region of the United Kingdom, to prioritise the employment and lifelong employability of the British people. Of course, where there are clear and urgent shortages of British candidates, such as in our NHS, rightly migrant workers can add skills to our economy and make a significant contribution. It is positive to see the caps for non-EU migrants coming to work in the NHS lifted. The Home Office has always been clear that the future

immigration system will be based on engagement and evidence, and that by putting the skills and talents of migrant workers at the heart of the future system, the UK can continue to attract the brightest and the best from across the world when it is necessary for us so to do.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman talks about skills, but in fact, with salary thresholds, we are talking not about skills but about salaries, and the two things do not connect, particularly where wages are far lower—outside the south-east. A skilled or university-qualified person in Scotland can easily earn under £30,000, which is the threshold that has been set.

Jack Brereton: I thank the hon. Lady for that point. Although I do not totally agree with what she has said, some parts of the country, including my own—

Carol Monaghan: It's a fact.

Jack Brereton: Will the hon. Lady let me finish my response? Some parts of the country, and certainly my own, do see differential wage levels, and having lower skills certainly does have an impact on that.

We need to ensure that there is more of a commitment in the longer term that any such shortages will be addressed by properly equipping the British people for such roles, particularly in traditional, proud manufacturing employment. This is exactly what our industrial strategy is designed to address, and we need the right immigration and social security co-ordination to work alongside it. Delivering on that rebalancing of our economy will be hugely important in ensuring that traditional working-class communities, as in Stoke-on-Trent and across the country, are no longer ignored.

Anna Soubry: Could my hon. Friend tell us what percentage of people in Stoke are migrant workers and, when free movement from the European Union ends, which countries people will come from to replace those EU workers? Will they come from Bangladesh, and is that what his constituents voted for?

Jack Brereton: I think what we in this House are saying is that we want to regain control and ensure that we have a fair system, whereby anybody coming to this country is in the same system and is judged on merit, not on which country they come from. At the moment, the current system is not a fair one. It prioritises some European countries within the EU, and places such as the Commonwealth, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and America are not receiving the same priority.

If we do not deliver immigration reforms as we take back control through Brexit, there is a real danger that some people will, in exasperation, turn to those who have demonstrably exploited their grievances before. It is concerning that we see a rise of extremist views, stirred by populists on both the far left and the far right. As I have stressed in the House previously, it was not easy to see off the British National party in Stoke-on-Trent, as we have had to do, and I will not be cavalier in assuming that the threat has gone away. We must ensure that our democracy remains relevant and responsive to all our communities if we are to see off future extremist threats.

Ending free movement is a major change in our immigration law. It is a change that people voted for and we must deliver it, just as we must deliver Brexit itself. Inevitably, given the scale of the task enabled by this Bill, much of the delivery will take the form of consequential amendments to be made by secondary legislation. It is work that must be done. The Bill contains the necessary powers to get the process under way, and I will very happily support it tonight.

7.47 pm

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I was only going to make a couple of points, but as I have listened to the debate, the number of points has grown. I shall kick off by correcting, or perhaps taking on—I do this on migration quite a lot—the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch). I was very disappointed by the remarks of the hon. Lady, who is not in her place, and the sort of reverse dog whistle when she looked at the SNP Benches. She should be aware that the first ethnic minority Member of the Scottish Parliament was Bashir Ahmad of the SNP, that the first Government Minister in the devolved Scottish Government was Humza Yousaf of the SNP, and that the first Muslim woman from Scotland to be an MP was Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh of the SNP. I merely put that on record so that people such as the hon. Member for Saffron Walden do not repeat that sort of nonsense again.

This immigration debate is an interesting one. It is not a debate about what we want or what we could do; it is a debate about what we can stop, what we can control and what we can limit, and that is very disappointing. There is actually something really akin to the Soviet central planning of the 1920s onwards: we have Soviet tractor statistics. That is really the sort of theology that is driving this current Home Office—centralised planning and red tape, with Government at the heart of people's lives and building bureaucracy where there is no bureaucracy at the moment. All the time, what the Government will do is increase the work in MPs' offices up and down the country as a result of the nonsense we are going to have.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the historical point. In response to what the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) said, does my hon. Friend recognise, as I do, that freedom of movement was actually brought in to replace the extremism of Soviet communism and Nazism? It is one of the greatest achievements in history—economically, diplomatically and culturally. Is it not a great shame that people such as the hon. Gentleman can see it go so easily and cheaply?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Absolutely. When people mix together, rub shoulders and talk to each other, they learn quite a lot from each other. They stop fearing each other and stop believing the demagogues who are telling them all sorts of nonsense about the other.

We will not just see more work in our own MPs' offices, but add anxiety and angst to people's lives because of the nonsense that will come before us. What is all this based on? It is based on a voodoo referendum. The question was about leave or remain, but it quickly became akin to slaughtering a chicken, looking at its entrails and claiming that the people meant us to leave

Euratom, that the people meant something on standards and tariffs, that the people meant something on the customs union, or that the people meant something on the single market. It is claimed that the people meant something else again on migration and freedom of movement, and on the European Court of Justice. It is nonsense, but people draw all sorts of conclusions. This is voodoo politics based on a voodoo guff referendum that we had a couple of years ago.

Alison Thewliss: I am almost loth to interrupt my hon. Friend because he is making some excellent points. He mentioned the increased casework for MPs' offices. My surgery on Friday overran by an hour and 10 minutes, all because of Home Office problems. Does he agree that the Home Office cannot cope with the additional 3 million people, and woe betide anyone else in the system at the moment?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: My hon. Friend's point stands for itself and is well made. As we are dealing with further voodoo from the Home Office, let me say that the problems that we have at present are based on voodoo thinking. Part of it was "Take back control", but when we are dealing with the Home Office, no one is in control, least of all the Home Office itself.

The Bill is based on Soviet-style central planning and a desire for tractor statistics, but it does not take account of what we really need. I have raised one of the most important points with the Home Office time and again. It is said that we are in control and we do not have free movement, but if we need people to come and work on fishing boats—people from outside the European Union want to come here, their Governments want them to come, our local authority wants them to come, fishing organisations want them to come and our communities want them to come; indeed everybody wants them to come except somebody in an office in London—we are told it cannot happen. The Home Office in London says no, and boats are tied up.

Christine Jardine: The hon. Gentleman's constituency, like mine, depends a lot on EU immigrants. In my constituency it is in the education and health sectors, and he has mentioned fisheries. Does he agree that the Home Office needs to think about allowing people who come here as asylum seekers to work earlier and to make a contribution to the economy, rather than robbing them of their dignity?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: That is correct, and the point has been well made by many MPs. If it was not for the voodoo thinking of the Home Office, and if normal people were allowed to decide this, that would be happening, to everyone's benefit.

I introduced a private Member's Bill on refugees, and I would have thought that this Bill would be an opportunity for the Home Office to extend the same rights to people who have already been given refugee status and are under the age of 18 as it does to those over the age of 18. Again, we have voodoo arguments and nonsense thinking from the Home Office about why it should not do this. There is an opportunity. The Home Office could end the need for my Bill if it wanted to, and it is disappointing that it does not.

[Angus Brendan MacNeil]

We are happy in Scotland, but we need more people. Switzerland has 26 cantons. Half the visas of people going into Switzerland are divided between the 26 cantons, and the other half are centrally controlled in Berne. Switzerland can manage to do that, but the UK cannot, because of voodoo thinking and a desire to keep control where the Home Office does not need control, thereby creating problems and messing up people's lives unnecessarily. That is our lot, given that we are stuck with the Home Office as it is.

Migration is good. I will repeat that for anyone who is in any doubt: migration is good. I live on a small island in the Outer Hebrides and our construction industry is just about driven personally by a guy called Pawel Kochanowicz. He is a young man who came to live on Barra, and he works day in and day out. Such people are welcome, and the more like him, the better.

Stephen Kerr: After 12 years of an SNP Government in Scotland, and when other parts of the United Kingdom have a net increase in immigrant population, why is it that Scotland's population does not really move?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the part of the UK that became independent 96 years ago, he will see it now enjoys five to six times greater growth. When a country controls all the levers of the economy, it finds that things improve. If a country is scared of responsibility and outsources it to someone else, it should not be surprised if its economy is in reverse. If the hon. Gentleman wants to take control of his life, he should follow the SNP's route, as the example is there of Ireland, of Iceland, of Norway and of many other countries. What is he scared of? He is scared; that is his problem. He uses migration to make cheap political points on the back of mismanagement by the Home Office and the Government in London—he should be ashamed of himself. I am grateful to him for giving me that row; I particularly enjoyed it.

There are many benefits to migration, and it goes both ways. I have cousins who live in New Zealand. I have Maclean cousins in Cape Breton in Nova Scotia and MacNeil relatives in Vancouver. We have all benefited from the movement of people and, if they are watching, I say a quick hello to them. It is great to use the House of Commons for that opportunity.

My relatives have contributed to New Zealand, Canada and many other places. Other people have helped our country—I gave the example of Pawel Kochanowicz from Poland. The hon. Gentleman's colleague, the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), made a more sensible intervention earlier when he said that the problem was a lack of resources. We need dynamic resource allocation to make sure that when populations grow, we get more housing, schools and hospitals, rather than people being blamed. As one of my hon. Friends said to me earlier, those people should be seen as strivers and as aspirational, but when the Home Office get hold of the situation, they are seen as a problem. There is no need for that.

Indeed, the Home Secretary himself conceded that the people who came here under free movement were good—that the students were good and everything was good. They were helping our economy. They were paying

more tax than they were taking out. The Government are actually better off having people from other countries here paying more in, because people from this country tend to take out more than we put in. That is why the UK has had a deficit since 2001—a black hole. It has not paid its own way in all those years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) suggested that we should perhaps take responsibility for migration away from the Home Office and give it to the Treasury, because then we might get some of the sense and logic that the hon. Member for Saffron Walden talked about in her speech. She is in no danger of promotion in the Tory party if she keeps talking about sense and logic, but she can take her own risks. We need to see this happen. An Immigration Minister said to me, "But we have the manifesto commitment on the one hand and the economy on the other." I will spare that Minister's blushes, but we know what Bill Clinton said about the economy. It is important that we look after the economy, and daft, voodoo-based Conservative election promises should be thrown in the bin with all the rest of the voodoo thinking that we have seen from the Home Office and the Government on something that is an opportunity. Migration is an opportunity, and the Bill should be an opportunity to do things, not to stop things.

7.57 pm

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I beg Members' indulgence for a few moments as I bring some sad news to the Chamber. A former Member, Sir Reginald Eyre, who represented Birmingham, Hall Green between 1965 and 1987, has passed away at the age of 94. He was very proud to represent Birmingham, having been born there in 1925. His father was a transport worker and his mother was a shopkeeper.

As a young man, Reg had a great time cycling around the city at night putting out tracer fire laid down by the Luftwaffe, and occasionally dancing on unexploded bombs for a dare. He spent the second half of the war as a midshipman in the north Atlantic and the Mediterranean. He would speak movingly of how, when he was not yet 20, he was in the Royal Naval College in Greenwich and told to go home, put his affairs in order and say goodbye to his loved ones, because the chances were that he and his friends would not be coming back. I like to think that he was delighted that, some 70 years later, he stood in the same place to give his only daughter away in marriage—to me, in fact, as he was my father-in-law. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

After the war, Reg went to Cambridge—the first man in his family to do so—and then became a successful midlands solicitor before entering the House in a by-election in 1965. He served his country and party with great distinction. He was a Minister for the environment and for transport—he took great joy in having broken one of Livingstone's London transport strikes. He was a vice-chair of the party, and he was also a Whip. Under different circumstances, I might be at home with my family at the moment, but from the great beyond I can hear his voice saying, "There's a vote tonight. Don't you dare, old chap. Don't you dare."

While serving in this place, Reg went on a trip to Kenya. There he met a beautiful young actress called Anne Clements. Anne was and is some decades his

junior, but it was the start of a wonderful and happy marriage that lasted the rest of his life. On leaving this place, Reg went back to Birmingham and became chair of the Birmingham Heartlands Development Corporation. He was extraordinarily proud of the opportunity to breathe new life into our great second city. He leaves a great legacy behind him.

Reg was one of those people whom everyone automatically warmed to and everyone instinctively liked. He was very proud of his country and particularly proud of his city. He was proud of his party and proud of this place, but most of all he was terribly proud of his wonderful wife and his wonderful daughter. All of them, from country to family, had very good cause to be proud of him, too.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am sure I speak on behalf of the whole House when I say that that was a very warm and loving tribute. Our condolences to you and your family.

8.1 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I, too, want to send my condolences. Maybe it is convenient that I am speaking after the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), because I was born and raised, and both my children were born and raised, in Birmingham Hall Green. I am sure I express the feelings of everybody in Birmingham when I send massive condolences to the Member and his family. It does not matter what path we tread, we are all human in this place. Any man who loved the city that I love has my full and utmost respect. Best wishes to his family.

I want to say a massive thank you to Members who have spoken throughout the debate about their support for Birmingham. They may not have noticed it, but many Government Members have been encouraging more spending in areas where there is high migration. I thank those Conservative Members who have suggested that Birmingham needs more resources. Perhaps the Minister could explain to me why so many of those resources have been cut when they feel that way about areas with high migration. It sticks slightly in the craw of a person who grew up in Birmingham to listen to people, who do not live among migrants and who do not live in diverse places, talk about how difficult it is for communities who have to live in places of high migration. Well, it is not difficult. It is not difficult at all. It is a total pleasure to live among migrant communities. My husband is very concerned. He believes he may be the only person in the entirety of Birmingham not to have heritage elsewhere that allows him a passport in these testing times. Pretty much everybody in Birmingham is from somewhere else. My Irish heritage has never felt closer to me than in these testing times. It is for my city that I stand here and I want to defend migration.

Actually, I am not just standing here and saying, "I really love living in a diverse place." I have real concerns about the Bill. I have spoken many times to the Immigration Minister about the real, deep-seated concerns I have about immigration: certain misuses of spousal visas, situations where we are not preventing problems such as forced marriage, and other issues that really need to be addressed. I see some of the worst elements of our immigration system, both on the part of the Home Office and on the part of the people who wish to

abuse it. I am not here to say that everything is perfect, everything in the garden is rosy, and that we should just open our borders and let everybody in. I am not saying that for a second. But what worries me most about the Bill are the powers that will take away the scrutiny of this place.

I will tell a little story, which Ministers have heard before and maybe the House has heard before, about how the scrutiny of this place makes a difference to our law—although we need to go much further. My constituent who rang the police to tell them that her husband had threatened to kill her ended up in Yarl's Wood. She was not taken to a place of safety; she was taken to a place of detention. I am incredibly proud of her. She was one of the brave women who, with Southall Black Sisters and Liberty, asked for court action, as a result of which the Government have now stated that a firewall must be put in place between victims of domestic abuse and the detention system. However, what we are being offered currently is not good enough and we are about to extend it to millions more people, so we have to get it right. I will, through the various channels in this House, be seeking special immigration status for women and any victim of domestic and sexual violence. I am sure the Minister will want to work with me on that. But without that scrutiny, without people like me in this House standing up and telling these stories, those laws would not be changing.

My deep worry is that the system proposed in the Bill will not be independent enough. Let us be honest. Those on one side of the House have far less experience of working with the immigration system and its pitfalls than those of us on the Opposition Benches. I imagine that I do more immigration casework in one day than some Conservative Members do in an entire year. It is only right that this place is the place of scrutiny for immigration. That should not be abandoned and given over in Henry VIII powers.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. We have heard the Government offer certain guarantees and protections in relation to the Henry VIII clause, but it is this place, with its broad and vast experience and its very different Members, where real life experiences can and should feed into Government policy, so that we do not risk damage in the future that will take months if not years to put right.

Jess Phillips: Absolutely. It is the best thing about this place and our democracy. We should be really, really proud of it. It is genuinely responsive. Migrant communities who live in my constituency sometimes come out door knocking with me. They cannot believe that I am walking around the streets knocking on people's doors. They are like, "Gosh, in my home country, you'd be driving past in an SUV with blacked-out windows." It is one of the best things and that is why this place should have to scrutinise every fundamental change that happens to our immigration system.

I want to make a point that has been well made in the debate. The idea of a £30,000 limit providing a sense of what skill base there is is absolutely flabbergasting. The only job I have ever had that paid me more than £30,000 is the one I am doing right now. That is not unusual for people who live where I live. It is not unusual for people

[*Jess Phillips*]

in Birmingham Hall Green, Birmingham Yardley or Birmingham anywhere. I was considered to be skilled and to be high management in the jobs that I did, and I did not earn that much money. It has been pointed out that there needs to be a massive equality impact assessment of how the £30,000 rule is meted out, because obviously men earn more than women and we need to know whether it will have a discriminatory effect on women workers. What about part-time workers? Will the £30,000 be pro rata? If somebody was only earning £5,000 but were only working one day a week, would that count as £30,000? How exactly will that work and how will it be fair to women? The idea that ordinary people are not skilled—we have to be careful with this language—and the idea that my constituents are not skilled because they do not earn over £30,000 is frankly insulting. It is insulting on every level to our care workers, our nurses, our teachers—there are so many people who do not earn over £30,000. I really think that that needs to be revisited.

Perversely, since I was elected I have met many people who earn way more than £30,000 and have literally no discernible skills, not even one. I met none before—I thought I had met posh people before I came here, but I had actually just met people who eat olives. I had no idea of how posh a person could be. Waitrose is apparently not the marker for being really, really posh. There is a lovely Waitrose in Birmingham Hall Green; it is the one I like to frequent. I have not necessarily met such people in this place, although there is a smattering. I would not let some of those very rich people who earn huge amounts of money hold my pint if I had to go and vote while in the bar, because they would almost certainly do it wrong.

I want to speak up for the ordinary people of Birmingham Hall Green and Birmingham Yardley, who are incredibly proud of the migration to their country, and are proud that people want to come here. Those people are skilled, and we should care much more about them than I think sometimes we do.

8.11 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (*Jess Phillips*) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (*Alex Burghart*). I was not going to mention this, but it now seems appropriate: my mother, Sheila Lillian Harman Kerr, passed away on Thursday evening. She was a daughter of Birmingham, so I have a bit of Brum inside me. Members may not be able to discern it from my accent, but a bit of Birmingham lingers in my heart. I feel she might be smiling at the fact that I am following such an excellent Member of Parliament for Birmingham and someone who represents someone who was a servant of the city of Birmingham.

I rise to support the Second Reading of this Bill on a key matter relating to our departure from the European Union: control over our borders. I thank Ministers for their decision to scrap the charges for the settled status process for EU citizens. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (*Huw Merriman*) for the very significant part he played in bringing that about. I know how much that means to people in my constituency. It is very important that our actions in

government match our words. We must send a clear message to our family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues who have come to this country from the European Union, and to whom this country is now home, that they are a vital part of our community. They enrich our lives and play a hugely valuable part in our economy, and I deeply regret any suggestion from any source to the contrary. Members of this House owe it to their constituents and the reputation of this House to measure the way they express themselves about such matters, and in interventions they make in debates about our departure from the European Union.

I have several points to make about the Bill. The first is about the university sector, and the University of Stirling in particular. In a report for Destination for Education, KPMG calculated that every international student recruited to a British university brings a net positive economic contribution of £95,000 in total. For the academic year 2015-16, that was estimated to be worth £20.3 billion. We are talking about a major British exporting success. I am proud of the UK university sector's global standing, and I am proud that the University of Stirling is consistently highly rated as a destination of choice for international students. Stirling loves its international students and welcomes them with open arms.

Our world-class university system is the envy of the world and an unrivalled source of soft power influence in the world. I do not believe that student visas should be subject to any kind of cap, and I was encouraged by the Home Secretary's remarks on that matter. We are competing with other English-speaking countries. By making it more difficult to access British universities than those of our competitors, we are doing ourselves no favours. We are in danger of losing market share in a growing global market. International students applying for bona fide courses at bona fide institutions should be allowed to come here. After all, they will support themselves.

We need a visa system that reflects an unabashed bias towards attracting and retaining talent, including newly qualified international graduates and postgraduates from UK universities. Why on earth would we not want such talent to stay in the United Kingdom to the benefit of our economy and the public good? As with other issues that we examine in this House, we must look for the balance of fairness. It is not fair or right to expect an international worker, graduate or postgraduate to earn more than £30,000 per annum, and to say that they qualify as skilled labour only on that basis. That would be a terrible mistake. The average graduate salary in Scotland is in the region of £21,000. Instead of rigidly fixing the system to a formula based on notional taxation contributions, we should look at earnings potential and social contribution.

We must be fair to businesses of all sizes. I ask hon. Members to consider how difficult it is for a small business to sponsor an international worker for employment in the United Kingdom. I worked for a global business before coming to this House, but what works for a big business does not necessarily work for a small business. The test of what is good for our economy is not how a global corporation copes with an imposed process, but how it works for a small business with limited resources.

I say this to the Government: beware of a one-size-fits-all approach to skilled labour. I would have thought that it is stating the obvious to say that what works in London and the south-east will not be right for other parts of

the United Kingdom, so we must build flexibility into whatever policy we apply. The variables must be weighted to ensure that skilled labour can be attracted and retained in all parts of the United Kingdom and all scales of business.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I rather suspect the hon. Gentleman will not agree that immigration should be devolved, so let us park that to one side. What role should the devolved Governments have in setting UK immigration policy?

Stephen Kerr: I have long said in this House and outside it that the best way forward for the people of Scotland is for Scotland's two Governments to work closely together, and I have made suggestions about how working together might be interpreted in a constitutional machinery sense. I am very grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I think it is important that Scotland's Governments work together on this issue.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am extremely grateful for that. Will the hon. Gentleman explain that point? What should the devolved Governments' role be? Should they get to set student numbers or have different salary thresholds?

Stephen Kerr: I do not think we should be talking about student numbers at all. The Home Secretary said earlier that there should be no cap on student numbers. It is important that we establish a constitutional process whereby the Governments of Scotland work together and talk and listen to each other.

David Linden: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He knows how much respect I have for him. The Immigration Minister is on the record as saying that she would not grant the Scottish Government powers that she would not grant to Lincolnshire County Council. Does he support her view on that matter?

Stephen Kerr: I have made it clear what I think should be happening in how Scotland's two Governments work together.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Kerr: I will not give way again, because I am now using my own time.

A lot more must be done about seasonal workers. It cannot be said often enough that a rigid system for seasonal workers will cause untold damage to the rural economy and to sectors such as hospitality and tourism, both of which are vital to my Stirling constituency.

We must also be fair to everyone and enforce the laws that we pass in this place. Will the Minister enlighten me about how we check and measure that people are leaving the United Kingdom? That should be straightforward enough in this data-driven age. It would help us not only to secure our borders against illegal immigration but to support those who may be able to remain but have overstayed their current visas. I have casework to that end.

Leaving the EU allows us to have a non-presidential—non-presidential? That may be as well, but it would allow us also to have a non-prejudicial immigration

system that does not simply allow free movement for people from the EU but opens us up to the wider world of talent—to skilled workers, to knowledge workers, to compassionate workers, to people who would make a welcome contribution to our society. Stirling is open to business, to students and to people from across Europe and the world, and I want to see that continue well into the future.

I hope that Ministers will appreciate that we have challenges to meet in my part of Scotland. Stirling is the most beautiful place in these islands to live and work, with doorstep access to Scotland's great cities and the wilderness beauty of the highlands, and we have secured an exciting city deal that will help us to explore the full potential of our local economy, but we need the ability to attract people to come and make their homes and their living in our communities. The SNP Government do not help much in that regard by making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

I will undoubtedly support the Second Reading of the Bill tonight because I fully support its purpose, but further down the line, when other measures come about resulting from the White Paper consultation, I will of course do what I feel is in the best interests of our country and my constituents.

8.21 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who from a lifetime of experience is in the right place on this issue.

The nature of a country and the values that underpin it are often reflected in the rules of its immigration system. On that basis, the United Kingdom could be seen as hostile, expensive, often offensive and demeaning, and overly restrictive. That is not the type of country I wish to help to lead from this House. Our immigration system should be fair, both to those who wish to come here and those already here, and should strike a balance between rights, restrictions, contributions and rewards for those who wish to come and be a part of our great country.

At a time of rising populism, the Bill was an important opportunity for the Government to set the right tone, but on that measure they have failed, not least because the Bill is remarkably light on detail, instead giving Ministers wide powers to make up the rules as they see fit. It gives the House no insight into what they seek to do. It fails to recognise either the positive contribution migrants make to our country or the positive bottom line for UK plc; it fails to recognise the rights of British citizens living in the EU—in greater numbers than EU citizens in Britain; and it fails to recognise the different types of immigration, whether they be those who come because we need them, those who come to contribute, or those who come seeking asylum. Nothing in the Bill sets out what type of country we seek to become—what type of country we wish to be—and that is a grave missed opportunity.

The Bill offers little hope to people in Bristol North West, whether the hundreds of doctors, nurses and social care workers at Southmead Hospital, or the migrant labourers in Avonmouth working in our warehousing and logistics business, or the people I meet in my constituency surgery week in, week out, including, sadly, victims of modern slavery—I know the Government

[Darren Jones]

have done great work on that, and I pay tribute to them and look forward to the conclusions of the review of ways of strengthening the support victims receive—or its scientists, researchers and technology entrepreneurs.

A recent report by the Science and Technology Select Committee, on which I sit, noted that collaboration across disciplinary and geographical boundaries was the foundation of scientific and technological endeavour—one this country has a proud history of leading and no doubt wishes to lead in the future—but also highlighted the overly restrictive tier 1 visa system for exceptional talent and how difficult the tier 2 system made it for employees and employers who want and need to be here to come here. It also dealt with long and short-term stays for the purposes of research and collaboration on innovation. We are failing to be able to bring the best scientific teams and technological minds to our country at a time when we need them not only to fuel our own GDP and economic success but to secure our position in the world as a leader in science and innovation.

I have a few questions that I hope the Minister will respond to when she sums up, although some have been asked already. First, in respect of the many nurses and social care workers and other low-paid workers, including scientists and innovation and tech entrepreneurs in Bristol earning less than £30,000 a year, are the Government not confusing vital skills with pay, and pay with value? The value that many of our low-paid workers, whether in healthcare or other settings, add to my constituents is hugely valuable but may not be reflected in their pay. We should be saying in this country that we welcome their contribution to creating a fairer, more open and more tolerant society, but instead we are saying that they do not earn enough to have the right to be here.

Secondly, is it right that amendments to immigration policy should not be debated on the Floor of the House? I understand that the Government have given themselves this power in the Bill, but surely the Minister will today confirm that they will none the less bring those matters to the House, both for debate and in the interests of their own accountability. Thirdly, there has been some concern about EU citizens who reside in this country for valid reasons other than exercising their treaty rights and whether they will be protected as part of the transitional arrangements if we leave the EU. I hope the Minister will clarify that distinction. She says “when” we leave the EU. I am hopeful that we will not be doing so.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Hear, hear.

Darren Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that.

Fourthly, in response to the report by the Science and Technology Committee, which I recommend to all right hon. and hon. Members, I hope the Minister will say how she and her Department will seek to meet the requirements I mentioned in order that we might stay at the forefront of international collaboration on scientific endeavour.

Lastly, I assume the Government will not admit it, but this is a prime opportunity to set out what type of country we want to be, whether Brexit happens or not; to say to people around the world who Britain is and what their experience will be here; to say to people who

live in this country what values we expect of our communities and what we will not condone and that xenophobia is not welcome, regardless of what people felt they could and could not say as a consequence of the leave campaign; to set out afresh a new, innovative, welcoming and fair immigration system that brings to life the values that supposedly represent the Treasury Bench's intentions for this country. Instead, it is a failure on all the measures I have set out, so I will happily not be supporting the Bill this evening.

8.27 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones). I am reminded of a trip we took together last year to the United States when one of the last things we did was visit the State of Massachusetts' refugee and immigration programme. It had some interesting ideas for both supporting refugees and making them valuable members of society, including by finding them jobs. We might want to learn from that.

Let me start by expressing an interest in the subject of immigration, as the husband of an immigrant, but an immigrant from outside the European Union. Before I came to the House, my wife and I began to be experts in the immigration process. My wife, who is from Azerbaijan—outside the EU, as I have said—is often surprised by how easy it has been in the past, and, we hope, will be in the future—indeed, I am sure that it will be—for EU citizens not only to stay here, but to continue to come here to work. I welcome not only the Bill but the 12-month consultation with business and services throughout the United Kingdom, which should set the country on course for a truly fair immigration system that reflects the country's priorities.

Let me also compare my view with that expressed by the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) at the beginning of his speech. Scottish Conservative Members share an understanding of the issues faced in Scotland by industries such as fisheries and agriculture, and the problem of the shortage of skilled labour at home and its availability overseas. We may simply differ in regard to the solutions that we envisage.

In June 2016, 17.4 million people in the United Kingdom—including, it is estimated, the majority of voters in Banff and Buchan—voted to leave the European Union, and there can be no denying that a desire to take back control of our borders was one of the many reasons for that vote. In 2017, along with other Members, I was elected to represent the people in a Scottish constituency on the basis of a manifesto that had pledged to respect the referendum mandate, which included an end to free movement, and I believe that the Bill delivers on that promise. I also believe that it marks another necessary step towards a new immigration system: a system that we control, a system that is fair to people from all countries, and a system that is skills-based and tailored to our economy, society and public services.

Stephen Kerr: Does not every major social attitudes survey that has ever been conducted in Scotland indicate that the attitudes of the Scottish people towards immigration are not remarkably different from those of people in the United Kingdom as a whole?

David Duguid: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the wide range of opinions on immigration across the United Kingdom, across Scotland and across my constituency, and, no doubt, his own.

The vision of a future skills-based immigration system tailored to our economy was set out in the UK Government's December White Paper, which I welcomed as a strong basis for our future immigration system. One of the challenges that we will face as we implement that system is ensuring that it works for all sectors of our economy—both public and private—and for parts of the country with high unemployment and those with low unemployment alike.

I am happy to say that Banff and Buchan is an area with low unemployment, and there is good reason to believe that more jobs will come to the area in the years ahead. As home to the great fishing ports of Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Macduff, among others, the constituency stands to gain from Brexit as we leave the common fisheries policy. If we embrace that sea of opportunity, Banff and Buchan will be on course to gain thousands of new skilled jobs in fishing itself, in seafood processing, and in other sectors such as maritime engineering, and those jobs will in turn lift the wider local economy in hospitality and other public services. That, combined with our already low claimant count, is why it is so important for Banff and Buchan that we get our future immigration policy right. We can only make the most of the golden opportunity that is on the horizon if the key sectors of our local economy have access to the labour that they need, and the labour of which there are shortages.

I should make it clear that I am not calling for those sectors to have unrestricted access to cheap low-skilled labour. The fisheries sector wants to be able to rely on local labour and is willing to work substantively towards that goal, but we are not there yet. The Scottish White Fish Producers Association has estimated that, much as we want to reach a point at which we are, if not totally unreliant on foreign labour, much more reliant on local labour than we currently are, that could take up to 10 years.

In the short and medium term, the fisheries sector will need to employ a significant amount of migrant labour if it is to keep going at its current level, let alone make the most of our taking back control of our waters. Like other sectors, it is increasingly looking outside the EU for skilled and experienced crew, and for skilled—or at least competent—workers in our seafood processing facilities. If anything, free movement, historically—combined with the basic need to limit net migration—has made it more difficult for labour from non-EEA countries to be hired. The end of free movement, as provided for in the Bill, gives us a chance to rectify that by creating a more level playing field.

The UK Government have engaged with me, and with many of my colleagues on both sides of the House who represent coastal constituencies, on this issue, and I am grateful for that. I look forward to engaging with them on it further after the Bill has been passed. I am confident that our future immigration policy will help the fisheries sector in Banff and Buchan, and the wider local economy with it, to make the most of what Brexit has to offer. To achieve that, we must lay the groundwork first, and that is why this Bill is so important. This is what the vote to leave the EU was about; it was not just

about immigration, but about control in the wider sense—the ability of this country and this Parliament to control and decide our own immigration policy; not to end immigration, but to ensure that our businesses and services can source the skills they need. This Bill provides a great opportunity for Banff and Buchan and for the United Kingdom as a whole, and I will support it as a means towards taking that opportunity.

I want to conclude by reminding my right hon. Friend the Minister of concerns I have raised previously regarding the level of skills that are considered “skilled” for immigration purposes. I would also welcome further discussion around the detail of salary levels, which has been mentioned by other hon. Members. The Migration Advisory Committee has suggested a £30,000 level for guidance, but I would welcome the opportunity to discuss that further, and as I said at the start of my speech, I particularly welcome the 12-month consultation process that the Department will be taking with businesses and services around the country.

In summary, I support this Bill.

8.35 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): First, may I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests in relation to research support I have received in my office for work on immigration matters? May I also say upfront that I strongly endorse the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and the support she has from a number of other right hon. and hon. Members around the House for taking action on indefinite immigration detention, which I think we can all agree is an obscene reflection on our current system?

It has been a pleasure to hear so many Members from around the House speaking so positively of the contribution and value immigrants have brought to our country over so many years, and it is true in my constituency, too: we are proud to be home to so many diverse communities, and I hope that the message that has gone forth from the House tonight to those who are here now or who might be considering making their home here in future is, “You will be welcome; you will be valued members of our community; and we will make sure that during your time spent in this country, you will be looked after well and can be happy.”

This Bill is very light on detail, yet it offers very wide powers to Ministers to implement all sorts of potential changes via immigration rules. While I appreciate that that is the way that many immigration changes are brought in already under our present system, the Bill's ending of free movement represents a seismic change in our system that I believe—and I think this belief is widespread—ought to be subject to careful parliamentary scrutiny.

We also know that our existing immigration system, which is presumably to be transplanted across in some degree to EEA nationals in future, is already flawed, and we have rightly heard tonight about Windrush. I would also highlight the recent DNA debacle, which we do not want to be replicated for future immigrants coming to this country, as we fear.

We are pleased that the Government have asked the Law Commission to look at how immigration rules might be simplified, but it seems premature or, indeed,

[Kate Green]

inconsistent to ask it to do so while asking us to give powers to Ministers to make ongoing changes that the commission will not be able to take account of. The Henry VIII powers in this Bill are very inappropriate in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, especially in the light of the direction of travel laid out in the White Paper and in particular, as we have heard again and again tonight, the very significant concerns about the £30,000 income threshold to assess whether a migrant has the skills to mean that we would want them to make their home here. As we have heard tonight, income is not commensurate with skills, and qualifications are not commensurate with the skills we may need across a whole range of sectors. I hope that the Minister has heard the widespread concerns around the House and will look again at that threshold after tonight's debate.

I want to echo comments made, including by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the shadow Home Secretary, about the Government's proposal for short-term work visas. These have some place in an immigration system, but on a large scale they will be inefficient for employers, create insecurity for individuals, damage family solidarity since family members will not be eligible to come in with those on short-term visas and damage community cohesion and integration. I particularly say to the Minister that there is a serious risk of the exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers on these short-term visas, as well as the risk that they will undercut UK workers if unscrupulous employers choose to take advantage of this system.

We will need strong protections at the very least to support a short-term workers visa scheme, yet today our labour market inspectorate is not well resourced. Indeed, Focus on Labour Exploitation tells me that we are at about half the global benchmark of inspectors to workers—it should be one inspector for every 10,000 workers. FLEX calculates that, given that benchmark, businesses face inspection on average once every 500 years. There is great concern about Ministers' ability to make immigration rules that might increase the vulnerability of those workers without full parliamentary scrutiny.

The Bill will allow Ministers to change rules on social security co-ordination, which is important in facilitating employment mobility. That is good for the economy and for individuals, but it is also a matter of fairness to individuals who have contributed and who have expectations about their entitlements going forward. I hope that the Minister will categorically rule out any possibility that the Government would in future unilaterally withdraw the ability to aggregate and passport pension and social security rights in the event of no deal or after the transition period.

I also want to express concerns for those who do not or cannot regularise their status, including some of those applying for settled status, or those who might become irregular in future, perhaps as overstayers. The current rules on income thresholds are particularly damaging for families, creating a risk of poverty and homelessness. In a number of debates about our Brexit plans over the past years, I have highlighted particular concerns about the wellbeing of children. Again, I underline that issue for the Minister tonight. The Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium has particular concerns

about children, because both EEA and non-EEA children might become subject to rules under which they have no recourse to public funds, creating huge hardship and, as we have heard, shunting costs to local authorities, which will have to pick up the pieces as a result. I hope that tonight the Minister might commit to relaxing or at least looking at relaxing the exceptional circumstances criteria set out in the 2012 immigration rules changes, so that families with dependants under the age of 18 have access to the public funds they need.

There are also concerns about the cost of regularising one's status and the complexity of the process. There was a welcome U-turn on fees for applying for settled status earlier this month, but the system is still complex. We have to be worried when the Home Secretary has spoken about the 90% success rate for those going to the beta testing phase—even in a relatively limited control group, 10% of cases cannot easily or readily acquire settled status. There is great worry that that ratio might increase in future as more vulnerable individuals make their applications.

I am concerned about exceptionally high fees and repeat fees for those who will not be applying for settled status, such as those who might arrive in future and will then go on to the 10-year path to citizenship. Will Ministers reconsider the impact of that, particularly on children and young people?

What advice are the Government offering to families to ensure that applicants can achieve the highest form of status to which they are entitled? For example, a child with a claim to British citizenship should be able to make that claim in their own right and not be expected simply to be reliant on the lower settled status that might be available to their parent. That leads me to ask the Minister about information and advice, and to ask her to consider the importance of ensuring legal aid and appeal rights.

I do not welcome the Bill tonight. In many ways, it will be bad, especially for the most vulnerable in our country. It will have worrying equality impacts, as we have heard from a number of colleagues, and it leaves the future very uncertain for EEA and UK nationals alike. In those circumstances, I look forward to voting against the Bill because it does not give our country and the individuals living in it now and in the future the rights and good will that they deserve.

8.44 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Immigration is an enormously sensitive subject, and it is important that we pick our words with sensitivity. I often sit in this place listening to foreign affairs discussions about countries that millions of people are fleeing—we were talking about Venezuela earlier—and I remember how lucky we are to live in a country to which people want to come, not one they want to flee. We are lucky to live in a country in which people have had freedom and where our history has given us freedom. In many European countries, people remember what it was like not to have freedom. Under communism in Poland, people were not allowed to leave the country. In East Germany, people in Berlin were not allowed to cross the wall, even to visit a family member.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) said earlier that we needed to stop freedom of movement to counter

extremism. However, is it not the point of freedom of movement to put into the past the kind of extremism that built the Berlin wall?

Vicky Ford: Let me continue my point. Under communism, people were trapped in a prison in their own country, and to many across Europe, especially eastern Europe, freedom of movement is a deeply cherished right and we must remember to respect it in our own language.

How did we get to where we are today, when so many people in the UK feel that freedom of movement is not right for us? For me, there were two huge errors in our history. The first came under the Labour Government in the early 2000s when 10 new countries joined the EU and the then Government vastly underestimated the impact of migration and did not introduce transitional controls. I remember the impact on many towns across the east of England, which I represented as a Member of the European Parliament. I am thinking of towns such as Wisbech, Thetford and King's Lynn, which saw a huge influx of people, putting real pressure on local services.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady therefore support the reintroduction of the migration impact fund, which was designed by the Labour Government to do just what she describes?

Vicky Ford: Sadly, the fund did not have the necessary impact at that point, but I would support measures to reassure local communities in which we see migration. Having knocked on many doors and spoken to many people, that was one of the key reasons why so many people voted leave in the referendum—not necessarily in other places, but in those towns.

The second error happened during David Cameron's negotiations with the EU. He tried to explain the impact that migration had had on those communities, but for one reason or another, the EU leaders gave the perception—whether it was real or untrue—that they simply were not listening and were not prepared to try to help introduce some of the reassurances that those communities needed. We are where we are today because of those two errors.

The vast majority of people who come to our country work hard, pay taxes and make huge contributions to our communities and our society, and we are stronger and better as a result. Post Brexit, it is vital that we continue to be a country that welcomes and values those who want to come here. I will support the Bill tonight, because we need to reassure communities that we listened to the message from the referendum, but we must have a migration system that works for people who bring skills, talent and sheer hard work.

I want to talk about four sectors: the NHS and social care, science and research, universities, and tech. I come from a medical family. Both my parents were doctors; my sister is a doctor; and I am married to a doctor. One in 10 of the doctors in our hospitals and across our health service come from other countries. Yes, we will train more in the future, and I am delighted that the first of the next generation of medical schools has now opened in my constituency of Chelmsford, where we are already training 100 new doctors. However, we cannot forget the contribution made to our health and

social care sectors by those who have come from other countries. A lot of those people are not on high pay, and the suggested salary threshold will risk cutting out and excluding some of them, so I ask the Minister to look at that.

This is not just about salary. I often hear people ask, "If I come and do extra qualifications here, will I be able to take those qualifications back to another country if I then choose to move?" Issues such as the mutual recognition of professional qualifications are important when discussing our immigration system and our ongoing relationship with Europe.

David Duguid: I apologise to the House for bringing my wife back into the conversation, but, as she is a qualified midwife and general nurse from outside the EU, one of her frustrations is with the impossibility of her qualifications being recognised. Does my hon. Friend welcome at least the potential of the Bill to recognise such qualifications?

Vicky Ford: I am delighted that my hon. Friend raises that point. One of my reasons for voting for the withdrawal agreement is that in the future partnership discussions, in black and white, is the continued mutual recognition of professional qualifications. That level of detail on such issues is so important. Yes, we must continue to welcome those with training and real skills, so we must make sure those skills, as well as the individual, can be moved.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which has done a huge amount of work on the future of the visa and migration system. This country has world leaders in science research, and we are a world leader because people come here from all over the world. We must make sure that we remain open to the best brains and the best talent, but that does not just mean the top professors; it also means skilled lab technicians and PhD students, and we need to make sure our visa system works for them, too.

Mobility is important. Scientists need to be able to move from country to country. I often give the example that people who work on the British Antarctic Survey will, by definition, not be spending 12 months of every year in Britain. They need to go to Antarctica. Scientists often need to go backwards and forwards to work and study, so a fixed regime that says they have to stay here for x number of years and cannot move backwards and forwards does not work for them.

Bureaucracy was raised by a previous speaker, and scientists need to be able to act fast. A post-doc who has been offered a two-year or three-year grant to get their research done does not want to hang around for six months to find out whether they have their visa. They will go to a country that will make the decision faster, so we need to make sure that we can act quickly. And when we are welcoming scientists, we must make sure that we also welcome their families, who will want to come with them, and we must have a policy to encourage that.

I was touched by what techUK told us before this debate. The UK tech sector is growing two and a half times as fast as the rest of the economy, and one in five of those working in the sector was not born in the UK. They are young, highly talented and highly mobile, and again the salary threshold may not be a proxy for skills in this area.

[Vicky Ford]

I am lucky to have a university in my constituency, and our universities are thriving and exciting places to be. Nearly one in three of our academics, and nearly one in every two of those on research-only contracts, was not born in the UK. Again, if the £30,000 threshold were to be agreed—it is not finalised—it may not be the right proxy for talent, and the universities have repeatedly made that point.

We need to make sure that we continue to have overseas students, who add so much to our universities, and I would like the Minister to consider the arrangements for post-study work. In Australia, for example, a student can stay for two to four years after their degree. If we want to compete for talent with countries like Australia, we need to give students more time.

My final point is that I am not one of those who says that the Government should be rushing into decisions on this. I do not blame them for taking time to get this right, as they need to take the time to consult. We need a system that rebuilds trust and confidence in parts of our country where people feel let down by the previous system. I want to make sure we have a system that is the best in the world and that we look at experiences from other countries. I want to end up with a system that welcomes people with skills and talents, welcomes people who want to come here to work hard and welcomes people who have come here to flee horror. That is the message I would like to leave the Minister with.

8.55 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): When I consider the whole issue of immigration in this country, the first thing that comes to mind is thwarted opportunity—squandered opportunity. I am reminded of Billy Connolly's eulogy at Jimmy Reid's funeral. He was talking about the conversations he used to have with Jimmy Reid, with one wonderful anecdote being about driving past a high-rise tower block. Jimmy was saying, "Think about this, Billy. When you look at all those windows, imagine that behind each of them is a world champion horse rider or a Nobel prize winning chemist. They are all there. They are all there with that potential, but they will never realise it because they have never been given the opportunity to achieve it—because society has determined from their youngest years that they will never realise their inherent potential to be as good as they can be and to realise their talents."

That is a question of not only poverty, but our immigration system. The same dynamic plays out. Tragically, it is often a function of people in poverty finding the wrong scapegoat—the wrong enemy—for their situation. The perennial problem of labour versus capital is the root cause of many of the tensions in our society today and many that caused this country to vote to leave the EU. Unless we understand those reasons and those underlying dynamics, we will fail to address those tensions.

Before I was elected as a Member of Parliament, I had a tangential involvement with immigration in this country—many people do, as they do not have many day-to-day dealings with it—but I remember one case that came close to home. I was working in the shipyards on the Clyde, having joined after graduating from Glasgow University. My starting salary was just £24,000, which

is far below the £30,000 threshold. Many people of all sorts of nationalities—Australians, Canadians and Malaysians—were graduates working in the shipyards on the Clyde. One colleague had been awarded a PhD in unmanned underwater vehicles by Queen's University Belfast, and she was a fantastic researcher. She also happened to fall in love at the same time with a Brazilian man who lived in Dublin and was studying there. She was in the invidious position of having to choose between her career in Glasgow and getting married to her fiancé.

Ms Harman: She should have chosen the career.
[Laughter.]

Mr Sweeney: Yes, perhaps she ought to have done.

The Home Office told my colleague that because her fiancé was resident in Dublin, he could not come to live with her in Glasgow. They had to move away to Brazil in order for him to apply to come to live in the UK, even though they had both been living in Ireland. What a bizarre anomaly that is! It is just one example of the absurd situation—the Kafkaesque nightmare—that many people encounter. As a result of that situation, my colleague had to go to work in Dublin. She left her job on the shipyards on the Clyde: another example of potential lost to the industry on the Clyde and to Scotland.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Of course if the Brazilian gentleman had become a full Irish citizen, he would have been able to move through the common travel area without hindrance. There is a question here, and it is one the Scots Tories do not like. They do not want Scotland to be able to contribute to common travel area migration in the way that Dublin and the London Government can. Does the hon. Gentleman support the Scottish Government's having the same rights to enable people to become citizens as the Irish Government have, and having them freely move within the common travel area, which is not a problem?

Mr Sweeney: One interesting and more laudable aspect of the Bill is that it does seek to maintain a common travel area. I recognise that there are many issues with the Bill, which is why I will not be supporting it. I will certainly be going through the Lobby to vote against it.

One of the fundamental issues with the Bill is the lack of flexibility and the rigidity of the system, of which the £30,000 is merely one example. I have talked about my personal example, but I also think of many of the people I know from university, including junior doctors who start on a salary well below the £30,000 threshold, or other people I know from other countries around the world who will not meet that threshold. It is an entirely arbitrary and utterly absurd threshold that will destroy potential in our country. That is one reason why, if the Bill does go into Committee, I will be looking to support amendments that remove the threshold, so that we can have a skills-based system rather than an arbitrary salary threshold.

There are also severe problems with the 12-month visa scheme, and there are all sorts of issues relating to the protection of workers' rights, which are another fundamental root cause. It is not a question of immigration undermining wages and working conditions in this country; it is the fact that organised labour has been under systematic assault by this Government for many years.

That is what has driven down wages and why wages have stagnated. The power of organised labour to bargain collectively in this country has been systematically undermined by this Government. That is the root cause and the heart of the problem. It is not about immigration.

The swathe of Henry VIII powers that the Government seek to usurp from Parliament in favour of the Executive is extremely sinister and unacceptable. If the Bill receives its Second Reading tonight—I hope it does not, but it may well—that must be challenged in Committee.

The whole notion of an arbitrary cap on migrants panders to the worst sort of stereotypes and ought to be stopped. We cannot have a system that imposes such arbitrary limits. It is simply nonsensical from any sort of economic development perspective. Indeed, an arbitrary cap militates against any effort to try to improve the country's prosperity.

I wholeheartedly support the proposal by the Mother of the House, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), to introduce a 20-day limit to immigration detention. I deal closely with this issue in many constituency cases. The idea that this is the only country in Europe with a system of unlimited detention is absolutely shameful. The Government should accept my right hon. and learned Friend's amendment without any Division and incorporate it into the Bill.

It would be a great gesture of good will and a great example of this country's humanitarian tradition if we sought not to have arbitrary detention. In the past year, more than 10,000 have been detained in this country without limit. They can only count the days up; they cannot count the days down. Some 70% of those people are detained not because there is any sense that they have committed an offence; they are being detained entirely arbitrarily and it is an extremely distressing situation for many of them to be in. The system needs to be changed.

It is about not just the economic aspects but the opportunities denied because of our asylum system. Think of the huge talents thwarted. I have met doctors, surgeons, lawyers and chemists in my constituency who are all denied the opportunity to work in or contribute in any meaningful way to our society, because under our current asylum policy they are not able to work so are kept in limbo for years at a time. It affects not only the adults but those who came here, often as infants and small children, who have grown up as second-class citizens. There are very frustrated young adults in our society who have been denied the chance to go on holiday with their friends or to get student tuition. They have been denied any kind of meaningful recognition in our country.

I have confronted the appalling reality in my past 18 months or so as an MP. I have had to deal with more than 100 asylum cases in the past five months alone because of the Home Office's failures to expedite those cases efficiently. I find it tragic when 18-year-olds are unable to take up a place to study law at university in Glasgow because they cannot get student finance because their immigration or asylum status has not been determined, or when champion boxers who want to represent Scotland internationally are unable to go abroad to fight in competitions because their asylum status has not been settled. That is shameful and a squandering of human talent and ability. That they are

denied that chance is a collective loss to everyone in our country. It needs to be addressed urgently because it is a shameful situation.

The "move on" policy came into sharp focus in Glasgow last year. With the existing asylum contracts coming to a close in 2019, we learned that Serco, which had the asylum accommodation contract in Glasgow, was seeking to move on asylum seekers at a much faster rate than usual. We saw the prospect of mass destitution in Glasgow, because more than 300 potential evictions were going to happen. It is clear that the "move on" policy needs to be addressed. I would support measures to extend the period to give asylum seekers the right to assess where they are at the end of a process and to consider their right to appeal, without the threat of being turfed out on to the streets. That is especially true for those in particularly vulnerable situations when they have no recourse to public funds. If they are survivors of domestic abuse, care leavers or have dependants, it is shameful. We cannot be in a situation where they are reliant on charities to support them in the face of destitution. I just find that, in our country, that just cannot be acceptable. I hope that most people in this House recognise that appeal for basic dignity.

We face an economic challenge in Scotland, which we tried to address in previous years under a Labour Government through the fresh talent initiative. The initiative was successful in reversing Scotland's historic population decline. From 1801 to 1901, the Scottish population grew by 180%, but from 1901 to 2001 it grew by just 10%, which was a huge demographic challenge for Scotland. The current immigration policy of this Government threatens to undo all that hard work to reverse Scotland's population decline.

Having worked in Scottish enterprise, promoting initiatives such as the ScotGrad scheme, which has brought in international graduates and foreign language students to help promote Scottish exports abroad, I can say that the policy is a real threat to the future economic prosperity of this country. We must oppose this Bill for a number of reasons—reasons to do with thwarted opportunity, basic human dignity and economic opportunity. The Bill's approach is totally wrongheaded. We need a new system rooted in economic opportunity, in human dignity and in the ability to grow our collective potential as a country.

9.5 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) spoke in great detail and with great skill about the many deficiencies of this Bill. I want to focus on just one: ending freedom of movement.

Since 2016, we have listened to those who wish to rip Scotland from the European Union speak triumphantly about the prospect of ending freedom of movement. They speak of this as if it is a victory that will benefit the people of this country. In truth, we cannot measure what will be lost. We will lose countless opportunities, relationships, stories, and human experiences that would have been worth just as much to us culturally and socially as the billions of pounds that our EU membership generates every year.

[Gavin Newlands]

I know that this will be hard to believe, but, by the end of this week, I will be one birthday away from my 40s. [Interruption.] It is the truth, yes. A clear majority of Members in this place are clearly older than I am. [Interruption.] My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) is clearly one of those. I am angry about the impact that ending freedom of movement will have on my generation and on those of older generations, but that anger is as nothing compared with the rage felt about the impact that this will have on younger generations—those who overwhelmingly voted to remain in the EU, or who were left voiceless due to this Government's opposition to giving the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds.

I equate the situation to the support that the Tory and Labour parties gave to the various versions of tuition fees at university. They were happy to accept all the benefits of free tuition and the unburdened opportunities that it afforded themselves, but are now happy to pull up the ladder of opportunity behind them. So it is with EU membership and freedom of movement—it is selfish, self-defeating and utterly, utterly senseless.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Gavin Newlands: On the words “utterly senseless”, I give way to my hon. Friend.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I hope to make some sense with this thought, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thinking of the generational shift, does my hon. Friend think, as I do, that, in the past, the waters and the skies of Europe were filled with warring air forces and warring navies, whereas now they are filled with easyJet, Ryanair and low-cost airlines, and with people not thinking twice about darting across the continent, opening up economies and opening up people's minds? Is it not the case that only the historically illiterate would cheer the ending of such a diplomatic channel?

Gavin Newlands: As usual, far from being senseless, my hon. Friend makes his point with force and alacrity, as is befitting of a budding statesman. I could not agree more—[Interruption.] I think that I have perhaps gone too far with that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We had to listen to vacuous calls for reductions in the number of EU citizens making their homes and their lives here. We saw the Eurosceptics' de facto leader stand in front of Nazi-inspired political advertising that cynically equated desperate refugees fleeing war-torn areas of the world with EU citizens. Those Eurosceptics lied about money for the national health service and they lied about Turkey joining the EU. Some even promised that we could stay in the single market and yet still somehow end freedom of movement.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): There is one other point that we do not often hear. I am somebody who benefited from freedom of movement, which gave me career and educational opportunities. Why should anybody in here have the right to take away those opportunities for those who come after us?

Gavin Newlands: I could not agree more; my hon. Friend makes a very sensible point.

As I was saying, these are all monumental and unforgiveable lies. Perhaps the remain campaign should have challenged them more effectively. Perhaps the national media were too complacent to hold the liars to account, or—more likely in the case of the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, *The Sun* and others—were actually complicit in those lies. Perhaps people like me, who opposed Brexit, could have been better at telling the real story of the benefits of EU membership and the privileges that we should never—but perhaps did—take for granted.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that it is an absolute tragedy that the UK came at the bottom of the list of EU countries that were able to give a positive view of the EU, and that it is only in the last year or two that newspapers in the UK have been reappointing EU correspondents?

Gavin Newlands: My hon. Friend makes a good point.

When confronted with these alternative facts as portrayed in the media and by some hon. Members here, who can actually blame some people for agreeing to what amounted to a quick fix? The difference between the attitude and actions of the Scottish Government and the Westminster Government following the referendum in 2016 was stark. Immediately after the result was announced, the First Minister of Scotland gave an open-hearted address to EU citizens and the message was crystal clear—“We want you to come to Scotland and we want you to stay”—whereas the Tories spoke of bargaining chips.

Scotland rejected the false promises, the hate-filled rhetoric and the lies. We did this because something greater is being offered in our country. In Scotland, the largest party has been proudly in favour of immigration and freedom of movement. Some politicians in this place are scared to follow this example, but it can be an easy argument to win; they just have to make it. I say to the Leader of the Opposition and some on his Benches that politicians are here not merely to follow public opinion, but to lead it—to persuade and debate the merits of a policy, not to cower meekly in the corner desperately waiting for 29 March to come and go. That is not leadership. It is a total abdication of responsibility.

Freedom of movement is the greatest achievement that we have reached together in the European Union, and it is the single greatest reason why we must remain members. Programmes such as Erasmus allow for an unprecedented exchange of ideas between the students who populate Europe's rich universities. Millions of people from the UK's constituent nations, including many Scots, choose to retire to quiet lives on the Mediterranean and millions of others travel across the continent, taking in Europe's vast cultural heritage. Others have built careers abroad in every conceivable field, allowing us to advance every aspect of our shared society.

Just before the withdrawal agreement, I made a call on social media for people to tell me their stories and experiences of freedom of movement. During the withdrawal agreement debate, I raised the story of Ivan and his family. Ivan was born in Spain, studied in Italy and has worked all over Scotland in Scotland's NHS. He met his Irish wife, who then went on to work in Denmark. They have had two daughters born in Scotland—one with an Irish passport and one with a Spanish passport, but both indisputably Scottish.

I have other constituents with similar experiences. My constituent Emma Hendrie is a 21-year-old student who studied for a semester at Ghent University in Belgium. Once her fellow students got past her apparently strong Paisley accent, she became lifelong friends with people from Europe and beyond. Alison Hughes lived in the Netherlands on two different occasions, which was a great experience for her children and her family, who got to meet other children from all over the world. Mark Harold emigrated to Lithuania in 2005 to work on music projects, and stayed for many years. Mark was eventually elected to the city council and is now the night mayor of Vilnius; he is the only non-citizen to have sworn on the Lithuanian constitution. Sandra and Steve Murray wrote to me to tell me their story of making a new home in a small village on the French-Spanish border that is populated by Spanish, French, German, Dutch, Belgian, English, Irish and Swedish people, as well as people from many other nations. Their only wish was that the UK would adopt the Scottish view that we all want the same things—peace, equality and opportunity.

This is what we are about to lose. How can we in this place rip this from our young people, who voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU? How can we rip Scotland out of the free movement area when the Scottish people overwhelmingly voted to continue to have this freedom? My message today is this: I understand that millions of people across England are disillusioned with politics and are yearning for something better, and I am sorry that there is no major party that can help them at this point. I do not blame them for their anger; I am often angry about the situation myself.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con) *rose*—

Gavin Newlands: I would give way but I am conscious that others want to speak, and I am coming to the end of my speech.

Scotland does have an alternative: Scotland voted to remain. I hope that colleagues across the House will reject this Bill and ultimately give people a chance to have the final say. I also reiterate that immigration powers must be devolved to Scotland so that we can get on with building an open and welcoming immigration system that works in the interests of Scotland. However, it would seem that Scotland's interests are now wholly incompatible with those of the rest of the UK. That leads to the only clear solution—to become like every other normal country and secure our independence so that we might forge that better future.

To conclude, perhaps on a note of consensus, we have just marked Robert Burns Day, so I would like to ask hon. Members to reflect on some words from Scotland's immortal bard—not “parcel of rogues”, although rarely would that particular verse have been more apt, but this:

“For a’ that, an’ a’ that,
It’s coming yet for a’ that,
That Man to Man, the world o’er,
Shall brothers be for a’ that.”

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I commend the hon. Gentleman on his excellent poetry. I am terribly sorry but we will have to reduce the time limit to six minutes.

9.15 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As this debate approached, I reflected on one of the first experiences I had when I first stood for election in 2017. It was at a hustings—although they seem to be a dying art in election campaigns, they are still a very important aspect—and I remember being challenged by a guy in the audience about what my party's policy on immigration was. I gave a very full-throated argument in favour of immigration and why we need it. After the hustings was over, he came up to me and said, “Look, before the public meeting tonight I was intending to vote for you, but because you are so pro-immigration, I can't.”

It was probably that experience that led me to reflect on how we managed to get into a situation where immigration has become such a hotly contested issue. There is an argument that during the Brexit referendum, leadership on this issue was completely absent from the main political parties. I believe that immigration is fundamentally a good thing, and that if politicians talked about it more, we would be less likely to be in this position. There is a degree of hypocrisy when we speak to some of our constituents. When we talk about immigrants, that means people who come here from Europe, but when we talk about people going to live in Spain, we call them expats. People will complain, “They don't speak our language when they are on the streets of Glasgow,” but when I go on holiday to Gran Canaria or Tenerife, I do not often hear many British people speaking Spanish, so there is a degree of hypocrisy there.

On the issue of hypocrisy, I want to address very directly the absolute mess that the UK Labour party found itself in this afternoon. The shadow Home Secretary opened the debate by saying that Labour would abstain on Second Reading. It took 135 miles for Jesus and Paul to walk the road to Damascus, but today it took an hour and 35 minutes for the Labour party to make a U-turn on its position. That shows the absolutely nonsensical position that the Opposition have found themselves in—and it is the same with Brexit. If someone is trying to ride two horses, eventually those two horses will give way. What we saw today is the very beginning of that for Labour, and its Members should reflect on that.

We have to be very, very upfront about the benefits of immigration, because if we are not, there will be major challenges coming down the track for us, in terms of not just our economy and our public services, but social care. We know that the number of people with dementia will have increased by about 40% in 12 years' time, and that means more people in care homes. It is a sad thing, but the vast majority of people that I went to school with do not like the idea of going to work in care homes—of wiping people's bottoms or serving meals. If we do not confront the reality of our ageing population, we are going to have a very serious problem with regard to our current argument on immigration.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. It is not simply about providing labour; it is also about the taxes that these immigrants will pay, which are needed to fund the social services that so many people rely on.

David Linden: Absolutely. My hon. Friend almost anticipates my next point. We have an ageing population, and people are going to have to be looked after. People

[David Linden]

will live for longer and we will need others to fund the tax base that pays for their pensions, so there is absolutely an economic argument for immigration as well.

As I was preparing for this speech, I reflected on the fact that we begin the sitting day in the House of Commons with a prayer in which the Speaker's Chaplain says:

"May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind".

We stand here at half-past 2 and pray that to God. We say, "Let us take decisions not just to please people but for the right reasons." In reality, we find ourselves in a position politically in which we are not leading anymore—we are reacting to public opinion.

I make no apology for the fact that I took a very pro-immigration stance at the hustings that night. Tonight, with a German surname, I will walk through the No Lobby and vote against the Bill because I believe in the free movement of people. The sooner that Members get to grips with the challenges coming down the track and the benefits of free movement, the better, because we have serious challenges, and any vote for this Bill would be a seriously retrograde step.

9.20 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): It has been interesting to listen to the debate, and particularly to speeches from Conservative Members who have said, "We've got to get rid of free movement of labour," but then in the next breath said, "But we really like the EU workers in the agricultural sector," or "We really need them in the horticultural sector in my constituency," or, "We really need them in hospitality, tourism, construction and care homes." We have started to see the complete inconsistency of the Government's and the Conservative party's argument on this critical issue.

There is only one way in which Brexit will reduce immigration, and that will be if it creates the mother of all recessions, which I think it can. People come to this country to work. The vast majority come to contribute, pay taxes and work in different sectors in our constituencies, making this country great, as they have done over the decades and centuries. To say that they should be treated in the way in which this Bill would treat them is frankly outrageous.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) that, given the need for the people whom this Bill dismissively describes as low-skilled, if we allow them to come here for a year but then ask them to stay away for a year, after which they might be allowed to apply again, we would not attract anyone to work in sectors such as care and public services?

Sir Edward Davey: The hon. Lady is right. The notion of a temporary 12-month work visa for these people is abhorrent. How can we expect someone to go into the care sector and make relationships with the residents in a care home when they have to go after 12 months? How can we expect such people to integrate into the local community? How can we ensure that their training

and productivity increases, which apparently we need to do? It is a nonsense approach to these so-called low-skilled workers, and I think that will be shown to be the case during the consultation on the White Paper.

It is argued that the 2016 referendum gave the okay and the mandate for ending the free movement of labour—it absolutely did not. That was not on the ballot paper. I accept that immigration was an issue, but I asked the Home Secretary at the beginning of the debate whether he thought people were voting on immigration or on free movement of labour. Many people did vote on immigration—not necessarily the majority, and not even the majority of leavers—and it was an issue, but the idea that the referendum came down to free movement of labour is nonsense.

It is worth remembering what some of the Conservative Brexiteers were saying at the time. Daniel Hannan MEP, one of the leading Tory Brexiteers, said the day after the referendum result:

"Frankly, if people watching think that they have voted and there is now going to be zero immigration from the EU, they are going to be disappointed."

He also said:

"The idea of staying within a common market but outside the political integration, I think that is feasible".

For his punchline, this arch-Conservative-Brexiteer said:

"It means free movement of labour."

When we are told that the referendum gave a mandate for this Bill, it is simply not true, and the House should not stand for it, because many Brexiteers, including one of the chief ones, said during the referendum that it did not. If we want to protect our communities, our businesses and our economy, and to ensure that our sectors that are crying out for workers get them, we have to reject the Bill.

Let me take the House through three sectors. The first is the NHS. We know of the lies told about spending on the NHS, but what about the fabric of the NHS—the people working in it? There are 10,000 doctors who are EU citizens working in our NHS, and 20,000 nurses and 14,000 clinical support staff. In the past two years, we have had a net loss of 5,000 in the number of nurses from the EU. When we are looking at nursing vacancies of 41,000 in the NHS, how is the Bill going to help the NHS? Do you know what, Madam Deputy Speaker? Just to show that the Government are totally inconsistent and totally incoherent, on page 84 of "The NHS Long Term Plan" there is the wonderful phrase:

"The workforce implementation plan will set out new national arrangements to support NHS organisations in recruiting overseas."

You could not make this nonsense up, and the Government should be ashamed of themselves. I think about my own constituency. When I talked to the management at Kingston Hospital, their No. 1 concern was this issue. It was not waiting times in A&E or resources, but their staff, the people who are leaving and the people who will not come here because of the nonsense in this Bill.

Let us move on to social care. EU workers already account for 5% of the total adult social care workforce in this country, which is about 1.6 million people. There are 110,000 vacancies up and down the country. How are those going to be filled? Do the Government think that people will be attracted by this

nonsense? I am afraid that, again, it is a real let-down of the British people. The British people will feel betrayed when they realise what has been done in their name.

Let us take the construction industry. The Prime Minister is lyrical about the number of houses we need to build, and she is right, but 10% of construction workers in the UK at the moment are from the EU—84,000 of them—so how are we going to build the 300,000 homes a year that we currently need if they are not made welcome? I think this is just shocking—a huge mistake.

Interestingly, I think the Government are completely behind the opinion of the British people: opinion has been changing. A recent poll said that 74% of British people are in favour of free movement within the EU. That is not a mandate for the Bill—quite the contrary.

Time is against me, so I will just end by saying that not only is getting rid of free movement of labour a huge historic mistake, but the Bill is a historic mistake. There are so many things wrong with the immigration system—there are no limits on detentions and there is a ban on asylum seekers working, and there is the complete incompetence and incoherence in the Home Office, as I see in my two surgeries every week when I meet people who are the victims of that incompetence—and there is so much to be done, but the Bill does nothing to solve those problems. The immigration system is not fit for purpose, and the Bill will make it worse and unfair. It is bad for our society and bad for our economy, and MPs from both sides of the House should reject it tonight.

9.27 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I guess I should declare an interest. My partner is Hungarian, my neighbour is Czech and my lodger was French. American Express has its European call centre in my constituency. I helped to push and worked on the legal base of Erasmus+. I have lived in Belgium and worked in Berlin, and I am an EU citizen with EU rights. At this critical time in our country's history, it is of course disappointing, but not very surprising with this Government, that the Bill represents another colossal stealing of those rights from many EU citizens who might not happen to be here on the right date or at the right time.

There are many problems with the Bill. It removes the right of EU citizens to enter the UK without the leave of the Secretary of State. Even if the process will be “simple and easy”, it fails to address honestly the open border in Northern Ireland; we will, of course, end up having a diverging EU immigration policy within the island of Ireland. It fails to give assurances against the exorbitant fees that we currently charge many people coming to the UK, and that we might now charge EU citizens. It fails to give reassurances to visitors who may come to the UK but want to change their status, and it might mean that they have to do the same ridiculous run around that non-EU migrants have to do when they have to leave the country of reapplying through a different immigration system and come back in. The system is currently farcical for non-EU migrants, and the Bill will introduce that farce for EU citizens as well. The Bill moves us to a race to the bottom on migration issues, rather than seeking the best, and that is the problem with it.

I want to draw particular attention to clause 4, which will give Henry VIII powers, allowing the Secretary of State swathes of power to make determinations without oversight by this place. Have we learned nothing from Windrush or the disregard with which the Government treat many migrants? I would not trust this Government—in fact, I would not trust many Governments—with the right to decide on immigration without being fettered by Parliament. How is it appropriate that the Government, who have shown themselves to be so inept, should give themselves these swingeing powers? They cannot be allowed to deny EU citizens their rights in this way.

Of course, things have got so bad generally with immigration. When I write to the Immigration Minister about immigration issues, she does not bother writing back to me; she gets a civil servant in the liaison team to send me a bog-standard, pro forma letter. She will not even engage on the issue. That is what the Minister has come to, and that is what the Government have come to—dispassionate about individual issues, worrying only about the number on the visa or the number of migrants. It is wrong, but now they want to extend that system to others.

My constituents speak of injustice. Last month, a man who had worked here for 20 years—he has an NHS pension and two medical businesses—was rejected for permanent residency by the Government. He was an EU citizen, but despite spending £1,000 on an immigration lawyer to fill in the paperwork, the Government said that the right boxes had not all been ticked. We will appeal that decision, and we will be successful, but he had 23-odd years of national insurance payments. The Government could have looked that up instead of worrying about which boxes were ticked. The Government do not worry about the people when they are what matter.

Many people have lived in the UK for much of their lives, but spent three or four years away working. A German citizen, for example, might have been raised and schooled here but spent the last four or five years out of the country. They will now have to fulfil all the immigration checks, even though they see Britain as their homeland. I was granted EU citizenship in 1992, as were most of us. My brother was born an EU citizen. I fail to see why people who were born with citizenship rights should suddenly have them taken away. If we have to go down this route, we should at least say that everyone who was born before exit date will continue to have EU citizen's rights for the rest of their lives. That is the only fair thing to do when people are being deprived of their rights.

The other danger is the huge costs we are seeing. It can cost an employer and employee £8,000 if they are coming from outside the EU, with the NHS surcharge alone being £2,000, even though the person will pay taxes and contribute to the NHS. It costs only £127 for the Home Office to process the application, yet the charge for leave to remain is £1,220—a profit of 1,000%. It is disgraceful. The Minister is frowning, but those figures are from the Home Office.

We must vote down the Bill tonight because it is wrong in principle and wrong in practice, and we must stand up for what is right.

9.33 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to make some concluding remarks in this debate and to follow the excellent speech by my hon.

[Catherine West]

Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) that outlined the problems for EU nationals. I will be joining him in the No Lobby, because the powers the Bill would give to Ministers are far too wide. It feels rushed, and the slogan of ending free movement has become a theme tune for the Conservatives. Apart from that, we have actually seen quite a lot of consensus across the House on the key question of the £30,000 threshold, and I welcome that. In fact, I welcome the tone of the debate, which has been very positive. So many Members, in press interviews and elsewhere, have been calling for the subject of immigration to be debated in a responsible and measured way.

The key areas of the economy mentioned by many Members were farming, food processing and fishing. I would just mention that while fishing is worth about £1.8 billion to the economy, fashion is worth £35 billion. We must put the various sectors into perspective. The other huge sector is the NHS, which many Members mentioned. My own hospital, the Whittington hospital in the west of my constituency, which most of my constituents use, has a 12% to 15% vacancy rate, put down almost entirely to fears over Brexit and uncertainty.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): We have exactly the same issue in my constituency. We have a very large number of NHS workers from the EU who make a significant contribution to our local community. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point and I fully concur. I also support the point she makes about key industries. There are a whole range of other industries in west London and the Thames valley, including IT.

Catherine West: My hon. Friend represents an area with a university. So many universities have contacted Members with concerns relating to science and technology. The fact is that many people coming through—perhaps not top professors, but people who are technicians or those coming over on the PhD route—may not be earning the £30,000 that the Bill would require of them.

I want to be positive and say that we have an opportunity to put some things right. The Mother of the House, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), has put forward an excellent proposal to end indefinite detention and to bring us in line with European justice systems. Many of us have visited detention centres, for example Yarl's Wood. The excellent work of Bail for Immigration Detainees and other voluntary sector groups shows that introducing proper procedures and stopping indefinite detention will lead to the speeding up of casework. Instead of having people languishing without any proper legal aid provision and individuals effectively falling off the radar of the Home Office, we would have a system where people's decisions were made much more speedily.

Secondly, we have an opportunity to put right the anomalies that led to the Windrush scandal. Thirdly, we would have an opportunity to lift the ban on asylum seekers working, which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) mentioned. Preventing asylum seekers from working results in the most incredible loss of human potential. They just sit around, not able to fulfil the key things they could contribute.

I was very pleased to hear the Home Secretary mention a more welcoming approach to students. In a written question, which I believe my office has already sent to him, I have asked him to confirm the exact detail. I understand from his initial remarks earlier this evening that he will be more generous, but we need reassurances for our tertiary education system.

In conclusion, I want to make some final points about the issues I have with the Bill. It appears that, following all the Brexit debates we have had and the various votes the Government have lost, the Government are still repeating the same mistake of giving Ministers incredibly wide powers and not really consulting with Parliament quickly enough. There is the nature of the Bill being rushed and the nature of the slogans around free movement. Finally, there is the short-term visa problem, which we know from hon. Members who have spoken could lead to the possible exploitation of those who are successful in attaining such visas. We need to look much more carefully at the evidence on visas. If short-term visas do lead to exploitation, what evidence do we have from other immigration systems that they actually work?

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence in allowing me to speak despite not being in the Chamber for the whole of the debate.

Mr Speaker: The House has been delighted to hear the hon. Lady. I say that without fear of contradiction.

9.39 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): We have heard passionate speeches from Members on both sides of the debate. By my count, 27 Members have contributed. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) raised the niche but important issue of immigration in football. I thank the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), and I hope he will continue to work with us in Committee.

A new immigration system must not damage our economy and our society. My speech will cover the four broad areas that Labour's objections to the Bill fall into.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Abstain or against?

Afzal Khan: We will be against. Is that good enough?

First, the Bill is not a blueprint for a new immigration system, but a blank cheque. It contains broad Henry VIII powers that would allow the Secretary of State to amend both primary and secondary legislation. That point was made by my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) and for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who drew on her constituent's awful case to highlight the importance of parliamentary scrutiny. The White Paper on immigration is not a final draft; it is out for a 12-month consultation. In any case, the Government are not tied to doing what is in the White Paper. The Secretary of State could use the powers in the Bill to introduce an immigration system that is entirely different from anything that has been discussed without parliamentary oversight or scrutiny.

If the Government go with what is in the White Paper, that would spell disaster for our economy and our society. Their own impact analysis points out that the plans would reduce GDP and would have a cumulative fiscal cost of between £2 billion and £4 billion in the

first five years. The suggested short-term visa route would open the door to widespread labour abuses, creating a second class of migrant worker and enormous inefficiencies for businesses. That point was made by the hon. Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and for Stirling (Stephen Kerr).

The Government's plans have come under fire from their allies, as much as from their critics. The CBI described them as a

"sucker punch for many firms right across the country."

The TUC called them

"a disaster for every worker".

The British Chambers of Commerce accused the Government of leaving businesses with their "hands tied". We will be looking to put sensible limits on those powers in Committee to ensure Parliament has a say on our future immigration system.

Our second big concern is about social security co-ordination. The Government already have the power under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to ensure continuity in social security in the event of no deal. In fact, the Department for Work and Pensions has already tabled a series of negative statutory instruments that do just that. As the Government admit in the explanatory notes, the powers that they are asking for in the Bill would enable them to bring in a new approach to social security. That is a massive overreach and is entirely undemocratic. At least we have an immigration White Paper that indicates the Government's thinking. We have no idea what they plan to do on social security.

The third issue relates to EU citizens in the UK. Despite the Government's warm words about how much they value the contribution of EU citizens and want them to say, there is nothing in the Bill that protects their rights in primary legislation. More than 3.5 million EU citizens in the UK have spent two and a half years under a cloud of uncertainty. The Government have already started rolling back on their promises—for example, not to deny settled status to EU citizens who have not been exercising treaty rights, despite the Prime Minister's guarantee that that would not happen. Basic fairness to those who have already moved between the UK and the EU, as well as our ability to attract talent in the future, rely on our getting this right.

Fourthly, the problem of accountability and transparency goes far beyond the Henry VIII clauses. The Tories have made it harder and harder to live as a family in this country, and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) made the powerful point that the income threshold disproportionately affected women. The most stark and tragic illustration of this was the Windrush scandal. Let us be under no illusion: the cause of the Windrush scandal was the hostile environment. If we are to avoid a repeat of Windrush for EU citizens, the hostile environment must end. A system cannot be transparent if it is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the average person. The Government must simplify the immigration rules, follow the Law Commission's recommendations, bring back legal aid and restore data protection.

We find the Bill a missed opportunity to address the moral and humanitarian failures of this Tory Government towards refugees and asylum seekers, as set out emotively by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire). There is nothing

in the Bill, and very little in the White Paper, on refugees and asylum seekers. At a minimum, we must bring an end to indefinite detention and fix refugee family reunion. I thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and the right hon. Members for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for their cross-party work to end indefinite detention.

In conclusion, on immigration and social security, the Government have not done their homework. They have come to Parliament asking that we grant them extensive powers without any idea what they might use them for. We are not willing to grant the Government such broad powers to introduce as yet unknown rules on immigration and social security. Listening to the debate, it has become clear that Ministers' intentions are even worse than we had expected, so we will be voting against the Bill on Second Reading.

9.47 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): We have had a good and thorough debate this evening, and many wide-ranging issues have been raised, some of them even included in the Bill. I remember a couple of weeks ago nodding in agreement when the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) spoke of the importance of tone and language when discussing immigration. She was right then, and she was right today, and I thank all Members who have spoken thoughtfully and carefully on this topic in this debate.

The views expressed in this debate demonstrate the interest in the future borders and immigration system and the importance of getting it right. We have also heard from across the House of the great contribution that immigration has made to our society, culture and economy, and the Government value that contribution very much. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was generous in giving way in his opening speech, and indeed the debate has drifted some distance from the contents of the Bill, but I want to reflect on the contributions of as many Members as possible.

The end of free movement will allow us to build a system that recognises and maximises all the benefits of immigration, and we will continue to welcome talent from every corner of the globe under the future system.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Caroline Nokes: I will come to some of the hon. Gentleman's comments in due course.

At this time, we must be an outward-looking, global nation, and as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary indicated, over the next 12 months, we will speak to a range of businesses and organisations across the country. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington raised the specific issue of Irish citizenship and deportation. Of course, the UK has always had the power to deport or exclude Irish citizens, but in the light of the historical, community and political ties between the UK and Ireland, along with the existence of the common travel area, the approach since 2007 has been to consider Irish citizens for deportation only where a court has recommended deportation in sentencing or where the Secretary of State has concluded that owing

[Caroline Nokes]

to the exceptional circumstances of a case the public interest requires deportation. This approach is to be maintained.

Coming to Back-Bench contributions, it seems fair to kick off with my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who mentioned football at length. Of course we welcome the contribution made by sports people to the UK. Our current visa arrangements are designed for elite sports people and coaches who are internationally established at the highest level, and whose employment will make a significant contribution to the development of sport. To support the sector, the Home Office works with recognised sports governing bodies to agree on an objective set of criteria against which elite sports people will be assessed. My hon. Friend made clear the importance of the premier league, not only to our society but to our economy, and I am absolutely committed to working alongside the Football Association and the premier league to ensure that that continues.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) spoke about detention, and specifically about indefinite detention. That issue was also raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). The hon. Gentleman will be aware that 95% of those who are here without immigration leave are in the community, and I am sure that he will welcome the current Yarls Wood community pilot scheme. We are working with 12 women who would otherwise be in Yarls Wood to ensure that they are being supported. There is, of course, an automatic bail referral requirement for people who have been detained for four months, and we are now piloting a referral after two months. That will provide the judicial oversight for which so many have called.

The right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham spoke passionately about detention. It is seldom that I say this, but I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to appear before her Select Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, a couple of months ago. We had an interesting and challenging discussion about detention, and I hope I convinced her and her Committee that we are thinking very hard about the issue. It is right that we work to make the correct decisions, but detention remains part of our immigration policy. It is important for us to work on the immigration bail pilots and, of course, on detention in the community.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) spoke about the conventional view that we should have one immigration policy for the whole United Kingdom, and I absolutely agreed with what he said.

Sir John Hayes: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Caroline Nokes: I am sorry, but I am not going to give way. I am conscious that I am very time-limited.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) made a point very early in the debate about fairness and language, and about the importance of not conflating asylum with immigration routes. She was, of course, absolutely right. I sometimes find it hugely frustrating when people conflate the terms “asylum seeker” and “refugee” and “economic migrant”. I have

said before that we must be careful with our language, and the Home Secretary responded to my right hon. Friend’s intervention with an important observation about language and tone.

I am well aware that there are strong and passionate views about immigration on both sides of the House. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) for saying, quite rightly, that we needed to have a mature and constructive debate, but he was also right to draw attention to issues in certain sectors of the economy. With that in mind, we are having a year of engagement on the White Paper, talking to representatives of different industries. My hon. Friend referred to agricultural workers in particular, but also mentioned the hospitality and tourism industry, which is so important to his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch) spoke about migration from a non-EU perspective, and said that it was a global issue. She is absolutely right, and in the discussions that I have had with EU representatives—and, indeed, in my discussions last week with French representatives in Calais—they were keen to emphasise that migration could not be seen in isolation. We must look at the root challenges, and work together. When we leave the EU, we will continue to work with our friends and neighbours on the other side of the channel.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) said that we were making immigration policy with the slash of a pen, but he was far from correct. I would argue that he was whipping up scare stories when he tried to convey the message that the Government had said that EU citizens were not welcome. That directly contradicted the messages given in the House time and again by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, and indeed by me. We want our EU neighbours, friends and colleagues to stay, and we have not only made the settled status scheme as straightforward as possible, but—as the right hon. Gentleman will now know—have made it free.

The right hon. Gentleman also spoke about asylum seekers having the right to work, and went so far as to suggest that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was more interested in the subject than I was. I would like to reassure him that just this morning I had a meeting with Stephen Hale from Refugee Action on this subject, and indeed on 24 October last year my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) held a debate on this subject in Westminster Hall, to which he did not contribute.

It is important that we look at the NHS, and several Members, including the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), spoke about NHS workers—nurses and care workers—and it is important that we continue to work with the Department of Health and Social Care to make sure there are sufficient routes into the NHS for those who contribute so much. I am very conscious that there are now 4,000 more EU workers working in our NHS than in 2016, and the hon. Lady will remember that last summer we lifted doctors and nurses out of the tier 2 cap threshold.

The hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) spoke about Refugee Action. She will know that I have a great deal of time and respect for her and the issues she has raised, and I hope very much to

continue learning from her and the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green); they often come as a tag team to give me a very hard time, but they do so with such charm and determination that I am sure we will continue to engage effectively with them. In the same way, through our engagement process we will continue to listen to businesses large and small, sectors like the universities, the National Farmers Union, the Royal College of Nursing and the CBI, which we have been doing to date, because of course the conversation on immigration has not simply started over the course of the last few weeks, but has been going for well over a year.

The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil)—he knew I would get to him eventually—has spoken at length about voodoo politics. I have tried to take a positive out of something that everyone has said, and, given the headache I took tablets for earlier, I am sure he had his pins stuck into a voodoo doll of me. To add a little bit of levity, however, he would like to hold up Switzerland as an example of how individual cantons can run their own immigration policies, and indeed they can, but I gently draw his attention to the case of Nancy Holten, a vegan anti-cowbell campaigner who twice had her application for a Swiss passport refused by a referendum—we all know how keen we are on those in this place—and I am far from convinced that that is an effective immigration policy.

I am running out of time, but I would like to mention the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), who spoke so movingly about his father-in-law the late Sir Reginald Eyre. As for the words of a Whip ringing in our ears, “There’s a vote; don’t you dare”, well, apparently Her Majesty’s Opposition have decided that there is a whip and they do dare.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) has on many occasions had fairly brutal conversations with me and has raised some very important cases, which I will continue to work with her on; she does not shy away from tackling the difficult. She raised the issue of Henry VIII powers and the immigration rules. Of course, historically since the Immigration Act 1971 the immigration rules have been used to firm up immigration policy by Governments of all parties, and we will undoubtedly continue to do so, but if anybody thinks these do not get scrutinised, I would point them to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), who always gives me a very hard time whenever immigration rules make it to a debate in Delegated Legislation Committee.

I fear that I have reached the end of my comments. I welcome the remarks about Rabbie Burns—a little bit of Scottish poetry always goes down well—and I reinforce the message that this has to be an immigration policy for the whole United Kingdom. We have set out powers that will enable us to make amendments to primary and secondary legislation, but that is crucial in ensuring that we align the treatment of EU and non-EU nationals and that UK law can operate effectively.

Let me conclude by thanking the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) for raising the tone of the debate. She spoke carefully and thoughtfully, and that makes a huge difference. We want an immigration system that works for the whole UK and we will be continuing the engagement. We will also phase in that

system, recognising the importance of giving individuals, business and, indeed, Government, the time to adapt. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 234.

Division No. 306]

[9.59 pm]

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Dodds, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Afriyie, Adam	Donelan, Michelle
Aldous, Peter	Dorries, Ms Nadine
Allan, Lucy	Double, Steve
Allen, Heidi	Dowden, Oliver
Argar, Edward	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Atkins, Victoria	Drax, Richard
Bacon, Mr Richard	Duddridge, James
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Duguid, David
Baker, Mr Steve	Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Baldwin, Harriett	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Barclay, rh Stephen	Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Ellis, Michael
Benyon, rh Richard	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Beresford, Sir Paul	Elphicke, Charlie
Berry, Jake	Eustice, George
Blackman, Bob	Evans, Mr Nigel
Blunt, Crispin	Evennett, rh Sir David
Boles, Nick	Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Bone, Mr Peter	Field, rh Mark
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Ford, Vicky
Bowie, Andrew	Foster, Kevin
Bradley, Ben	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Bradley, rh Karen	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Brady, Sir Graham	Frazer, Lucy
Braverman, Suella	Freeman, George
Brereton, Jack	Freer, Mike
Bridgen, Andrew	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Brine, Steve	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Bruce, Fiona	Garnier, Mark
Buckland, Robert	Gauke, rh Mr David
Burghart, Alex	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Burns, Conor	Gibb, rh Nick
Cairns, rh Alun	Girvan, Paul
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Glen, John
Cartlidge, James	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Cash, Sir William	Graham, Luke
Caulfield, Maria	Graham, Richard
Chalk, Alex	Grant, Bill
Chishti, Rehman	Grant, Mrs Helen
Chope, Sir Christopher	Gray, James
Clark, Colin	Green, Chris
Clark, rh Greg	Green, rh Damian
Clarke, Mr Simon	Greening, rh Justine
Cleverly, James	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Griffiths, Andrew
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Collins, Damian	Hair, Kirstene
Courts, Robert	Halfon, rh Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hall, Luke
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Crouch, Tracey	Hammond, Stephen
Davies, Chris	Hancock, rh Matt
Davies, David T. C.	Hands, rh Greg
Davies, Glyn	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Davies, Mims	Harrington, Richard
Davis, rh Mr David	Harris, Rebecca
Dinenage, Caroline	Harrison, Trudy
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hart, Simon
Docherty, Leo	Hayes, rh Sir John

Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkins, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr
 Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda

Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Rosie
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Sir Edward

Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr
 John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jo Churchill and
Wendy Morton

NOES

David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg

Hobhouse, Wera
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie

Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Rayner, Angela
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Laura
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeter, Wes
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Swinson, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Alan Campbell and
Jessica Morden

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time.

IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL SECURITY CO-ORDINATION (EU WITHDRAWAL) BILL: PROGRAMME

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 7 March.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—(Mike Freer.)

Question agreed to.

IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL SECURITY CO-ORDINATION (EU WITHDRAWAL) BILL: WAYS AND MEANS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52 (1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any fees or charges arising by virtue of the Act.—(Mike Freer.)

Question agreed to.

IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL SECURITY CO-ORDINATION (EU WITHDRAWAL) BILL: MONEY

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown, a government department, a person holding office under Her Majesty or any other public authority by virtue of the Act; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.—(Mike Freer.)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Orders Nos. 15 and 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion in the name of Andrea Leadsom relating to the Business of the House (Today) may be entered upon, though opposed, at any hour; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(Mike Freer.)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at today's sitting, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of the Motions in the name of Andrea Leadsom relating to Proxy Voting not later than one hour after the start of proceedings on this Motion; such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Andrea Leadsom.*)

Proxy Voting

Mr Speaker: We now come to motion 6 on proxy voting, which we will debate together with motion 7. Before I call a Whip to move motion 6, I should inform the House that I have selected amendment (d) to motion 7, which stands in the name of the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). The amendment will be debated together with the motions. I am referring to amendment (d), appertaining to miscarriages.

At the end of the debate, I shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings. I hope that this is helpful to colleagues. First, I shall put the Question on motion 6, after which I shall call the Leader of the House to move motion 7 formally, and then the hon. Member for Shipley to move his amendment (d) formally and put the Question on that—the Question on amendment (d). Finally, I shall put the Question on motion 7, either as amended or, as the case may be, in its original form on the Order Paper.

I should make it clear that if amendment (d) is agreed to, I shall ensure that the additional requirement relating to miscarriage is incorporated into the pilot scheme and duly authorised as soon as possible. I must emphasise that this would not delay the immediate implementation of the scheme in the form that has been made available in the Vote Office. I call the Leader of the House to move motion 6.

10.18 pm

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

That this House:—

(1) reaffirms its resolution of 1 February 2018 on baby leave for Members of Parliament;

(2) endorses the Fifth Report of the Procedure Committee, HC 825, on Proxy voting and parental absence;

(3) accordingly directs the Speaker to prepare a pilot scheme governing the operation of proxy voting for Members absent from the House by reason of childbirth or care of an infant or newly adopted child, pursuant to the recommendations in the Committee's report, this resolution and the temporary Standing Order (Voting by proxy for parental absence);

(4) directs that a scheme prepared in accordance with this resolution and the temporary Standing Order (Voting by proxy for parental absence) shall be signed by the Speaker and the leaders of the three largest parties in the House before it is published, and that it shall enter into effect for a period of 12 months when the Speaker takes the chair on the sitting day after the day of publication;

(5) directs that any amendment of a scheme in effect by virtue of paragraph (4) above shall take effect when the Speaker takes the Chair on the sitting day after a proposal signed by the Speaker and the leaders of the three largest parties in the House is published; and

(6) directs the Procedure Committee to review proxy voting arrangements within 12 months of the commencement of a scheme established by virtue of this order.

This debate follows much discussion of the issue of baby leave and the use of proxy voting over the past year. I would like to start by thanking all Members from right across the House who have helped to bring us to this point. In particular, I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) and his Committee for their helpful and rapid response to last February's debate. Their report has provided the

means for us to implement these changes and to demonstrate how Members are helping to bring Parliament into the 21st century.

I also thank the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), and the Mother of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). They have both been strong champions of proxy voting and have consistently supported and promoted the many issues that affect women in this place.

I pay tribute to the collaborative way in which you, Mr Speaker, have worked with the Clerks to ensure that, should these motions pass, the proxy voting scheme can be operational from tomorrow. I am grateful to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the SNP's Westminster leader, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), for quickly reviewing and authorising the details of the scheme that is the subject of this evening's decision. Over the past year we have seen two full debates, a Select Committee inquiry, three urgent questions and many other deliberations in the House on this issue, and in my opinion quite rightly, too. Throughout that time, we have seen strong support for the changes before us today.

I am sympathetic to the issue that the amendment seeks to address. A miscarriage is a distressing time for any individual to have to go through. However, those suffering such distress may well prefer to do so in private, via the anonymity of the pairing system rather than the transparency of a proxy vote, during what is always a personally devastating period. Whether the amendment is passed is ultimately a decision for the House.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The proxy voting in the motion is voluntary—it will not be compulsory for somebody to take a proxy vote. If somebody wished to keep such a matter private, they would still be able to under my amendment. It would just mean that if somebody wished to take advantage of proxy voting after they had had a miscarriage, they would be able to do so. I am not sure that it would breach a confidentiality if the person concerned did not want it to.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in the point he makes. I think I just acknowledged that myself.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I am pleased to hear that the Leader of the House is sympathetic to the amendment on miscarriage. As somebody who suffered a miscarriage during the 2015 general election, I think it would have been physically impossible to have come into Parliament to vote at that time. Could the amendment extend to male colleagues, who are often there to support their partners at times of miscarriage? We perhaps do not often talk about the role of the expectant father in such cases.

Andrea Leadsom: I am very sympathetic to all the proposals around the sadness of miscarriages. Having had two myself, I have some personal experience of the matter. Nevertheless, I draw all Members' attention to the fact that we are here to debate and agree proxy voting for baby leave, subject to the amendment tabled

by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), on the basis of a pilot scheme. The Procedure Committee will come back to this issue at the end of the one-year pilot scheme, when there will be an opportunity for all Members to put forward their views.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I note that amendment (a), tabled by the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), has not been selected for debate, but does the Leader of the House not agree that, whether it is considered in the pilot or afterwards, looking after a partner who is terminally ill is an equally valid reason for getting a proxy vote?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady makes an important point. As I say, we have debated the issue in this Chamber on a number of occasions, which is why we plan to focus on a pilot scheme. Towards the end of the one-year pilot, we can look again at whether the issue should be restricted to baby leave or expanded.

I acknowledge that Members have wished to bring in slightly different or additional changes to our voting system, but I definitely do not think that anyone could accuse us of having rushed into the reforms we are proposing. Members will, I hope, be reassured that bringing in proxy voting as a pilot scheme means that any outstanding issues can be addressed during the 12-month review.

Let me reiterate that ensuring that every baby has the best start in life has been a personal priority for me for many years. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that this Government do all they can to allow new parents to spend that vital early time with their babies. I am therefore delighted to be able to bring forward these motions, and I urge all Members to support them.

10.25 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for bringing forward the motions and for listening to the concerns of hon. Members by expediting this particular process.

Mr Speaker, you will recall that you commissioned the report "The Good Parliament", from Professor Sarah Childs—she is actually listening to the debate—way back in 2016. She cited the issue of proxy voting and said that that would make this a good Parliament. We have had two debates and two urgent questions on the matter. The House expressed a view in favour of establishing a system of proxy voting when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) first secured a debate in the House on 1 February 2018, so we are moving quite quickly—it has taken a year to get the system into gear.

As I set out from the Dispatch Box on 18 July and 13 September 2018, and on 22 January 2019, the Labour party supports the principle of proxy voting for parental absence. I, too, thank the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) and members of the Procedure Committee for taking evidence and producing its report "Proxy voting and parental absence" on 15 May 2018.

The Committee recommended that the scope of the scheme

"should be broadly equivalent to statutory provision for maternity and paternity leave."

[Valerie Vaz]

That was similar to the Clerk of the House's memorandum, which identified

"caring responsibilities limited to mothers of young infants" to cover a category of Member who might qualify for a proxy vote.

The motions are about the implementation of proxy voting for Members absent by reason of childbirth or care of an infant or newly adopted child. The scheme is not, at this stage, intended to be extended to other reasons for being away from the Chamber. The Procedure Committee's report flagged up the fact that the Parliaments of Australia and New Zealand also have this process—the two processes work in slightly different ways, but they work nevertheless.

I will not go into individual cases, but it is clear that a system of proxy voting for parental absence should be in place as soon as possible. The breakdown in the pairing system and Members having to vote while heavily pregnant have made this a necessity, and it is right that there can be such certainty. Right hon. and hon. Members want to cast their vote and want that recorded. The Leader of the Opposition, who is committed to a modern Parliament, has signed the certificate. I am pleased to say that he was the first of the three main party leaders to do so. I pay tribute to the Clerk of Divisions and Elections, who managed to get the certificate ready to be signed by you, Mr Speaker, in the first instance.

I think that it is helpful to set out what actually happens. To get a proxy, Members can either provide a certificate of pregnancy or a matching certificate to you, Mr Speaker. No further validation is necessary. The maximum duration of a vote by proxy is six months for the biological mother of a baby, or for the primary or single adopter of a baby or child, and two weeks for the biological father of a baby, the partner of the person giving birth, or the second adopter of a baby or child. Eligible Members will need to specify in writing to you, Mr Speaker, the dates on which the absence shall begin and end within these maximum durations, and name the Member who has agreed to carry her or his proxy vote. You, Mr Speaker, will issue a certificate and cause it to be entered in *Votes and Proceedings*. Members can change who their proxy is, and their period of proxy voting earlier or cast a vote in person by providing a written notice to you, Mr Speaker, as soon as possible, or, at the very latest, by the end of the previous sitting day.

Members casting a proxy vote in a Division will inform the Division Clerk at the appropriate desk and the Tellers at the doors of the Lobby. Members can cast their vote in one Lobby and the proxy in the other, and may cast a proxy without casting their own vote at all. The result of Divisions in *Hansard*, both online and in its printed edition, will note votes cast by proxy, including the Member who cast the proxy vote. I know that one hon. Member has already signalled to you, Mr Speaker, that she intends to cast her vote by proxy, and she will be able to do this at the end of today, certainly in time for tomorrow's votes. The new system is set out very clearly and I thank the Clerks for drawing it up.

If the House agrees to motion 6 and the temporary Standing Order, will the Leader of the House confirm—although I think that she has done so already—that the system of proxy voting will be in place by tomorrow?

Will she also outline the timeframe for the Procedure Committee's review and confirm when the clock starts ticking on that review? I hope that it is from today so that we have the full 12 months for it. It is right that this House accommodates everyone who wants to carry out their caring responsibilities. Members who work hard to fulfil their duties on behalf of our constituents deserve always to have their voices heard in our good Parliament.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), I should just mention that the shadow Leader of the House referenced Professor Sarah Childs, and I wish to record that the great professor is watching over us.

There will be a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke has generously signalled to me that she intends her speech to be shorter than that, but she has up to five minutes.

10.30 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): May I start by offering my congratulations to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on the arrival of her son? I am sure that we would all want to send our best wishes to her.

I will also begin by referencing a certain Professor Sarah Childs, because it was her report in 2016 that concluded that the House of Commons had in the past "lacked the institutional will" to address issues of representation and inclusion. I am sure that Professor Childs will join us today in recognising that things have changed and we have started to consider these matters in a great amount of detail. I pay tribute to the Leader of the House and the Mother of the House, who have done so much on this issue, as well as the Chair of the Procedure Committee and many more who have made today's events possible.

May I gently suggest to Members that while we can be celebratory, we can also challenge ourselves to do much better? Members have to take responsibility for the modernisation of this place. The piecemeal approach that we are taking to modernisation has driven many of the amendments to the motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), although only one of them has been selected. We need to be better at shaping our vision for the future of what this place should be in totality, rather than simply focusing on one issue at a time. We need to make sure that we do not exclude anybody from standing for election to this place because of their gender, disability, race, religion or sexuality. As an organisation, we have not yet grasped the bigger role that we have to play in picking up the picture that was so eloquently painted by Professor Sarah Childs in her report, which has also been discussed in "The Good Parliament" guide and at the Speaker's Conference in 2010.

Mr Speaker, you have had a pivotal role in driving forward change in this place, but your enthusiasm for change cannot completely take the place of Members' support for that change. We cannot simply do this in a piecemeal way. We need to ensure that important questions such as that raised in the intervention of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford)—whether the measure should be extended to people with other

caring responsibilities, particularly for terminally ill family members—are answered before we go much further. If we want a more representative Parliament, with people who have real-life experience, we have to be able to accommodate the needs of that group and we need to encourage those people to join us.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has stated publicly that the House of Commons may well be in breach of its public sector equality duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The Women and Equalities Committee believes that we have a role to play in providing more scrutiny of the way in which the House of Commons proceeds on equality issues, so I am pleased to tell the House that we have decided to set up a Sub-Committee to look specifically at the scrutiny of equality in this place—yes, holding ourselves as parliamentarians to account over every aspect of the working of this place so that we turn those wonderful words into practice not just in the future, but now. That is a hugely important part of our job. We are the custodians of the future not just for British business and British institutions, but for Parliament itself. We have to live up to those expectations and deliver now.

10.34 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). I very much look forward to her continuing work on and interest in this issue. If anybody can drive through this agenda, it is she and her Committee.

We very much welcome the motions and hope that this will be the very last word on the tortuous process of delivering proxy voting in this House. It is almost unbelievable that it has taken so long. It is almost a year since the first debate, when the House expressed a will and a view that proxy voting should be a feature of our voting arrangements. I have no reason to doubt the Leader of the House's commitment to this; in fact, I know how solid her commitment is. She has been very sincere and championed this through the House in the course of the past year. I just hope that she has managed to get her Whips Office fully on board with all this now. I really hope that there will be no other kickback from any Whips Office in this House and that we are able to properly deliver this.

As we have heard, the Procedure Committee was charged with bringing forward a solution and designing a way in which that could happen, and that has been duly discharged. I, the Leader of the House, you, Mr Speaker, and the shadow Leader of the House—she has promised to be my proxy if I ever require one, but I gently say to her that I do not think that is going to be necessary—all gave evidence to the Committee. The motions practically replicate everything that was suggested and recommended by the Committee, and this is the way forward.

It has to be said, however, that it has taken a couple of crises for us to get to this position. The first involved the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) and the breaking of the pairing system back in July last year, and then there were the terrible and appalling events around the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), who had that dreadful experience with voting a couple of weeks ago. Let us not kid

ourselves that there has been only natural and good-natured progression, because it has taken a couple of such incidents before this has happened.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that we have to get past the point where we are making policy as a result of being shamed? We had to be shamed into doing this. There were so many debates, and the Leader of the House herself said that she might look at it when we moved out of this place while it was being refurbished. A lot has changed since then, and it is great to see progress, but we cannot let things continue like this.

Pete Wishart: I totally agree. We should make proper plans and make sure that we have the right arrangements in place. I do recall those comments by the Leader of the House, but I will be kind to her—I think that she has played a part in ensuring that this is delivered and made a reality, along with many Members.

We have to conclude that the pairing system has totally and utterly failed this House. The 19th-century “nod and a wink” approach that we had to deal with such arrangements really now has to come to an end. We never, ever trusted the pairing system. We have never participated in any pairing arrangements during my time in the House—almost 18 years—and they must be totally and utterly abandoned.

It is a welcome fact that the motions have been debatable—that was the right way to go. When these proceedings were first proposed last week, there were concerns that somebody might attempt to vote the motions down or talk them out. I welcome the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). I used to gently chide him when he was a new Member, calling him “Dinosaur Jr”. He is now a fully fledged member of the dinosaur community, but his interest just goes to show that even dinosaurs may change their horns. I accept, in the sincerest way, that he has now come forward as a fully fledged, proper member of the community of change in this House. We will support his amendment tonight.

It is great that Professor Sarah Childs is with us tonight, because it was her report that first set out some of the agenda items we needed to look at. We have to make this place a good Parliament. We have to address some of the byzantine ways in which we do our business in this House. I go on and on about the voting Lobbies. They are now thoroughly dangerous and we have to do something about them properly, so let us start to look at that. This is a good start. I can assure the House that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) has already signed the certificate. We will now get this process in place and I welcome it very much.

10.39 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Thank you for selecting my amendment (d), Mr Speaker. There seem to be two things that we need to concern ourselves with today. The first is whether we agree with proxy voting, and the second is whether we agree with proxy voting on the terms in the motion.

I am rather sceptical about proxy voting for a number of reasons, not least that if debates in this place never changed anybody's mind or made better legislation, we would have to question why we bother having them at

[Philip Davies]

all in the first place. That is a clear part of our role as MPs. What Ministers say at the end of a debate can affect a Member's vote. Reassurances from Ministers can make a Member take a different line, and that has happened on many occasions.

I am also sceptical because I am not entirely sure that this will deal with the lack of trust in the pairing system. What if the proxy votes the wrong way? What if there is a breakdown in communication? What if the designated proxy is unable to vote, for some reason? This does not mean that there will be none of the same problems with proxy voting as there are with the pairing system. We should not believe that this will be a flawless system. Given that the will of the House is clearly that we should have proxy voting, it is surely incumbent on us to try to make the rules the best we can, and this motion is lacking in a number of areas.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I do not share my hon. Friend's scepticism, but I do share his attention to detail, and that is lacking in his amendment. He will know that my private Member's Bill dealing with stillbirths is going through the House of Lords at the moment. I hope that his amendment would extend to women who have suffered stillbirths, who would not be covered by the definition of miscarriage at the moment.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I accept his support in that spirit. If we are going down the route of proxy voting, we have to make sure that it is fair for people in every circumstance. That is the point I want to make. That is why it is important that people who have a serious illness, who are not covered by the motion, are included. Why is the primary carer of someone who is seriously ill less deserving of a proxy vote? Why is someone whose close relative has died less deserving of a proxy vote than those mentioned in the motion? People who have suffered a miscarriage should equally be covered, and I hope the Government will accept my amendment.

We have to look at why fathers and mothers are being treated so differently. The Women and Equalities Committee report, "Fathers and the workplace", which I think was a unanimous report of the Committee, said that limiting the statutory period to two weeks for fathers is

"particularly inadequate in certain specific circumstances, such as where the mother or baby is ill or has been born prematurely."

I agree with that report of the Committee, on which I serve. Members of the Committee seem to have been distinctly lacking in arguing for that to be included in the terms of this motion, despite recommending that every other organisation in the country should abide by it. They seem to think that it should not apply to the House of Commons but should apply to every single other organisation.

We have to look at where proxy voting applies, and I hope the Procedure Committee will consider all these things. I do not think that proxy voting should apply to private Members' Bills, for example, which it does in the motion. Hardly anybody turns up for private Members' Bills, so it would be rather absurd that someone who never turns up for them on Fridays and never had any intention of doing so will all of a sudden be able to vote in proceedings on them.

The Report of Bills is not really suitable for proxy voting. You might recall, Mr Speaker, that there are sometimes 200 amendments tabled to a Bill on Report in different groupings. We do not know on the day of the vote which ones will be selected for debate or which ones will be voted on. How on earth can a Member give an informed opinion on 200-odd amendments that day when they do not even know which ones are being voted on and which ones will be selected for debate? We should be very wary about extending proxy voting to the Report of Bills.

I must say that there is something distinctly lacking in one of the motions compared with the one in the Procedure Committee report. The Government have missed out one key plank, which I have sought to reinstate, of the report's proposed motion. It states:

"The Speaker may make provision for the exercise of a proxy vote insofar as it is not provided for in this Order."

That had in mind something like miscarriages, which is why I have tabled amendment (d).

Equally, the Procedure Committee report says:

"There is an inherent risk to the House's reputation of Members away from the House casting votes as if they are present in the Chamber and actively following debates. For example, it would be unthinkable"—

the word "unthinkable" is underlined in the report—

"for a motion on committing military personnel to armed conflict to be carried on the basis of proxy votes."

Yet that has not been excluded from the motion on proxy votes: sending troops to war will still be covered by proxy votes, despite the Procedure Committee saying that that would be unthinkable.

I hope that the Government will accept my amendment (d) as a modest step forward in trying to make this procedure fairer to everybody, irrespective of their circumstances, and I hope that the Procedure Committee will look at all these matters in the round when this comes up for review.

10.45 pm

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): It is obviously a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who gave a characteristic speech. I recall my suggestion during the urgent question, when I said that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) might be seeking a pair for this evening and I thought the hon. Gentleman might have been up for that, but he is here instead. What I would say is that even a stopped clock is right twice a day, so while I disagree with much of what he said, there are none the less some good suggestions for progress in some of the amendments he has tabled.

I am delighted to be here for this debate, as I am that we are having this debate and that we have this very good news. I again thank the Leader of the House for her dogged work behind the scenes, those from the Procedure Committee and the Women and Equalities Committee, and of course the Mother of the House and everybody who has helped to make this happen, which is so important.

I am particularly happy that, tomorrow, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn will be able to vote by proxy. I think she is probably still awake—she has a small baby, so I reckon she is still awake right now—so I would just say, "Tulip, we are so happy for you."

Tomorrow, enjoy little Raphael and making sure your constituents are represented at the same time.” Indeed, I hope that this will go on to be useful for other hon. Members. I know that, with the hon. Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) and for Fareham (Suella Braverman), many more babies are due to be born, and I think this is going to be a really positive step.

One thing I did agree with the hon. Member for Shipley about was the importance of fathers. In the urgent question last week, I was particularly moved by quite how many men stood up and talked about their experiences as dads and MPs, and about the guilt that they feel. I do hope, given that this is a pilot, that that is an issue we can return to as soon as possible. I just think it is not right in the 21st century for us to leave men out of this and say that two weeks is enough; it is not. Dads are incredibly important, which is why we introduced shared parental leave and why we should make sure this applies to men as well.

The hon. Gentleman has tabled an amendment, which seems to command support, about miscarriage, which is also incredibly important. I am fortunate in that I have not experienced miscarriage, but we have heard from hon. Members who have. However, I have had scares involving heavy bleeding. In fact, on one occasion when I was pregnant with Gabriel, I was in the House in the evening, I had just had something to eat and we were due to be voting late on Brexit, and that was when I started to bleed heavily. Anyone who has been pregnant will know how that feels: even though it is not uncommon, the fear strikes that something is going wrong, particularly in the first trimester.

I telephoned my midwife, who advised me to go to accident and emergency, and I went across the bridge to St Thomas's. It became clear that, by the time I was seen, I was going to miss the vote on Brexit, so I had to contact my Chief Whip and, in doing so, tell him I was pregnant. I had not announced it to anybody yet, so it was not necessarily the circumstances in which I wanted to do that. I was kept in overnight as it happened, and I had a scan and everything was fine—do you know what, I was so delighted that that was the case—and the rest of the pregnancy was good, but that is a not uncommon experience. It is not one where a proxy vote would necessarily make a difference, but I share that because these are the types of experiences that people have when they are pregnant.

I know there will be so many other experiences like that that others have had, which is why a modern workplace ought to be able to accommodate and understand the types of things that people are going through. Of course it did not help that I inevitably received criticism from constituents for not having voted in that Division. I said that I was unwell, but that was not good enough and people still said that I should have been there. If someone has not announced she is pregnant, and in particular if she is worried about having a miscarriage, she really does not want to suddenly tell the world about it.

I hope that we will in future be able to extend this provision to other categories. My right hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) has spoken movingly about his first time in Parliament when he was caring for his terminally ill first wife, and others have

had similar experiences. In the future, bereavement and other circumstances should be covered, so that this place can be a genuinely modern Parliament.

Mr Speaker: It would help if colleagues could shorten their speeches somewhat, but I am guided by colleagues.

10.50 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I will follow your advice to keep it brief, Mr Speaker. Indeed, this is not an obviously family-friendly time to have this short debate, although as the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) said, many a new mother may be awake doing an evening feed.

I support the motion. I know that women all around the Chamber have been waiting for this moment, to receive the reassurance that when their time comes to give birth, they will not have to worry about coming in to vote or about pairing arrangements. There will also be women watching this debate who will at some time in the future follow in our footsteps and want to know that Parliament is a family-friendly place to work, and that it is possible to come here and be a parent—a good parent. I am often asked by women thinking of standing for Parliament, “Does it work?” I say emphatically, “Yes. It does work to be a Member of Parliament and a mother; it does work to be a Member of Parliament and a father.”

I say that, but my children are a little bit older—they are six, eight and 10. I cannot imagine what it would be like having a baby as a Member of Parliament and thinking that you might have to go in to vote. Of course, as others have said, we have the pairing system, and that has worked well for many people, but it is not foolproof. It does leave you with a level of uncertainty and it also means you cannot represent your constituents in the way you would like. The time has come to move on, and we have the proxy voting proposals that have been worked through carefully so that we can have this pilot.

I, too, feel that the proposals do not go far enough. I would like to see us doing more for dads beyond the two-week period. I have spoken to colleagues who have come in to vote in the weeks that their wives were giving birth, not knowing whether they would be able to get back in time for the birth. I remember when I was in the three weeks leading up to my due date asking my husband not to travel for work, because you never know when the baby will come.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Just as a point of information, we should be mindful that there will be women who will be married to, or have partners who are, women so the impact will be not only on fathers, but on mothers whose wife or partner is giving birth.

Helen Whately: I completely agree, and in fact I was trying to make sure I used broad enough language.

We must make sure that we are thinking of dads and, in future, two weeks may prove not to be long enough. We must also think in the future about people who are seriously ill or have caring responsibilities for someone who is seriously ill. That is very much for the future. Let us get on with what we can do now. I fully support the introduction of proxy voting now.

10.53 pm

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): My baby was born on 14 April 2017, and four days later the Prime Minister made the announcement outside No. 10 that she was going ahead with a snap election, contrary to what she had said before Easter. Nothing can really legislate to prevent a general election from being called when someone is in that position, but we were perhaps overly optimistic about the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.

From July to December 2017, I was absent for the vast majority of votes in Parliament. I came in for a handful of votes, and I want to take the opportunity to put on record my thanks to both Whips Offices. There has been some airing of the problems that others have had in this debate, but some people are new to the party as I do not remember them taking part in the two debates and several urgent questions we have had. There is a bit of what-aboutery going on.

Let me be clear about why pairing is not enough. I want the right to have a baby and be able to represent my constituents. That is the simple answer. A second part of the answer is that some of us are suffering and have suffered reputational damage just for daring to have a baby and wanting to be a Member of this House. I was branded by a national newspaper as having the second-worst voting record in Parliament. I was not asked before the publication of the article why that might be the case, so I did not have a right to reply. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) was branded as one of Britain's laziest MPs in one of the tabloids, although it did print an apology.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): The hon. Lady and I were on the same Select Committee. Does she believe that being on maternity leave ought to be recognised for those serving on a Select Committee? I, too, was attacked by people locally for looking as though I was missing when I was simply on maternity leave.

Emma Reynolds: We have to think about all these issues. I think the Leader of the House has made the right decision to pilot the scheme on the basis of the detailed recommendations of the Procedure Committee, but we do need to look at these issues. We were lucky, being on the same Select Committee. In a way we paired each other on many votes, but that was just a coincidence. We need to think about other roles in the House, but let us not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

For me, any system is better than pairing. For example, a proxy voting system that does not let me express an opinion on a Friday, when I probably would not be here anyway, is fine thank you very much. A proxy voting system that says if we vote on military intervention I would have to come in and I would not have a proxy vote on that occasion is also fine by me, thank you very much. Anything that is better than having my name trawled through the mud because I have been off for six months and nobody has asked me why is a move in the right direction. We have to iron out some of the difficulties in the pilot, which will take place for a year. I do not think for a minute that after the pilot this progress will be rolled back. I hope it will advance.

I would like to say something about the role of fathers. We have legislated in this Parliament for shared parental leave. The Procedure Committee looked at that

in its recommendations. In the pilot, we are going to have six months for mothers and two weeks' paternity leave for fathers. Once we have had this pilot, we should look at extending it. It is a crying shame that so few dads take up shared parental leave. If an hon. Member were to take that leave and set an example, it would send a very strong signal to dads out there that it is culturally and financially okay to do so. I know there are many barriers preventing dads from taking up leave. As an aside, I would like to thank my husband for taking shared parental leave early, so that he could help me to fight an election campaign. I also thank his employer for letting him do so at short notice. We made use of it and I urge other dads to do the same.

Finally, I would like to say huge thanks to you personally, Mr Speaker, for your commitment to this, to the Leader of the House, to the shadow Leader of the House, to the Chair of the Procedure Committee and all its members, to the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, and, above all, to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who pushed this issue when it was not a popular thing. People were saying, "What about this, what about that and what about the other?" My right hon. and learned Friend, the Mother of the House, with her characteristic determination, just went through with it and kept on going. She has brought so many people on board. Tonight, we are sending a strong signal to young women up and down the country that they can be an MP and combine that with being a parent, so please come and stand. Sending that strong signal is what tonight is all about.

10.58 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I commend the Leader of the House and the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) for pursuing this proposal. I also commend the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), who is not with us but will perhaps be the first gainer from it.

This proposal is overdue. Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) who wants radical change quickly, I am an incremental reformer of the House because reform of the House has unexpected consequences. This proposal, however, is overdue. It is overdue because pairing is obsolete. As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) made plain, in today's politics being absent is not good enough. Whatever the real reasons, the public will not forgive us for not being there, so it is absolutely necessary that we put this measure in place and keep it after the year is up. I have no doubt that that will be the outcome.

There will be issues, some of which my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) raised. His concerns are not always popular in the House, but some of them are real. Quorum will be a serious issue on Fridays and so on, so we must deal with that. I agree entirely with his amendment on miscarriage. That should go *nem con*, as it were. He raised the issues of serious illness, irrespective of who the Member is, of being a primary carer for somebody who is seriously ill, and of the death of a close relative. The public will see it as necessary that we address those issues to maintain the fairness of this proposal. It is important that, in the public eye, we maintain the view that this is a fair and

sensible proposal. I say to the Leader of the House that, although there will be a one-year review, I hope we will look at those issues before the year is up.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Like my right hon. Friend, I strongly support these proposals. To support the immediate point he is making, two years ago today is the day that I went into hospital, and as some Members know, I was in a coma for 11 days, during which time I missed the Second Reading of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill, which attracted the kind of criticism that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) referred to. Although it is difficult to know quite how I could have appointed a proxy in those circumstances, does my right hon. Friend agree that we must ensure that, when people are ruled out of participating in parliamentary affairs, they can still represent their constituents?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is important, in this context, that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater—that is a terrible metaphor, now that I think about it. The simple truth is that we must retain our ability to do our job in a way that the public accept is fair, sensible and effective.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a very powerful case. Having three children, I fully support this move to help with maternity, but I want to make the case for people with relatives who are seriously ill or have died. At the moment, it is unbelievably stressful, because one has to wait to be with that person to see whether somebody on the other side of the House is also in the same boat so one can be paired.

Mr Davis: That is the last intervention that I will take, Mr Speaker, because I will finish in about 10 seconds.

This is a massively important issue and I hope we will carry it nem con tonight, but we must understand that this will not be the end of the reform. It will lead to a series of reforms that are right and proper for this House and will improve our Parliament.

11.3 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is a real pleasure to speak in this debate. It is heartening that so many colleagues from both sides of the House have waited until 11 pm to participate in this important and historic conversation. There is a historical perspective on this. Members may not be aware that until 1868, according to “*Erskine May*”, Members had the opportunity to have a proxy vote in the House of Lords, and there were also proxies in our medieval Parliament, so in fact we are reinstating an age-old tradition.

To bring us back to the present day, it is just a few weeks until the arrival of my second child. A colleague said in jest that I am sitting here in self-interest. Let me be very clear that this change cannot come quickly enough for my constituents and for what we can and should be doing on behalf of the country.

If this motion does not pass tonight, I will continue to do what I did last time. When I had my first child, I came back to the House for some urgent votes. Colleagues might recall seeing me sitting in the Lobbies breastfeeding my baby when they were less than three or four months old.

I did so until 11 pm one evening in the Tea Room. That is not the best environment for a new-born, although I would do it again if I had to. At this critical juncture for our country, it is important that no Member on either side of the House should have to make that choice and be here only for certain votes.

I echo the point that colleagues have made about the example we set. We legislate for maternity and paternity rights, and in 2019 we should be leading by example. The fact that we rely on an informal pairing system that depends on the Whips is not acceptable. I also echo the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds). I did an interview on television earlier, although I will not embarrass the presenter who made this just about mums. As has been said, this is not just about mothers; it is about dads, too, and I hope that after this year-long trial we can make further strides to extend it beyond the two-week paternity leave—important though that is—to cover shared parental leave. Having secured that in the House, we should be leading by example and having it here too.

In conclusion, I thank the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House, your good self, Mr Speaker, and the Procedure Committee for being impatient that this has taken so long. There have been steps on the way that have urged it along. We should not have to choose between our responsibilities as Members of Parliament and our responsibilities as parents. The two really can go hand in hand. If we are serious about making this a place that welcomes people of all ages and backgrounds and about encouraging people to consider standing for public office, and particularly if we are serious about addressing the gender imbalance we still see, this move will make a really big difference. I hope the House supports it tonight.

11.6 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): As Government Chief Whip, I had responsibility for managing the pairing system, so it is a matter of some regret to me to listen to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), as I have done previously, and talk about her experiences and how she and other Members lost confidence in the pairing system. I would rather that confidence had been regained, but given that it has clearly not been, these proposals are welcome and I support them. I also welcome what the hon. Lady and others said about extending the provisions to cover shared parental leave. We have legislated for that arrangement for those outside the House; it seems to me that, if we are making provision inside the House, we should do so on that basis.

My final point is a note of caution. Perhaps this is to be built into the review mechanism, but transparency cuts both ways. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) said about the criticism she received for not appearing to be doing her job when she was quite properly absent from the House, but I would caution that pairing can sometimes be valuable in allowing Members to be absent for reasons they do not wish to be transparent about. I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) explaining his absences. If a Member is ill, they may wish to be transparent about it, but often Members cannot be here because of family

[Mr Mark Harper]

circumstances—children, parents or other family members—and we should be conscious of the need to enable them to be absent in a way that does not force either them or their family members to put into the public domain the reasons for their absence.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): It is important to stress that no one has to take a proxy vote; it will always be voluntary, and Members could continue with the pairing system. Like other Members, when I was on maternity leave, the campaigning group 38 Degrees emailed my constituents and said, “Where was Rachel Reeves?” The answer was I was on maternity leave with a very young baby, but it did not bother to check its facts. Many of my constituents thought I had just not bothered to turn up.

Mr Harper: The hon. Lady’s experience just confirms what I have thought for many years about 38 Degrees and the way it campaigns against Members. I have always found that robust pushback and setting out the facts to my constituents have been very helpful. I take her point seriously. I would caution only that as we look at the results of the pilot, we should bear in mind that there are many circumstances in which colleagues may need to be absent, sometimes for reasons that they do not wish to share, and that no one in any other workplace would ever have to make public. I want us to ensure that we do not implement a system that makes it more difficult for people to keep private things that should remain private.

Just in practical terms, if the pairing system is to work, we need enough colleagues who are not here to be available to pair with. The hon. Lady was right to say that no one would be forced to use the proxy voting system, but if we end up with proxy voting it will become increasingly difficult for pairing to proceed, and colleagues may therefore find that they are forced to use the system in circumstances where they do not wish to draw attention to the fact that they are not able to be here. That is the only cautionary note that I wanted to add to the debate. I am very supportive of the specific proposals.

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Bury North, I must emphasise that I want the Leader of the House to have the chance to wind up the debate no later than 11.14 pm.

11.10 pm

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I am delighted to add my voice to the call for proxy voting. Just two months into my new job as a Member of Parliament, my wife gave birth to our fourth child, Bobby. As a relatively new MP and a modern dad, I expected a modern Parliament, but, 36 hours after our son’s arrival, I had to be here on a heavy three-line whip. My wife and I were in the delivery ward facing an early inducement, as Nikki had a high-risk pregnancy and gestational diabetes. The knowledge that that process would last for days and would quite possibly clash with the vote, and my need to be present for both, brought an edge to the room that was frankly unhealthy. The fact that such a

dilemma reached the delivery suite demonstrates, I hope, what an inflexible parliamentary process we have, and why this place must change.

Last night, over dinner, in anticipation of my speech this evening, my wife admitted that she had had a cry with the midwife about it. It seems that without modernisation, our fundamental role as MPs serving our towns must be pitted against our fundamental role in life as husband, wife, mum or dad. Parliament is steeped in tradition, but at times it seems impossible to move. We cannot deny the force of the arrival of life, thank goodness, although I suspect that otherwise some might try.

A work-life balance is an important attribute for every workplace, including Parliament, and that should include remote or proxy voting in special circumstances. The issue is raised in “New Brooms”, a book produced by the Fabian Society, which includes contributions on reform from 10 of my Labour colleagues from the 2017 intake. Tonight marks an important step as we think about how to implement ideas for reforms that speak to the country—as my colleagues have said—and strengthen our democracy, make Parliament more effective for those whom we are sent to represent, and make our place of work resemble those that the people we represent would recognise.

The urgency of the need for reform has never been starker than in recent times, with a minority Government, knife-edge votes and a breakdown in some of the traditional agreements such as pairing. There is too much process and not enough product here. Daily life for the many will not improve while we shuffle about with such reforms. This place needs to be better and work better for those whose lives we are here to make better, and so to be best for our towns and country. Proxy voting can be the first through the gate in the next generation of reforms to this Parliament, and I give it my full support—as a dad.

11.13 pm

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith). What a fantastic way to end our debate: a speech about the importance of dads. Sometimes there is something on which we can all agree, and the importance of dads is one of them.

I share the pleasure of many Members at the fact that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) will—we hope—be able to use the first proxy vote tomorrow. It may be the first time since the 19th century, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) mentioned, but it certainly will not be the last. This is fantastic news for Parliament, and it is something that we can all get behind in our attempts to make ours a modern workplace to which more people from more diverse backgrounds, of different ages and at different stages in their lives, will feel proud to come to represent their constituents.

I hope that all Members will support these motions, and prove that when we really get together we can do great things.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House:—

(1) reaffirms its resolution of 1 February 2018 on baby leave for Members of Parliament;

(2) endorses the Fifth Report of the Procedure Committee, HC 825, on Proxy voting and parental absence;

(3) accordingly directs the Speaker to prepare a pilot scheme governing the operation of proxy voting for Members absent from the House by reason of childbirth or care of an infant or newly adopted child, pursuant to the recommendations in the Committee's report, this resolution and the temporary Standing Order (Voting by proxy for parental absence);

(4) directs that a scheme prepared in accordance with this resolution and the temporary Standing Order (Voting by proxy for parental absence) shall be signed by the Speaker and the leaders of the three largest parties in the House before it is published, and that it shall enter into effect for a period of 12 months when the Speaker takes the chair on the sitting day after the day of publication;

(5) directs that any amendment of a scheme in effect by virtue of paragraph (4) above shall take effect when the Speaker takes the Chair on the sitting day after a proposal signed by the Speaker and the leaders of the three largest parties in the House is published; and

(6) directs the Procedure Committee to review proxy voting arrangements within 12 months of the commencement of a scheme established by virtue of this order.—(*Andrea Leadsom.*)

PROXY VOTING (TEMPORARY STANDING ORDER)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

Voting by proxy for parental absence (Temporary Standing Order)

(1) A Member may, by reason of absence from the precincts of the House for childbirth or care of an infant or newly adopted child, arrange for their vote to be cast in accordance with this order by another Member acting as a proxy (a proxy vote).

(2) A proxy vote may be cast:

(a) in a division in the House, in Committee of the whole House, or in any legislative grand committee, in relation to the business specified in paragraph (3) below;

(b) on business specified in paragraph (3) below recorded in a division under Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions), and

(c) in a ballot cast in an election under Standing Order No. 1B (Election of Speaker by secret ballot), Standing Order No. 2A (Election of the Deputy Speakers) and Standing Order No. 122B (Election of select committee chairs).

(3) Subject to paragraph (4) below, a proxy vote may be cast on all public and private business of the House.

(4) No proxy vote shall be cast in a division on any motion in the form specified in section 2(2) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.

(5) No proxy vote shall be reckoned in the numbers participating in a division for the purposes of (a) Standing Order No. 41(1) (Quorum), and (b) Standing Order No. 37 (Majority for closure or for proposal of question).

(6) A proxy vote may be cast only if the Speaker has certified that the Member for whom the vote is to be cast is eligible under the terms of this order and the Resolution of the House of Monday 28 January and if that certificate, including the name of the Member nominated as a proxy, has been published in the Votes and Proceedings.

(7) A vote cast by a proxy shall be clearly indicated as such in the division lists published under the authority of the House.

(8) This Standing Order shall lapse upon the expiry of the proxy voting scheme established under the terms of this order and the Resolution of the House of Monday 28 January.—(*Andrea Leadsom.*)

Amendment made: (d), after paragraph (7) insert:

“(7A) The Speaker may also make provision for the exercise of a proxy vote for Members who have suffered a miscarriage.”—(*Philip Davies.*)

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.
Ordered,

Voting by proxy for parental absence (Temporary Standing Order)

(1) A Member may, by reason of absence from the precincts of the House for childbirth or care of an infant or newly adopted child, arrange for their vote to be cast in accordance with this order by another Member acting as a proxy (a proxy vote).

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(7) A vote cast by a proxy shall be clearly indicated as such in the division lists published under the authority of the House.

(7A) The Speaker may also make provision for the exercise of a proxy vote for Members who have suffered a miscarriage.

(8) This Standing Order shall lapse upon the expiry of the proxy voting scheme established under the terms of this order and the Resolution of the House of Monday 28 January.

Mr Speaker: The Leader of the House signalled this, but for the avoidance of doubt and the sake of clarity, following the decision of the House on motions 6 and 7, as amended, I wish to make a brief statement.

As has already been alluded to during the debate, the pilot scheme that I am directed to prepare has been signed by myself, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the parliamentary leader of the Scottish National party. The scheme, colleagues, will be published this evening and will therefore indeed have effect from tomorrow.

I also confirm that I expect my first certificate of eligibility to be published in the Votes and Proceedings for today, enabling a proxy vote to be cast tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (INSOLVENCY)

That the draft Insolvency (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 19 November 2018, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Interchange Fee (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 22 November 2018, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CONSUMER PROTECTION)

That the draft Consumer Protection (Enforcement) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 4 December 2018, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 30 January (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CIVIL AVIATION)

That the draft Air Services (Competition) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 5 December 2018, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Market Abuse (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 6 December 2018, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS)

That the draft Credit Rating Agencies (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 December 2018, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 30 January (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (MERCHANT SHIPPING)

That the draft Ship Recycling (Facilities and Requirements for Hazardous Materials on Ships) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 December 2018, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

School Exclusions and Youth Violence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Freer.)

11.19 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this extremely important debate to the House. As I hope that the Minister and other hon. Members are aware, I am chair of the cross-party Youth Violence Commission. I established the commission in 2016 as a response to an alarming increase in deaths among young people in my constituency, in London and across the country. We published our initial policy recommendations in July 2018.

I have called many times in the House for the development of a public health policy to tackle violence, and I was pleased that the Government and the Mayor of London committed to that approach at the end of last year. The commission is now working hard to ensure that those words turn into action, and I am pleased that the Mayor of London has established a violence reduction unit similar to that adopted in Scotland to develop this approach. I am still waiting to see what the Government are doing. As part of its ongoing work, the commission is starting to flesh out some of its individual policy recommendations. I would like to use the debate to focus on recommendation No. 4 from our report, which is about boosting support in schools. More specifically, I will be examining the relationship between exclusions and violence, and the role of pupil referral units and alternative provision.

This is in no way intended to be an anti-PRU debate. During my time with the commission, I have seen some brilliantly run PRUs that achieve great outcomes for many of their students. However, I believe that we need a radical re-think of how funding is organised so that we can prevent the need for PRUs in the first place.

I hope that the Minister has had time to read the commission's report for himself, as the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) clearly had when she responded to my Adjournment debate on the role of youth services in tackling violence. I was pleased to see in today's press that she continues to stand up for vulnerable young people by criticising her Government's delay in introducing a law to make it illegal for sports coaches to have sexual relations with 16 and 17-year-olds in their care.

The number of pupils being permanently excluded from schools is on the rise. Between 2012-13 and 2016-17, the number increased by 67%. Referrals to children's services when gangs are identified as a factor at assessment rose by 26% between 2015-16 and 2016-17. During the same period, hospital admissions for under-18s who had been assaulted with a sharp object rose by 20%.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Lady has brought an important issue to the House for consideration. The stats show that 72% of parents think that when their child is excluded from school they are at risk from youth violence. This suggests that there is real concern among parents about the problems that follow exclusion from school. Does the hon. Lady agree that that concern must be addressed to ensure that there is life and a place to go after exclusion?

Vicky Foxcroft: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Therein lies one of our problems: when kids are seen to be excluded, they are not only excluded from school; they can sometimes feel like they are absolutely excluded from society as well.

To go back to my point about figures and statistics, I believe that this is incredibly concerning, particularly given that the Government's own serious violence strategy recognises school exclusions as one of the risk factors for involvement in serious violence.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing the debate and her generosity in giving way. Analysis was done of 60 serious cases of youth violence in Croydon, and in every case, that child was outside mainstream school. We also have in Croydon a situation that is mirrored elsewhere: some schools seem to exclude huge numbers while others tend not to exclude at all. The disparity makes it clear that something has gone wrong, so does my hon. Friend agree that we need to consider what Ofsted and other organisations can do to try to stop so many exclusions happening in certain schools?

Vicky Foxcroft: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. The work in Croydon has been fantastic at identifying the need to follow the evidence, and the evidence clearly points to the link between school exclusions and youth violence. It is important that we continue always to follow the evidence.

I know of 10 young people in my constituency who have been killed as a result of youth violence since I was elected in 2015, and we know about those cases only because they have been reported in the press or the families have contacted me. It should not come as a surprise to Members that certain groups of children are more likely to be excluded and end up in alternative provision settings. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research's 2017 report "Making the Difference: Breaking the Link Between School Exclusion and Social Exclusion", excluded pupils are many times more likely to come from a vulnerable background compared with the general student population in England. They are 10 times more likely to suffer from mental health problems, seven times more likely to have a special educational need, four times more likely to qualify for free school meals, and twice as likely to be in the care of the state.

What about the outcomes for those young people? The commission's research has shown that it is difficult to separate out pupil referral units from data on all alternative provision settings, which include those that provide education for children who cannot attend a mainstream school for other reasons. However, the data that we do have makes for depressing reading. In 2016-17, only 4.5% of children educated in alternative provision settings achieved a 9-to-4 pass—an A to C in old money—in GCSE English and maths. By comparison, of the mainstream school population in England, 72.4% achieved a pass in English literature and 70.7% in maths.

Reintegration into mainstream education may also be used as a measure of success. However, the Education Committee's 2018 report "Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions" suggests that it

"is often not a possible outcome for pupils, with some schools being reluctant to reintegrate pupils."

Although some PRUs provide support for pupils who are reintegrated, that does not apply across the board. When pupils are reintegrated without such support, schools can struggle to keep them in school, and they are likely to return to alternative provision. Once they leave the pupil referral unit, the picture remains bleak.

A 2012 Ministry of Justice study found that 42% of prisoners reported having been permanently excluded from school, with the figure rising to 63% for temporary exclusions. That provides a stark contrast when compared with the less than 1% of the general population in England who end up in prison. The same Education Committee report found that 94% of year 11 pupils from a mainstream or special school go on to sustained education or an employment or training destination, compared with 57% from alternative provision. That has had the knock-on effect that pupils from alternative provision face limited choices when they leave education.

Of course, it is not inevitable that pupils who have been excluded will go on to become involved in serious violence and crime. However, we cannot ignore the link between school exclusion and social exclusion. Once children and young people are permanently excluded, it is difficult for them to re-enter mainstream education. That means that they are more vulnerable to grooming by criminals and to becoming the victims or perpetrators of violent crime.

What are pupil referral units costing us? The answer is not entirely straightforward. Each place receives £10,000 of central Government funding, but that is topped up by local authorities to varying degrees, depending on each individual's need. In answer to a written question, the Department for Education told me that it estimates the average per-pupil cost of alternative provision, including PRUs, to be £17,000 nationally. By way of example, the average cost of a place at Abbey Manor College, the PRU local to my constituency, is £18,000, which is £1,000 a year more than the average cost of a place at a private school in 2018, and almost three times the cost of a state secondary school place in the same year.

As part of our research, the Youth Violence Commission held five evidence sessions. At the third of these we heard from experts, teachers, practitioners and, most importantly, young people themselves about the vital role that education can play in the prevention of youth violence, but what shape should that role take? Our interim report made five recommendations in this area. The first, and perhaps the most important, was for a long-term aspiration of zero expulsions from mainstream education and a reallocation of funding away from PRUs towards support and earlier intervention in mainstream schools. In order to achieve that, schools must be properly incentivised to keep pupils on their books.

The launch of Ofsted's consultation on its new framework for the inspection of schools and colleges offers some hope that things may be starting to move in the right direction. The proposals aim to address concerns that education has become too narrowly focused on exam results, and schools that push out less able children—a practice known as off-rolling—could now risk being punished by inspectors. However, it is clear that a great deal remains to be done if we are to achieve this necessary shift in focus.

The Youth Violence Commission's report also recommends an overhaul of the way in which careers advice is delivered in schools to ensure greater inclusion,

[Vicky Foxcroft]

greater emphasis on high-quality sex and relationships education, and better integration of support services such as school nurses, social workers and mental health professionals.

Once we had our recommendations, we needed to test them on the professionals. Earlier this month I met representatives from five teaching unions. I have to admit that I had expected some push-back against the commission's recommendations. Teaching, as we all know, is already a demanding and stressful job, and I feared that the unions would view the recommendations as putting more pressure on their already overworked members. Well, I am pleased to report that I could not have been more wrong. I learned that there is huge appetite and enthusiasm for teachers to be able to do more to help vulnerable pupils. However, they simply lack the time and resources.

Four main strands came out of our discussion, the first of which is that we need to learn from what worked in the past. In 2002, the Labour Government set up the behaviour improvement programme as part of their street crime initiative. The programme targeted 34 local authorities that had some of the highest crime rates, and worked with two to four secondary schools in each area and their feeder primaries. The programme's behaviour and education support teams provided a full range of specialist support to vulnerable pupils.

The same Government's "Every Child Matters: Change for Children" agenda was launched in 2003 to promote the wellbeing of children and young people. Ministers wanted to ensure that every child had the support that he or she needed to stay healthy, to be safe, to achieve economically, to make a positive contribution to society and to enjoy life. That is not unreasonable, as I am sure the Minister would agree.

Healthcare practitioners, social workers, early years practitioners and other agencies shared information about vulnerable children. The child was central to their plans, and partners regularly worked with them in an attempt to achieve the best possible outcomes. Sadly, the coalition Government brought those programmes to an end in 2010.

Secondly, the union representatives suggested that pupil referral units should play a greater part in early intervention and prevention. In the past, PRUs engaged in inreach work with mainstream schools to try to prevent exclusions from happening in the first place. Unfortunately, that is no longer happening due to funding cuts, which mean that PRUs are able to perform only their statutory minimum duty.

I made an intervention on last week's Adjournment debate secured by the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on funding for pupil referral units to raise this point about funding for inreach work. Although the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), went some way towards addressing it, I hope that the Minister for School Standards might be able to give a fuller response today.

The third point that came out of the consultation meeting was the need for inclusive accountability. It was suggested that schools should be held accountable for every student who walks through their doors in year 7.

Although that might cause some problems with schools refusing to take perceived "problem" pupils in the first place, it would address the problem of off-rolling in GCSE years in an attempt to improve results. This clearly links with the proposed changes to the Ofsted framework I mentioned. Finally, the unions highlighted the need to build resilience in young teachers, especially regarding how to cope with behavioural issues and violence. Behaviour management should be a higher priority in teacher training programmes. At present, trainees are given inadequate guidance on how to support and manage behaviour.

In conclusion, I am asking the Department to consider conducting a fundamental review of how funding for alternative provision is best spent. As I stated earlier, the Youth Violence Commission's findings ultimately point towards achieving zero exclusions, but we note that this is a long-term goal and that smaller steps need to be achieved along the way. Primary school teachers frequently tell me that they can identify which of their pupils are likely to be involved in future violence. The current system is failing too many of those children and simply has to change.

I will finish with a few words from one of the young people who attended our evidence session:

"I didn't get a lot of support at school. I just got moved from place to place and I didn't have a mentor to be able to talk about my problems with. I basically grew up in prison—I went when I was 15."

I hope that the Minister agrees that that is categorically not the outcome we want for our vulnerable young people and that he will be able to address some of the points I have raised.

11.36 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) on securing this debate and on her speech, and I pay tribute to her for her work as chair of the Youth Violence Commission.

Over the past year, too many young people have lost their lives as a result of violence, including 14-year-old Jaden Moodie just a few weeks ago. Tackling this issue is a priority, and we know the impact of these tragic incidents is devastating for both the families and friends of those concerned. This is not a matter that can be tackled in isolation, which is why the Serious Violence Taskforce was established by the Government in April 2018. Chaired by the Home Secretary, it brings together cross-party MPs, police leaders, local government and the voluntary sector with the aim of ensuring that sustained and decisive action is taken against violent crime.

The Government's serious violence strategy, published in April 2018, signals a step change in the Government's approach. It is focused not solely on law enforcement, important as that is, but on a multi-agency approach across a number of sectors, such as education, health and social services. Early intervention and prevention are at the core of the strategy, which is why the Home Office has established the early intervention youth fund. Through the fund, 29 local projects in England and Wales have been awarded a total of £17.7 million over two years to divert children and young people away from violent crime.

Schools play an important role in the safeguarding of pupils. Schools and colleges, including alternative provision, to which the hon. Lady referred, have a statutory obligation to safeguard and promote the welfare of their pupils. The Department has clear guidance in “Keeping children safe in education” and “Working together to safeguard children”. They set out what schools and colleges should and must do to implement their obligations, and how agencies should work together to ensure the welfare of children. The Department has worked with the Home Office, the police, Ofsted and the Health and Safety Executive to produce new school security guidance, which makes explicit reference to the serious issue of knife crime. We have also created a resource for teachers, so they can raise awareness about the dangers of knife crime among young people. This complements the national knife crime media campaign that has been launched, #knifefree, to raise awareness of the consequences of knife crime.

Equally crucial in safeguarding children and young people is the role of social care. Evidence from joint targeted area inspections of local authorities, health and police has shown that children who have grown up neglected are vulnerable to exploitation as adolescents. That is why the Department is improving the quality of children’s social care services, including through an £84 million investment in strengthening families and protecting children, as well as establishing a new national response unit to help local authorities to support vulnerable children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation, including through county lines and other forms of gang involvement and sexual exploitation.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) on securing this Adjournment debate and on the tireless work that she has put into driving forward the work of the youth violence commission. Does my hon. Friend agree that education, local government and health all have a part to play in diverting young people away from serious violence, and that although the Ministry of Justice makes the savings when we divert young people from prison and criminality, we should look into some way to recycle the savings back into those areas of Government upstream of the problem, so that we can keep young people safe and out of trouble?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend makes an important point. That is why the taskforce was established in the first place: to make sure that we were not operating in silos and that those sorts of funding issues did not prevent the action that we know needs to be taken.

Children who need help and protection from social care—those with a social worker—not only lack safety and stability but often have very poor educational outcomes, including being more likely to be excluded than other pupils. The children in need review aims to understand what works to help those vulnerable children to reach their potential.

Let me move on to the important issue of pupil behaviour and the related matter of school exclusions. The Government are committed to ensuring that all teachers are equipped with the skills to tackle the serious behavioural issues that compromise the safety and wellbeing of pupils and school staff, as well as the low-level disruption that too often gets in the way of effective teaching. It is vital that all schools are safe and disciplined

environments. There is more to be done, though, which is why the Government are investing £10 million to create behaviour hubs to facilitate the sharing of best practice in classroom and behaviour management. We have also strengthened teachers’ powers to discipline pupils. Teachers can now take action on poor behaviour that takes place outside of school. We have also clarified teachers’ powers to use reasonable force, they have stronger powers to search pupils for items that could be used to cause harm or break the law, and they can now issue same-day detentions.

Parents also have a fundamental role to play and are often well placed to support schools with the early identification of any problems that may be influencing a child’s behaviour. The special educational needs and disability code of practice, for example, sets out that schools should work with parents to identify any underlying problems that might be related to behavioural issues. Any form of violence in schools is unacceptable. Schools’ behaviour policies should set out how poor behaviour, including incidents of violence, are dealt with. Should the incident constitute a criminal offence, the school should of course report it to the police.

All children have the right to a school environment that is safe and conducive to education, and the Government and I fully support headteachers in the use of exclusion where it is warranted. Exclusion on any grounds other than behaviour is unlawful, but it is for the headteacher to take the decision based on the evidence available and the need to balance the interests of the excluded pupil against those of the whole school community. There has been in recent media coverage some misinformed conflation of fixed-term exclusions with permanent exclusions. The statutory guidance on exclusions makes it clear that, in all cases, a decision to permanently exclude a pupil should be taken only in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of a school’s behaviour policy, and if allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of others in the school. But exclusion from school must not mean exclusion from education. When a child is excluded, suitable full-time education has to be arranged from the sixth school day of exclusion.

There are differences in exclusion rates between schools, between different local authority areas of the country, and between pupils with different characteristics, despite all state-funded schools in England operating under the same exclusions framework. That is why last spring the Government launched an externally led review of exclusions practice, led by our former colleague Edward Timpson, which is due to be published shortly. This will examine the factors that drive those differences, and also explore and evaluate best practice for those where the disparities are less significant.

Regarding the potential links between exclusions and crime, which the hon. Lady mentioned in her opening remarks, it is correct that children who have been excluded from school are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. A recent study found that 23% of young offenders sentenced in 2014 to less than 12 months in custody had been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentence date. However, while there is some correlation between exclusion and crime, we do not have evidence to suggest a causal link. What we do know is that there are children who face difficult circumstances, where complex and multiple vulnerabilities

[Nick Gibb]

can damage their outcomes, falling behind others from the early years onwards. Of pupils in 2016-17, approximately one in 10 needed a social worker over the previous six years. Of these, 35% also had special educational needs, 42% also claimed free school meals, and 17% faced all three disadvantages. The compounding impact of these children's vulnerability on their educational outcomes can be entrenched by poor experiences in education, including exclusion.

The Ministry of Justice did publish some analysis last June that looked at the educational background of young offenders who had committed a knife offence, and it was not possible to identify whether there is an association between exclusions and knife possession offending. Although a higher proportion of offenders had been persistently absent or excluded from school, only a very small proportion committed the knife possession offence shortly after being excluded from school. Around 74% of offenders committed the offence more than one year after being permanently excluded.

As I have said, exclusion from school must not mean exclusion from education. Alternative provision is the system that is in place to educate those pupils who are unable to attend mainstream school. This could be for a variety of reasons, be they behavioural or following on from exclusion. There are some excellent examples of alternative provision that not only have high standards for behaviour, progress and attainment, but have strong interventions in place to support their pupils at risk of

involvement in crime. For example, London East AP—LEAP—has an ethos of high expectations on pupils' results, outcomes and behaviour. It does not accept an excuse culture among staff and pupils. That type of alternative provision is not necessarily widespread across the country, and we are determined to make sure that every alternative provision setting is as good as the best in the country and that the best practice is shared. That is why we are taking forward an ambitious programme of reform of the AP system over the coming months and years, which we believe will deliver sustained improvement.

As we set out in our vision document published last March, our objective is to make sure that the right children are placed in the right alternative provision, that they receive a high-quality education and that they achieve meaningful outcomes after leaving alternative provision.

In conclusion, I want to assure the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford that this Government are determined to do everything they can to break the deadly cycle of violence that devastates the lives of individuals, families and communities. In doing this, it is vital to develop a truly effective, multi-agency approach to tackle the root causes of violence. We must continue to work together, so that every young person is safe and free to fulfil their potential, away from violence.

Question put and agreed to.

11.48 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 28 January 2019

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Cervical Cancer Smear Tests

4.30 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 225767 relating to lowering the age for smear tests for cervical cancer from 25 to 18.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. Before I move to the substance of the debate, I want to say a little about the woman who started the petition, Natasha Sale. She died on 28 December last year. She was 31 and left four children. I have spoken to her friends this afternoon, and I think Natasha must have been a remarkable person, because it takes a remarkable person to decide, when they have a terminal diagnosis, that they will use their time to help others rather than to bemoan their fate. That is what Natasha did. In her petition, she said that

“it’s too late for me but it’s not too late for the next generation”.

I thank her family and friends, who encouraged people to sign the petition to get the debate today. I particularly thank Natasha’s family, who have kindly said they are happy with the debate going ahead. That, too, takes courage, and I am grateful to them.

Cervical cancer is something that all women fear. Like breast cancer, it strikes at the heart of how we see ourselves and how we define ourselves as women. Because of that, screening programmes have been introduced in this country. In fact, screening is changing so that women will be tested for the human papillomavirus before they get cervical screening, because most but not all cervical cancers are caused by HPV. Screening is currently on offer only to women between the ages of 25 and 64. Those between 25 and 49 are called every three years and those from 50 upwards are called every five years, yet the reasoning behind that offer is perhaps not often understood. Before the age of 25, not only is such cancer very rare, but changes in the cervix are very common. A test can produce false positives and lead to unnecessary treatment and anxiety for women.

Nevertheless, there have been repeated calls to lower the age of screening, not only in this petition, but in others, including one we received previously. In response, the Government would rightly say that the UK National Screening Committee has looked at the evidence and decided that there is no real evidence to support reducing the age of screening. Their reasoning, which is valid, is that one in three tests below that age will produce a false positive; and that, when people are given unnecessary treatment, there is a risk to future pregnancies. I hope the Government will publish the evidence on the risks of getting cervical cancer at that age and the risks from screening so that women can make an informed decision. They should publish that in a way that can be understood by people who, like me, are not doctors or scientists. The evidence is often couched in scientific jargon, which conveys very little to most of us. That is the first important thing that we want to do.

Even with that evidence published, there will always be some cases, and cases in young women can be very tragic. They can lead to the loss of a young life, and often leave children without their mother. Because the disease can be so devastating, in 2008 the then Labour Government introduced a programme of vaccination against the most virulent forms of HPV for all girls from the age of 12. In fact, for that first cohort, we vaccinated up to the age of 18 to catch up. Those who were 18 at the time will now be undergoing their first screening. If as expected the rate of cervical cancer in that age group drops, it will have been well worth while.

When the programme was introduced, I well remember MPs getting a lot of letters from parents saying they did not want their daughters vaccinated—it still happens—because they somehow saw it as encouraging promiscuity. That is not what vaccination is about. It is about vaccinating girls before they become sexually active. I hope parents will think about the risk they are putting their daughters through if they do not have the vaccinations.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for presenting the case in the petition. While the vaccine has been shown to lower incidence of cervical cancer, does she agree that cervical screening should take place as a matter of urgency, initially for those who are sexually active? The average age when sexual activity begins is 15.6 years across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Does she agree that people cannot be allowed to wait 10 years for a first cervical smear? It must be addressed immediately.

Helen Jones: I will answer that point in a moment, because it is important that we look at the evidence. There will always be some cases, even among women under 25. We can never eliminate the risk completely. When that happens, it is important they get the right treatment. That is why in 2010 guidelines were published for GPs to ensure that young women who presented with abnormal symptoms were offered screening and referred on to a consultant if necessary. That does not always happen—I will come on to that in a moment.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I apologise that I cannot stay for the whole debate. What monitoring is done of GPs providing that screening, including for women over the age of 25? I had a smear that presented as abnormal. I had HPV. I went to my local GP and asked for my smear test that I was required to have and was told that they did not do smear tests. What monitoring is being done to ensure that all GPs are adhering to the guidance and their duties under the legislation?

Helen Jones: My hon. Friend makes a very good point and I will be asking the Minister to look at that. Our first problem is getting people through the door. If there is something wrong with us, it is natural to think either that it will somehow go away or that it might be cancer—we kid ourselves that, if we do not get a diagnosis, it is somehow not happening. We need to have much more publicity to encourage young women to report to their GP if they have abnormal symptoms. After all, it might not be cancer and they might be reassured. Equally, if it is cancer, the sooner someone gets treated, the better their chances of survival. I do not think that that message is always getting through, particularly to younger women.

[Helen Jones]

The other problem is that the rates of people attending screening, even among those who are eligible, are falling. In the last year for which I have figures, only 69.1% of eligible women attended their screening appointments. That is down from 73.7% in 2011. In practice, that means that 3.5 million women in this country have not been screened in the past three and a half years. That is very worrying. Even more worrying is the fact that 1.7 million have never had a test. Some 345,000 have not had a test in the past 10 years. What is more, there are significant regional variations in the rates of screening. For instance, for those aged between 25 and 49, the rate of screening in London is 61.6%. In the north-east, it is 72.9%. Among over-50s, the rate in London is 74% and in the east midlands 78%. We need to look closely at those figures and find out why women do not attend. It is no use getting into the blame culture. We need to ask the right questions. Are they frightened, for example? Are appointments not at convenient times? Are there particular groups of women who do not turn up for screening? It is probably a mixture of all three.

I was sent some very interesting information from Jo's Trust, who asked a group of young women in a survey why they did not attend for their screening. Seventy-one per cent. said they were frightened of the test and 75% said they felt vulnerable. A whopping 81% said they were embarrassed, which is a particular factor for young women who are constantly bombarded with air-brushed photos of what they should look like and what their bodies should be like, so they suffer from a lot of body consciousness. Despite the fact that doctors and nurses keep repeating, "We don't care what you look like, we are not interested in what you are wearing, we do hundreds of these tests", the message is not getting through. It is therefore important that tests are conducted in a supportive environment.

Interestingly, in the same survey, 67% of the women said they had felt they were not in control of the test and 68% said they would not discuss their fears with a doctor or a nurse. That particular problem applies to survivors of sexual assault: 72% are put off going for their screening or do not go at all. It is vital that women are screened in a supportive environment where they get the chance to discuss any fears they have with a practitioner beforehand.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I apologise for not being able to be here for the whole of this absolutely critical debate. Cervical screening uptake in Wales is at an all-time low. More than a quarter of women did not attend their cervical screening in the past year. Importantly, last September, Wales became the first nation in the UK to provide high-risk HPV testing as the primary cervical screening test across Wales. It leads to more sensitive and specific tests, more certainty for patients and more appropriate referrals to colposcopy services, faster treatment and then faster discharge times. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Helen Jones: Yes, and I hope those tests will be rolled out across the rest of Britain.

On the problem of women getting access to screening services, time and again they report that they ring their GP for an appointment that is then weeks ahead. Someone

I met recently told me that, in her case, it is months ahead. It can be as much as 10 weeks. All are offered appointments at times they cannot attend, perhaps because they work shifts—that applies particularly to younger women who are more likely to be in insecure employment and therefore not eager to ask for time off.

I do not know why we persist in this, but very often the comments on screening give the impression that someone is saying, "These stupid women are not going for their screening." Actually, there is a problem of access. I remember when we had mobile breast cancer screening units that came to a place of work. I got my blood pressure tested in the middle of Warrington shopping centre because the hospital had a programme to encourage people to go for testing in case they were at risk of vascular disease. Why can we not do more to take cervical screening to places where women are? Why can they not be screened in the workplace, for example, where groups of women are much more likely to say, "Come on! We will all go together"? It is not beyond the wit of man to arrange that.

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Helen Jones: I will give way one more time and then I must make some progress.

Jim Shannon: Constituents have expressed concerns to me on two issues: first, that it is very painful; and secondly that it is embarrassing. When it comes to giving peace of mind to ladies going for cervical cancer screening at whatever age, it is very important that the doctors and GPs are involved at an early stage to put their minds at rest. The importance of cervical cancer screening cannot be underlined enough, but the ladies need to be assured of not having the pain and embarrassment, which is a big task for the NHS.

Helen Jones: The hon. Gentleman is right. Women need to be assured that they will be treated sympathetically, whatever their age. All of us who have been to screening know that sometimes it is fine, but sometimes someone is a bit ham-fisted and it is not fine. It is better than getting cancer.

Another issue needs tackling: when women under 25 present with abnormal symptoms such as abnormal vaginal bleeding, they are not always treated according to the guidelines. In fact, they are frequently not treated according to guidelines. There are plenty of examples of younger women going to their GP with symptoms and being told they are too young for cervical screening, and plenty of examples of women going time and again and, as one lady told me earlier, being fobbed off. The problem is that GPs do not see a lot of cases and cervical cancer is therefore not the first thing they think of. The Government must do more to alert GPs to the possibility of cancer to get early diagnosis and ensure that people are referred to consultants where necessary.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady that GPs and others must take the concerns of young people under 25 seriously. I recently attended a pensioners' parliament in Northern Ireland and many women over 64 spoke of the difficulty of being taken seriously when they go to the doctor. The vast majority of deaths from cervical cancer happen

to those over 50 and many of those over 64. Is that not also an issue that needs to be addressed? Those women feel that they are being left behind.

Helen Jones: The hon. Lady makes a good point. We need people to realise that women know their own bodies and know if something is wrong, so people must listen to what they say. There are too many examples of women having to pay for a private test before finding out they have cervical cancer. If it is not diagnosed early, there is a chance it will become terminal. If it is diagnosed early, the chances of survival are much greater, so we need to ensure that people are diagnosed early.

On the question of whether the age for screening should be reduced, I am not convinced at the moment. The scientific evidence does not support it, but I hope that the Government will keep it under review. If the evidence changes, we need to change what we do. Sir Mike Richards is undertaking a review of cancer screening and is due to report by Easter. I hope he looks at the issue. Ministers must ensure that they get the best advice and they have to proceed on that advice. We have to remember that, rare as it is, in 2016, 15% of women diagnosed with cervical cancer were under 30, and last year, 12 of those who died were under 30. We can and should do much more to prevent such deaths by ensuring that women are screened where necessary, even if they are under 25. If they have indications that require them to be screened, they should be. We must ensure that we promote the HPV vaccination programme, which is one of the best things that has been done in recent years. I say to parents who worry about it, “Don’t put your daughters at risk. Get them vaccinated.” We have to do much more to convince them that vaccination is the right thing. We have to do much more to make screening accessible and easily available to women, and it must be done in a supportive environment. Let us be honest: it is a bit like a sausage machine when we go to the GP, precisely because health workers are screening all the time. To them it is not at all unusual, but it is to the people who attend; that is the difference.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I hope that, like me, the hon. Lady will support the Public Health England awareness campaign that is about to start, which will try to tackle all the misunderstandings about screenings, and to overcome the feelings of fear and embarrassment that she described so well.

Helen Jones: The hon. Gentleman is right, and it is not before time to have such an awareness campaign. However, it is no good having one unless we ensure that screening is easily available and that people are treated well when they go. That is vital, because one bad experience can put a woman off ever going again, which is not what any of us want.

Natasha started the petition because she wanted to raise awareness of the symptoms of cervical cancer, and to ensure that other women did not suffer as she had suffered. That was a remarkable thing to do, and I hope that today’s debate, which I know her MP, the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), would have liked to have attended—unfortunately, she has to be in Committee elsewhere—will go some way towards doing that. I hope the debate will open up the dialogue on how best to get women screened, and when they

should be screened, and I hope that the Minister will commit to keeping the age of screening under review, so that, if the scientific evidence supports screening earlier, that is acted on.

4.51 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to follow the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) in this important debate. I thank the petitioners, as it is good to have the opportunity to discuss such an issue in open debate. I think that all Members will get the strong impression that there is agreement across the House for what is being proposed.

I will start with the Public Health England campaign, which I mentioned when intervening on the hon. Lady. I agree with her that it is about time we had such a campaign, and that it will have a hard job. On the one hand, it has to tackle issues concerning the women themselves—the enormous misunderstandings about the screening process, and the fear and embarrassment that surrounds it. There is not just fear about the illness; anything to do with cancer creates fear, so there is an enormous amount to overcome.

However, I suggest that the Public Health England campaign should also look at the other side. The Minister has heard us talk strongly today about the impact on GPs, and the way in which they have to handle the issue and make facilities available. It would be very good to have something in the campaign that targets GPs, making those points to ensure that testing happens in the right place, at the right time and in the most effective manner.

The hon. Lady also mentioned inoculation against HPV, which I support. I am pleased that we are now inoculating young boys against it as well, as that makes a very big difference. Those who have talked to medical professionals in this area will have heard stories about the number of people who develop cancer as a result of HPV. It is very good to have such inoculations, and to be able to support the campaign.

Like the hon. Lady, I am not yet convinced that the age for screening should be reduced. Around the world there has seemingly been a general trend to increase the starting age of such programmes. I think the American Cancer Society recommended that the age for cervical screening go up from 18 to 21, which is interesting. The reason she and I believe that the screening age should not be reduced is the false positives that are created. No one wants to be put in the situation of having a false positive test. It is not about the waste of money, but about the concern that a false positive creates for an individual. I am not yet convinced that the age should be brought down but, like the hon. Lady, I call on the Minister to look very carefully at it, to keep it always in his mind, and to keep reviewing it.

I think that Scotland has increased the age at which women go for their first smear test from 20 to 25. That, too, is an interesting reflection of the way things are going, and builds upon the difficulties in dealing with this matter. However, I thank the hon. Lady for presenting the case, and the petitioners for bringing it, and allowing us to discuss it in the way we are doing.

4.56 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Sir Roger. I am hugely grateful to the friends and family of Natasha, and all those who signed the petition, for enabling us to have the debate, which is much needed.

HPV accounts for 99.7% of cervical cancers. It also accounts for cancers in boys. I would like the Minister to seriously consider rolling out the vaccine programme to boys as well. I cannot think of any other inoculation programme where we inoculate only half the population. It seems a bizarre approach to trying to eliminate a reasonably common form of cancer.

I will build on what my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) said about the fears. As soon as I started tweeting about this matter, people replied saying how dangerous the vaccine was. I am sorry, but the evidence does not support that. It is an insurance policy for people's children, and I urge parents to look at the evidence, rather than the scaremongering on Facebook and Twitter.

HPV is a sexually transmitted virus. As my friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, unfortunately children start having sex, on average, at 15.6 years of age. Legally they can have sex from the age of 16. I am sorry, but to me it does not make sense to have a gap of nine years, knowingly, between when children are likely to become sexually active and be exposed to a sexually transmitted disease and when they have any screening.

When I started talking about this issue a couple of weeks ago, two of my friends came to me and said that their cervical cancer was picked up when they were 21. They were incredibly fortunate in one way: because they had a history of cancer in their family, they were on the programme for high-risk people, so it was picked up. I am very concerned about the people who are not on that programme and for whom it does not get picked up. If two of my friends had this cancer at 21, I am sure that many others are at risk, and will have cancer that is not picked up until it is too late.

The smear tests are not fun and can be embarrassing, but at my GP they have changed. They now use a small brush that is nowhere near as uncomfortable. I say to the Minister that there are ways of minimising the discomfort of such tests. Turning to my personal experience, I have always gone for my smear tests. After one test, I received the letter we all dread, saying that there were some abnormalities and asking me to go back for a biopsy. When I did so, lo and behold, it was confirmed that I had cancerous cells.

I did not have any symptoms. If I had had the symptoms, I would probably have put them down to something else, because they are irregular bleeding, discomfort during sex and back pain—I am 49, so I suffer those quite a lot anyway. *[Laughter.]* Those are not abnormal symptoms at any age, even at a younger age—I look to the women in the room. If I had had those symptoms, the last thought on my mind would have been, “Oh, my goodness; I might be at risk of cervical cancer. I must go and do something about it.”

I was lucky that it was picked up really early, so I had simple day surgery and did not require any further treatment. Two weeks ago I got the letter saying that I was six months clear, which is just wonderful. I want

everyone to know that feeling, and that is why I am so grateful that the petition was put forward and there are campaigns, and why I am so concerned that the number of women going for smear tests is dropping.

The figure cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North that 1.7 million women have never had a smear test chills me, but there are often very good reasons why women are not going. A lot of it, for the women I speak to, is due to past sexual violence or childhood trauma. I ask the Minister to look at the guidance that goes out to GPs. If a woman has never been for a test, or has missed a number of appointments, instead of assuming that she is being difficult or that she cannot be bothered, is it possible to put something in the chase-up letter that says, “We understand that this can be very difficult, so here is the nurse you can talk to, so we can minimise some of the trauma and the worry that going for a smear test might create”?

These are simple things that we can do and that can change lives. I am very supportive of lowering the age for smear tests, for the reasons I have outlined, but I also think that we owe it to young women to give them the best protection they can possibly have.

5.1 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to speak in this debate. I was supposed to be with you and others at the Council of Europe last week, but I was not there; I was having a biopsy done, because I had had an irregular smear. It was an uncomfortable and painful experience, but it was largely made better by the fantastic doctors at St John's Hospital in Livingston. I will get the results in three to four weeks—hopefully they will be all-clear.

It is very important that those of us who have a voice use it to speak out and encourage young women and people in the trans community to have their smear tests. I had a really fantastic conversation last summer with people from Jo's Trust, who spoke passionately about the work they are doing with members of the trans community.

I want to pay tribute to some of the organisations that work in the area, including a charity in my constituency called the Michelle Henderson Cervical Cancer Trust. Michelle Henderson was in the year below me in high school; I did not know her well, but we occasionally attended the same house parties and I knew her to be an incredibly bright and vivacious young woman. In October 2010, at age 26, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She died on her 28th birthday in October 2012. Her father is the famous football player Willie Henderson. Michelle set up the charity not long after she was diagnosed, and Willie has continued her incredible work in her memory. A couple of years ago I did the 120 km last leg of the Camino de Santiago to raise money for that incredible charity.

Too many women are dying young. Many of us feel that we must listen to the health professionals; we absolutely must, but we must also consider the individual cases of those who, like me, had irregularities picked up early on, well below the age at which cervical smears are now being carried out in Scotland, England and the rest of the UK.

The hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Warrington North (Helen Jones) mentioned victims of sexual violence. I want to pay tribute to the work of My Body Back, a project set up in August 2014 by Pavan Amara that supports women who have experienced rape or sexual assault to take their bodies back again. It runs specialist services and recently opened a clinic in Glasgow that includes a cervical screening and maternity clinic. That work is so vital, because for women who have been victims of sexual violence it can be a harrowing experience to have to go and have a smear done. The fact that the design of speculums has not developed or changed in decades, if not longer, says something about the care that is given to women's health.

I was diagnosed with HPV—for the rest of the world, let us remember that that presents itself as genital warts—in my late teens. I had intercourse with a man—I was not out at that point—and the condom broke. He was good enough to get in touch to tell me that he had contracted HPV, not from me but from a previous partner. That was an experience that I have lived with ever since. It has been a source of deep shame, because it means that no medical professional has ever been able to tell me whether my irregular smears—I have had many over the years, and much treatment for pre-cancerous cells—were directly related to that experience.

The positive part of the story is that a few years after my experience, and after I was given the all-clear, I was contacted by a big health conglomerate that was developing a vaccine to stop HPV and asked me to give my cells. I was happy to do that, so I spent a couple of years travelling back and forth to clinics, giving my cells and blood. My unfortunate experience—the experience of many women the length and breadth of the country, and not something we should be ashamed of—led to my cells being used to develop the vaccine that is now given to many women and young girls across the country. That is something I am very proud of.

I had not planned to speak about my personal experiences today, but I figure that those of us who have a voice should use it. Cervical smears are at an all-time low. There may be an element of complacency because we are wiping cervical cancer out, but—as my doctor reminded me the other day as she was peering over me while doing my colposcopy—the vaccine protects against only three strains of HPV, which, like all viruses, has a habit of mutating. We must say to every person who should be getting their cervical smear how vital it is, and we must listen to them about their real and genuine concerns.

As the hon. Member for Warrington North said, the terrible shaming of women's bodies in the media plays a key part in why women and girls feel that they cannot come forward. We must remind them that our bodies come in all shapes and sizes, and they are all beautiful. The only way to prevent this terrible disease from killing more women is to make sure that we get out there, talk about it and encourage them to go for their cervical smears.

5.7 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, particularly under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. It is great to be in a Parliament in which women are prepared to stand up and share some of the

most private, intimate things about their lives—probably things they have not told their mothers—in a forum such as this.

Hannah Bardell: I just want to say that, when I went to the sexual health clinic in Edinburgh, my mother came with me. She was the only person I trusted—and, yes, until today there were only a handful of people in my life who knew that story.

Jenny Chapman: She sounds fantastic—how lucky you are.

We are now in an age in which women can stand up in Parliament, as I do not think they could even as recently as 2010, when I was first elected, and talk about the cost of Tampax, smear tests, their sexual history—

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): And mesh.

Jenny Chapman: And mesh, as my hon. Friend never stops reminding me. That is a good thing—a wonderful thing—and I am really proud to be part of it.

When I saw that this debate was taking place, I asked for the data for Darlington, because I wanted to see where we stood. I was anticipating the same thing I normally get when I compare health data for the north-east with the rest of the country, but I was pleasantly surprised: take-up is better in the north-east than in most places in the UK, which is a very interesting fact. Part of it, I think, is about the stability of communities and the ability to access services that are themselves stable. They do not tend to move around too much and GPs tend to serve for longer. Although there can be many problems with access to services, it appears that, in this regard at least, women in my constituency are availing themselves of the opportunity to get tested at a higher rate than women in other parts of the country. That is very welcome.

Looking at the data on Darlington, I notice that the participation rate among 25 to 49-year-olds is fairly steady at about 74% or 75%. The take-up among older women—those aged between 50 and 64—has gone down by 2% in the last year, which seems to be the case in other parts of the country as well. I welcome the discussion about testing young women under the age of 25, but we should be mindful that we might be sending the message to older women that they do not need to worry. Take-up is perhaps dropping off more quickly among older women than among those in other age groups due to embarrassment, indignity and all of that. At the risk of oversharing, the only smear test I have ever had—where I really did not care happened not long after I gave birth to my second child. That was not an issue at that point. However, I am mindful of the fact that older women are not taking part in the way we would wish. Some of that is obviously about the indignity, but also there is a lot of misinformation and misconception about cervical cancer.

I have heard it said that once a person is no longer as sexually active as they might have been earlier in their life, or does not change partners quite so often, they are somehow at less of a risk or no longer need to be so concerned about cervical cancer, and their need for a test is therefore reduced. I have heard people say that, if they are in a same-sex relationship, they do not need to

[Jenny Chapman]

have a cervical screening test. There seems to be an association between sexual activity and a risk of cervical cancer. I do not know where that has come from or why it persists—my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) referred to it when she talked about vaccination. That kind of misconception seems to apply to older women as well. If the campaign mentioned by the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) takes place, it is very important that they take the opportunity to get those messages right, too.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) made a very helpful point about women who have been victims of sexual abuse. They have a very special and entirely understandable concern that is not taken into account by the blunt approach that service providers can take. More thought needs to be given to that. Disabled people might have additional needs when accessing this test, and I am absolutely certain that not every setting will be able to cater for those needs in a way that enables a disabled woman to have the test with the dignity and sensitivity that we would all expect.

The declining participation in smear tests is a trend that should ring an alarm bell for Ministers, and I am sure it does. This is a red-flag dataset. It is great that we have the data—it is fantastic to debate something with clear information, and when we can see good-quality data over time and get a good idea of what is happening in different parts of the country. We must use that to nip this problem in the bud before it gets even worse. From people I have spoken to, access to this service is one of the principal reasons, along with all the other things that we have talked about, why women are not participating in increasing numbers and why we are seeing those numbers decline.

The GP patients' survey last year found that 28% of patients found it "not easy" to make an appointment over the phone to see a nurse—up from just 19% in 2012. We have had many debates in this place on the difficulty in accessing GP services, which I know the Government will want to grapple with. It is affecting these women. A smear test is a very easy thing to want to put off. Someone might get round to making that phone call, but if it does not quite work the first time, it is tempting not to get round to it again for some weeks or probably months.

The work that Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust has done is absolutely phenomenal—what a tremendous organisation. It is really impressive. Its data, stories and the way it puts those across in a manner that everybody can access and understand are fantastic. The trust found that one in eight women find it difficult or impossible to book an appointment for their smear test, which just cannot be right. It might be the case that women should be encouraged to access services not through a GP, but through a specialist clinic where they could access contraceptive services at the same time. That is now available in Darlington—it is also open in the evenings and is a very good service, which might be one of the reasons participation rates in my constituency are holding up relative to other areas of the country.

Obviously I take the point that the age of screening must relate to science, but I wonder whether this is a situation in which we might be able to prevent some of the misconceptions and anxieties about pain, which does not need to happen, or a lack of dignity, which

there does not need to be if screening is done sensitively. Young women can have a good experience if they are encouraged to have a test at an early age. Perhaps we need to give some thought to positive early experiences of smear tests to increase participation rates among women over 25.

We need to consider an awful lot about access to the test and cervical cancer generally. This is an important part of it and I congratulate everybody who signed the petition and put it in front of us. We have an opportunity to do something that would make the lives of my constituents and everybody else's so much better and safer. The Minister is listening and thinking hard, and I know he wants to do right by the people who signed the petition.

5.17 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to take part in a debate in which there have been so many thoughtful and personal contributions. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on her detailed opening. I tried for some time to secure a debate on this subject, in order to raise the concerns of my constituents and others who were denied smear tests because they were under 25 and so did not receive a diagnosis of cervical cancer. My hon. Friend raised the case of a young lady who died of cervical cancer around Christmas. She believed that had she been allowed a smear test earlier, the cancer might have been caught at an early age.

My understanding of the campaign under way at the moment is that it does not necessarily aim to extend access to smear tests to all women under the age of 18; it argues, more simply, that a smear test should be carried out when a doctor believes it is necessary. I know of the case of a young woman, Lucy, who lives in a constituency neighbouring mine. She had a history of cervical cancer and so was given a smear test, but the lab did not even test the sample and destroyed it because she was under 25. She went on to develop cervical cancer—it was detected when she went for a private smear test. I am happy to report that it was eventually cured, but not without the difficulties of treatment.

My constituent Sophie wrote:

"I'm 23. I have two children (aged 5 and 16 months). When I was 17, I fell pregnant with my first son and my midwife asked for a smear test a few months after I gave birth, as I was suffering from abnormal pains in my pelvis area. My sister had been diagnosed with cervical cancer that year and my nan sadly died from it a few years before"—

So there is a family history. Sophie went on to say:

"I wasn't given one, due to my age. Three years ago, I was suffering from pain again and they refused a smear, again due to my age, but used a cotton wool bud for a swab. This came back with abnormal cells and I was given antibiotics to clear these up and take the pain away. The doctor advised me if it carried on I would develop cervical cancer and may not be able to have further children. However, he did not refer me for a smear.

I had my daughter in June 2017 and still suffer from strange pains and, again, my midwife asked my doctor to refer me, but my age has always been a massive problem. I'm 23. I have two kids. I'm a law student, and it's always in the back of my mind that, due to my previous abnormal cells, which they didn't look further into, and my family's history, I could potentially have cancerous cells I don't know about, which would completely ruin and change my babies' lives."

Sophie concluded:

"I totally back you, Chris, with this, and hope that this legislation is changed. It's totally against women's human rights and discriminatory in age."

The proposal is that women under the age of 25 should have access to cervical smears if they are needed. Objections to the proposal suggest that smear tests that are done too early might be inconsistent and inaccurate, and throw up false positives, as other hon. Members have mentioned. The campaign is not about testing all young women by extending the testing programme to 18 to 24-year-olds; it is about allowing a test only when the circumstances require it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North talked about the current regulations, which she believes are not being implemented. The regulations behind the 25-year age limit are now 13 years old, and they have not been reviewed in that time—my hon. Friend therefore asked the Minister that they be reviewed. The Smear on Demand campaign has prepared an extensive research paper that shows that the initial figures used 13 years ago to justify the 25-year age limit may have been incorrect, as they related only to when patients were diagnosed with stage 1B onward, as opposed to stage 1A. Many of the high-profile cases that we have heard about today were initially diagnosed with stage 1A. The campaign looked at figures for women under 28. The number of women diagnosed with stage 1A is highest in those aged 25—the figures start only at 25 and are not collected before then.

The smear test is supposed to be a preventative measure, but women can access it only at 25. It makes no sense to remove the possibility of prevention for the lower age limit. I do not think that it is in dispute that 25 is a good age at which to start routine smears, but when a doctor believes that a woman under that age needs a smear test, it should surely be allowed on the NHS. The campaign is not asking for all women under 25 to be tested; only those for whom that is recommended by a doctor. Some 99.7% of cervical cancers are treatable, because cervical cancer goes through three stages of pre-cancer, which means that it can be very slow growing. Currently, a smear test is the only cancer-detection test available that can detect pre-cancers.

I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to prevention in the NHS strategy that he recently presented to the House. I also welcome his commitment, which he gave to me in the main Chamber, to asking Mike Richards to look into the issue. I have not yet heard from Sir Mike, but I am sure that he will soon be in touch following the Secretary of State's commitment. The House is currently dealing with some very difficult, intractable and divisive issues. This is not one of them. It is an easy issue for which a Minister can perhaps change the regulations and direct that if a doctor believes that a young woman under the age of 25 has symptoms that require investigation, they are investigated. That is a minor change that could have major consequences. In these difficult times, I urge the Minister to apply some common sense and grab that chance with both hands.

5.24 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank everybody who signed the petition

and all the women who have come to listen to the debate. I know that getting down to London can be quite tricky—I say that because I come from Hull—so I thank them all for coming.

I agree that having a smear test is not pleasant, but I think that we would all agree that it is crucial. While we are in a sharing mood, I will share a little bit with you all as well. I too had abnormal smear tests and was found to have pre-cancerous cells when I was in my early 20s. I had just finished university and decided to move to Leeds to spend time with my sister. It was fine, because I had the biopsy and—they had to remove the cells—went through the various bits and pieces of the operation. Since then I have been on a yearly recall, so I have had so many smear tests. Every time I ask whether I still need to be on a yearly recall, they say, "We'll let you know," and then the following year I have to go back. I am due to go back again, so this debate has prompted me to pick up the phone and arrange that.

I did not take my mum with me to that procedure, because unfortunately she was unable to come, so I took my sister, who is five years younger than me—I was only about 21 or 22. The experience of coming in to watch terrified her; she was there to offer me moral support, but I found myself reassuring her throughout my operation, saying, "Don't worry; it's fine. I'm perfectly okay." I think that we should be a bit more open and honest about these things.

We should also do the brilliant thing that we all do when we get a little embarrassed: laugh about it, because it can actually be quite comical. As I said, I have had so many smear tests, and when my friends are worried about them, I joke about the ridiculous, small piece of blue towel that is meant to preserve our modesty. The midriff is hidden by the piece of blue towel while all the rest is exposed to the world—that is funny. It was also quite funny when, not long after being elected, I was lying there and someone asked, "Are you our local MP?" I said, "Oh, yes. I am." We then proceeded to have a conversation about how I was finding life at Westminster. I said, "Well, slightly more comfortable than this, thank you very much!" We should find those things funny and we should laugh.

While I am in the sharing mood, I have a little tip for all the women out there. If, like me, they suffer from a hidden cervix—apparently mine is quite shy—a towel or cushion under the bottom lifts it up so it comes into view. That is a little bit of health advice while I am here.

In all seriousness, there is a growing problem. In Hull, the figure for women having smear tests has dropped to only 73.1%—that is a huge fall. The figure is slightly higher in East Riding, at around 78%, but that is nowhere near the 80% for which the NHS is aiming. I echo the words of all hon. Friends and hon. Members who have spoken when I say that the Government need to conduct some kind of survey to find out why. Is the problem, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) said, that women associate smear tests with sexual activity? Do they think that they have no need for one? Do their working hours mean that they are not able to attend tests? Let us find out and make life that bit easier for all of them.

We know, when looking at the NHS cure rates, that 92% of those whose cancer was detected are cured. That is wonderful. I cannot possibly say what would have happened to me had mine not been removed—I do

[Emma Hardy]

not know. I am here today, all is well, and I will book my next smear test. Some 66% of all those diagnosed after developing symptoms are also cured. We need to do more to push that message out to people and get rid of the myths. I absolutely support what my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) said in his beautiful speech about the importance of reducing the age to 18 under a doctor's advice.

I have been involved in a campaign for teaching menstrual wellbeing in schools, on the education side of the issue, because I am not sure that everybody understands what the abnormal signs or symptoms are. I became involved in the campaign through my support for the charity Endometriosis UK, but I think that removing the taboo around periods, smear tests and so on would also help a lot of people. We must start talking in schools about menstrual wellbeing, what normal and abnormal periods are, and what normal and abnormal symptoms are. If we start to have that conversation, we will give people the language and ability to talk about the matter without feeling really shy and saying, "I've got a problem with my—I can't say the word."

We should be able to talk about it, which reminds me of a brilliant story. When I was doing a radio show for my campaign on vaginal mesh, I spoke to the show's producer before I was due to speak live. He said, "We're very supportive of the campaign, but it's a breakfast show, Emma, so could you not say the word 'vagina'?" I therefore spent the entire interview talking about problems with "mesh" that was "in" women's bodies. We need to dispel all of that nonsense and shyness and start being a little more open, and I implore the Minister to work with the Schools Minister in support of my call for menstrual wellbeing to be taught in schools.

Hannah Bardell: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady about how, for some reason, we cannot talk about parts of our bodies at that time in the morning. In the same way, I still find it incredible that adverts for sanitary products depict women's period blood as being blue rather than red. I do not know about anyone else, but I have never bled blue in my life.

Emma Hardy: Perhaps that is the royal family only. The hon. Lady is absolutely right. For years I was convinced that if we used Tampax, it would suddenly make us fitter, more active and able to roller-skate—[Laughter.] Sorry, we are descending into farce.

On a serious note, I ask the Minister, please, to look at what my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North said about lowering the age to 18 when doctors give a recommendation. I also ask him to support my call for menstrual wellbeing to be taught in schools, and to have a wider survey into understanding why people are not attending tests, so that we can do something to change that for the future.

5.31 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I am grateful to be able to speak in the debate. I thank the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for introducing it, and I welcome everyone

in the Public Gallery. Natasha's friends and family who are here have definitely brightened up the gallery and this debate, and we are grateful.

I pay tribute to Natasha Sale, a brave young woman who organised the petition that we are debating. As we heard, she was diagnosed with metastatic cervical cancer before passing away on new year's eve last year—a 31-year-old woman who left behind four children. It is incredibly sad to hear that she never got to see this moment through, but I hope that, by having the debate, we pay tribute to her tenacity and her commitment to ensure that it was heard. On the petition webpage, she wrote:

"If I can do anything with my life I want to make this change happen, it's too late for me but it's not too late for the next generation of young ladies."

That is a truly brave statement. I am only sorry that she could not make it to see the campaign debated on the Floor of the House. We are, however, very grateful to have all those present in the Public Gallery.

Natasha's bravery and selflessness to the last in the face of that horrendous disease is truly humbling and should be commended by all. In doing so, we must also recognise the commitment of her family and friends who continued her endeavour to reach more than 100,000 signatures on the petition, which is a feat in itself. In raising awareness of cervical cancer through their campaign and by encouraging women to take smear tests, they have undoubtedly already saved lives.

Breaking the taboo is so important in the fight against cervical cancer. This debate should serve not only as a motivation for every young woman who is scared to get regular check-ups and to see their GP, but as a reminder—I am sure it has reminded many of us present—never to be too busy to do the same.

Contributions from hon. Members in all parts of the House are most welcome, and it is always a pleasure to have men speak in these debates because, as the hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) rightly pointed out, for too many years in this House such issues as this one have been seen as women's issues. They are not women's issues, because every man has a mother, a wife, a daughter or a sister, so the discussion should be had by everyone. It is therefore most welcome to have had those contributions.

I will summarise some of the contributions. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) raised cases from his constituency and others, especially that of the young woman who, sadly, died around Christmas last year because she was denied access because she was under 25. That she is not here at this point is a great sadness. The hon. Member for Darlington highlighted how the debate should be part of everyone's agenda, not only on behalf of their constituents but to raise awareness that it is not just a women's issue. I also join the calls of the hon. Members for Warrington North and for Henley (John Howell) for the Government to keep the matter under review.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) brought a bit of light-heartedness to the debate. As harrowing and awful as this is, it is important to find a way to laugh. I found myself in a similar position and, up in stirrups, someone telling me, "Oh, that's where I know you from"—easily the strangest time to be recognised, and a little bit weird. None the less, I had gone to have my smear test.

The hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle and for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), and my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) gave very personal contributions. The House is always richer when people share such experiences and give voice to the many more people who do not have a platform. I am grateful to each and every Member who shared in their contributions—they were deeply personal, but we appreciate their honesty and candour.

I also pay tribute to Jo's Trust, especially because it has actively sought to ensure access to GP services. That is particularly important not only in England but in Scotland, so that people know they can access such services.

Cervical cancer is the most common cancer in women aged between 25 and 35 years old. I find myself in that bracket, so I use this opportunity to encourage every young woman in Scotland: please, have your smear test done if it has been a while or you have never done it. Now is absolutely the time, with about six women in Scotland diagnosed every week—please, do not be scared. Go and have that done. It is so important.

We know that smear tests are the best protection against that form of cancer. A test is not the most comfortable or nicest experience, but it has to be done, because when tests are done, they are estimated to save about 5,000 lives each and every year across the UK, and to prevent eight out of 10 cervical cancers from developing. Despite that remarkable fact, however, the most up-to-date figures show that, as we heard, only 73% of eligible women accept the offer of a test—but, ultimately, that means that 27% of eligible women do not, and they miss out on a potentially lifesaving trip to the doctor.

I have heard some of the reasons why people avoid participating in the tests, as the hon. Member for Warrington North also told us. The test might be said to be intrusive, offensive, scary or gross but, although it is not a pleasant experience, that is not a reason not to have it. While it is true there are more fun things than getting a smear test, the same can be said about a number of other routine check-ups. I do not particularly like going to the doctor or the dentist, but doing so is important.

Clearly, more work has to be done to encourage the take-up of screenings among certain groups of the population. As we heard, evidence shows lower participation in cervical screening among young women living in areas of deprivation, women with a learning or physical disability, black or minority ethnic women, and lesbian and bisexual women—the myth among those women, myself included, was that they should not have to have a smear test because they are sleeping with someone of the same gender. As my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston rightly highlighted, the test is also for those who are trans. It is easy to assume that this is a women's issue, but it is an everyone issue.

In Scotland, we are working hard to ensure that all those at risk see the importance of attending cervical screenings through public awareness campaigns to tackle the fears that people might have about having a smear test. The contrast remains apparent between the least and most deprived areas, however: 78% of women who live in the least deprived areas attend their smear test, whereas only 67% took up the offer in the most deprived areas. Ultimately, those in the most deprived areas are

least likely to attend. I hope the Minister recognises those figures and looks at what the Government can do to raise awareness in those areas. That proves that we have so much work left to do.

In Scotland, we are introducing tests for HPV within the routine smear test to allow for earlier detection and more effective treatment. Health Scotland has produced a toolkit to help GPs, practice nurses and practice staff to optimise uptake, reduce barriers and ensure that women make an informed choice about cervical screening. Despite those efforts, according to a recent study, 72% of young women said that they had delayed a test or never went for screening because they felt embarrassed. I do not know about anyone else, but I dread to think that the notion of “dying of embarrassment” could truly be the case. I hope we can do more so that young women know they should not feel embarrassed and ashamed. We must do more to encourage women to get further screening. If we break the taboo, we will save lives.

We should use the opportunity of World Cancer Day on 4 February to raise awareness and to encourage women to come forward. We should use the House as a platform not just to speak about Brexit—I am sorry to mention that word—but to tackle the issues that affect women so much.

5.40 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for introducing this debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I, too, pay tribute to Natasha Sale, who started this important petition. As others have said, it is so sad that she did not live to see this debate take place. Her family, I am sure, are very proud of her.

I thank all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate: the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), and my hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), whose speech was excellent and we will not forget any time soon. I thank the hon. Members for Livingston (Hannah Bardell), and for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), who spoke on behalf of the SNP. It has been an excellent debate with very good contributions and lots of sharing. I am a classic oversharer, but I will try to resist the urge. Finally, I thank the 167,000 people who have signed the petition so far.

This is a very timely debate, because Cervical Cancer Prevention Week concluded only yesterday. The age to start screening is a very emotive issue. Every year in the UK, more than 3,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer. As we have heard, 15% of those women are under 30. Last year, 12 of those under 30 died from cervical cancer. The number of cervical cancer deaths has fallen in recent years, but it remains the most common cancer in women aged 35 and under. That is why I welcomed preventive measures such as the introduction of the HPV vaccination, which was offered to adolescent girls in secondary school.

My daughter was one of the first to receive the vaccination when she was 13. I was very pleased to give that permission; I would not have hesitated for a second

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

to give it, although as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North said, a number of people do not give permission. That is very concerning; genuine concerns will have led them to that decision, but we must do what we can to allay their fears. We heard about the catch-up programme at the time, to ensure that all girls up to the age of 18 were vaccinated.

At that time, I looked extensively into this policy area, following a campaign by Washington constituent, Claire Walker Everett, and her family. Claire led the campaign before her untimely death at the age of 23 in 2008, and her family continued it for some time afterwards. I called for a further catch-up programme to address what I called the “seven-year gap”, so that women between 18 and 25 could be vaccinated until they were eligible for smear tests. I said that the gap would close each year until almost all under-25s had been vaccinated, as is now the case. That was 10 years ago, so that gap has closed. Many of those first vaccinated are approaching 25 and are eligible for a smear test, so we should have a whole generation of young women and girls who mostly have been vaccinated against the HPV virus, to help protect them from cervical cancer.

The vaccination programme has been very successful on the whole, with a high national uptake of around 85%. However, I have previously raised with the Minister the significant regional differences in the uptake of the HPV vaccination, which need to be addressed. The lowest uptake for the two doses is in Stockton-on-Tees, at 48.3%; the highest uptake is in East Renfrewshire, at 95.6%. That is curious, and flies in the face of the screening statistics cited by hon. Members, which show that the north-east reached higher rates than others. Perhaps the differences are in pockets rather than whole regions.

I therefore ask the Minister what steps he is taking to investigate and address the regional inequalities in HPV vaccinations and screening. How do the Government ensure that the HPV vaccinations are taken up by the vast majority of girls? Otherwise, the reassurance of my earlier statement that a whole generation of women and girls approaching 25 have been vaccinated falls short in certain areas, which is extremely concerning. Cervical smear tests are available to women aged 25 to 64, yet cervical screening is at a 21-year low. Last year, it was discovered that more than 40,000 women had missed out on crucial information about cervical screening appointments and test results. Has the Minister made any assessment of the impact that has had on uptake? Can the Minister give assurances that this issue has been solved?

According to Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust, which I commend for its tireless work and campaigning, one in four women across the UK do not attend cervical screenings. That proportion increases to one in three among those aged 25 to 29, when they are first eligible for screening, and to one in two in some of the most deprived regions in the UK. That decline can be for a host of reasons, such as fear or embarrassment.

I pay tribute to TV shows that show the medical equipment involved in a smear test; the “Victoria Derbyshire” show even showed a smear test live on the show on Friday, in an attempt to address those reasons. There was no wincing or obvious cries of pain, so it will

have been reassuring to someone who has not had one, although I am sure some viewers complained that it was not suitable daytime viewing. Aside from doing more of that, will the Minister tell me what steps he is taking to increase take-up? Additionally, what steps is he taking to educate women on the need for cervical smears and what the tests are for? I understand that some women believe that a cervical smear will also detect ovarian cancer—as he knows, that is not the case.

As I mentioned, most women under the age of 25 have received the HPV vaccination, giving them excellent protection from the HPV virus. That means that the reason that once may have existed to lower the screening age no longer does. However, I say again, that reason falls down in low take-up areas. Additionally, I worry that lowering the eligibility age for a cervical smear test to 18 would cause additional problems and worries for young patients, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North detailed so well in her excellent speech. False positives are more likely in younger women, as they often undergo natural and harmless changes in the cervix that a smear test would identify as cervical abnormalities. In most cases, those abnormalities resolve themselves without any need for treatment.

Treating false positives as cancer can damage the neck of the womb, which can cause a woman to give birth prematurely in any future pregnancies. In women under 25, therefore, the risk is deemed to outweigh the benefit. However, as my hon. Friend said, women should be provided with that information, to make judgments for themselves. Wider education should start in school; my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle called for that to start as early as possible, to tackle the fear and embarrassment as soon as possible. I also believe that much more research should be done on the age so a decision can be made that is best for all women.

Cervical cancer is very rare in women under 25, with under three cases per 100,000 women. However, every such case is an awful ordeal for the woman and her family, and sometimes it becomes a tragedy, as it did in the case of Natasha Sale. That was also true for Claire Walker Everett from Washington in my constituency, who died at 23 and whose case first brought this issue to my attention, and more recently for Amber Rose Cliff from the neighbouring Sunderland Central constituency, who died in 2017 at the age of 25. If a young woman has abnormal bleeding or symptoms that she is concerned about, she should be taken seriously by her GP and offered a smear test as soon as possible as part of the health investigations into what is causing her symptoms.

I believe that is part of current guidance and best practice, but we have heard clearly that that guidance is not always followed. That was the case in the short life of Amber Rose Cliff. Between the ages of 18 and 21, she went to the doctor around 30 times, complaining of worrying symptoms and asking for a smear test, only to be told 30 times that she was too young and sent away. When she was 21, her mum paid for her to have a smear test privately. The results were devastating. It was cancer, and the cancer had spread. She died just four years later, aged 25. Young women should not be excluded from a valuable screening service just because of their age if they have symptoms, as Amber obviously did. GPs should be aware of cervical cancer symptoms and

know that they should refer young patients who present with such symptoms for smear tests as part of wider investigations.

With all I have said in mind, I conclude that the age for cervical smear tests should remain at 25, on the condition that further research and debate is conducted and tests are offered to those under 25 who present with symptoms. The Government must also ensure that preventive measures such as the HPV vaccination are taken up as fully as possible, and that women who are eligible for a cervical smear test attend their appointments when they are invited or as soon as possible thereafter. I know the Minister cannot drag them all there personally, but I look forward to his response.

5.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger—I shall refer to you again in a moment. I feel somewhat outnumbered, along with the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), but I am rather used to that, having chaired the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer for five years with the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). We were often referred to as “Steve and the girls”.

I completely endorse the point by the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) that this is not a women’s issue. Natasha, whom I will come to in a moment, had four children—two of each. It is very much a boys’ issue for them, as it is across the board. *[Interruption.]* We may have heard the B-word only once during the debate, but I could have sworn I just heard something from outside. I must be imagining things.

It has been a privilege to be part of this debate. It is only right that I start by expressing my sincerest condolences to the family and friends of Natasha Sale, who tragically passed away in December. I know I speak on behalf of all Members present when I say that our thoughts are with her family and friends. Anybody who has lost a loved one to cancer knows the pain and anguish that the family are experiencing due to Natasha’s loss. As somebody who has fought and lost more than I have won, I am one of those people. In some of the coverage of Natasha’s death, I saw a quote from Amanda Scott, her best friend, who said:

“God only takes the best”.

I thought that was a lovely quote. We have heard that many times before, but I was interested in how that was reported.

As the Minister responsible for public health and cancer, cancer prevention and early diagnosis are vital priorities for me. I am delighted to see Natasha’s army here today. I saw the pictures on the bus on social media this morning, with some interesting hand signals—I must ask them about that. It is very good to see them all here. I hope they know, as Members know, that I will continue wholeheartedly to support the efforts of the NHS and Public Health England, which I hold to account, and of all our excellent cancer charities, which work as part of team cancer to prevent cancer and reduce the number of families who have to go through what Natasha’s family is going through.

There have been so many interesting speeches. Luckily, for once I have time to touch on a number of them, if not all of them. I was very interested in the point made by the hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) about the data showing that take-up is better in the north-east than almost anywhere else. I was interested in what she had to say about the reasons behind that. The NHS as a system too infrequently talks to Members of Parliament, who know their areas better than most. I will ask Sir Mike Richards to contact her, perhaps along with the hon. Member for City of Chester, who is obviously still waiting for an introduction. I am very happy to facilitate that. Her other point was about access, which many Members mentioned. I will ensure that her very good point about disabled women is fed into Sir Mike Richards’s review, and I encourage her to raise that with him when she sees him.

[IAN AUSTIN *in the Chair*]

I will come to the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), who introduced the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee, because many of the points she raised will come up in my speech. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Henley talked about the “Be Clear on Cancer” campaign and the new Public Health England campaign that will be rolled out next month. He mentioned the role of GPs in those campaigns. “Be Clear on Cancer” is a public-facing campaign, but elements of it relate to GP education, which I will come to. He often makes very good points in our debates, and I thank him for raising that topic. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) also mentioned GP understanding, which I will touch on.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) made a very personal speech. She said she is awaiting results, and I think I speak for everyone when I say we wish her well. We will be thinking of her, and our fingers are crossed for her. She made a point about the trans community, which I had not heard mentioned in this context. NHS England has published clear guidance for trans men—people who have changed from female to male. Trans men who still have a cervix and have not had a hysterectomy remain entitled to screening. If a trans man is still registered with their GP as a female, they will continue to receive invitations for screening. If they are registered as a male, they remain eligible for screening but will not automatically be invited. The guidance makes clear that trans men need to request screening from their GP. I thank her for raising that point, which is another that I want to feed into Sir Mike’s screening review.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) made a brilliant speech, as always. She should be on the stage. The rather unconventional advice surgery she talked about may not catch on, but I enjoyed hearing about it. We constituency MPs all dread somebody saying, “I’m sure I know you from somewhere.” She talked about education, particularly in schools. Public Health England has a range of materials aimed at providing teenagers and their parents with information about things such as the HPV vaccination programme. She will know that the Department for Education is also working on new relationships and sex education guidance. Its consultation closed in November. That guidance, which will include input from Health Education England, will be published in the first half of this year.

[*Steve Brine*]

I took the Teenage Cancer Trust and CoppaFeel!—a breast cancer charity with possibly the best name of any cancer charity—to see my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards at the end of last year. We were very keen to make the point to them that we must improve awareness in schools of health, bodies and particularly cancers, but in a balanced way that educates children about warning signs without frightening the life out of them. I think we have struck that balance, and I think Members will be pleased when they see that guidance rolled out in the first half of 2019.

Helen Jones: Will the Minister tell us whether that guidance includes educating young girls about the need to go for smear tests? Some of Natasha's friends have forcefully made the point to me that if we do that, it may encourage girls to go for smear tests when they reach the age for screening.

Steve Brine: I cannot tell the hon. Lady that, but I will find out and write to her and other Members who in the debate. It is not my policy area—obviously I am not the Minister of State for School Standards—but it is a good point and it would seem logical that that is done in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Care and with Health Education England.

To go to the heart of where I want to start, the hon. Member for City of Chester talked about a constituent being refused a smear test. He said that it would be simple for a Minister to change the regulations and said that this was an example of the system not doing what we direct it to do. As the shadow Minister said, the system should already do that. It would not be appropriate to go into individual instances, but it is important to understand that cervical screening is a screening test and not a diagnostic test. It aims to detect abnormalities of the cervix that if left undetected may develop into cancer, so it is preventative. Cervical screening is not appropriate for women with symptoms, but if women of any age, including under-25s, have unusual symptoms or abnormal bleeding, they should consult their GP immediately and they should be treated under the NHS and initially offered a speculum examination in accordance with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance for primary care. If that is not happening and if that were one of my constituents, I would be taking that up through the procedures that the hon. Gentleman will know about as an experienced constituency MP. I think that is clear.

The hon. Gentleman also touched on the petition. To be clear, the petition is entitled:

“Lower the age for smear tests from 25 to 18 to prevent cervical cancer.”

He is right to raise the point about women requesting that. We do not often hear about “Liberating the NHS: No decision about me, without me” in the House these days, but it is still very much alive. I would encourage him to take that case up, as I would encourage any other Member who runs into that issue to do.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Will the Minister address the issue of self-screening kits for HPV in his remarks? I am sure he will go on to talk about them. My interest is at the other end of the spectrum, with women aged over 64, but it is pertinent to young women, aged 18 to 25, as well.

Steve Brine: Indeed. If the hon. Lady is not satisfied with what I say now, then please come back and we will make sure that she gets more information after the debate. Self-testing for HPV is an emerging area of medicine. It is not in the same place as the fecal immunochemical test for bowel cancer, but it is an emerging and exciting area of policy. I echo all the positive words that have been said about Jo's Trust, Jo herself and Rob Music, who runs that charity.

Members will be aware that the NHS offers cervical screening to all eligible women aged 25 to 49 every three years and to those aged 50 to 64 every five years. The screening is designed to detect abnormalities of the cervix at an early stage so that women can be referred for effective treatment. It is important to remember that the purpose of population screening is to reduce mortality and morbidity from cancer and other conditions—that is why we do it—in people who appear healthy and have no symptoms, by detecting conditions at an earlier, more treatable stage. Hence prevention is better than cure.

The purpose of any screening service is to maximise the chances of healthier outcomes and, by association, minimise risk of harm to the whole population. With this in mind, the UK National Screening Committee considers the evidence on whether population level screening should be offered and makes recommendations to Ministers. It is not Ministers who make this stuff up, and nor should we. Using research evidence such as pilot programmes and economic evaluation, the NSC assesses the evidence for programmes against a set of internationally recognised criteria. It is important that these recommendations are made by experts based on the best available evidence, and not by politicians.

On this basis, in 2012 the UK NSC recommended that women should be invited for their first cervical screening at the age of 25. This recommendation was based on evidence that showed that the majority of women below this age would receive little benefit from being screened and treated, which can lead to unnecessary treatment, as we have heard from hon. Members. It is very rare that cervical cancer occurs in women under 25—as the shadow Minister said, there are fewer than three cases per 100,000 women. That is no consolation to someone who, like Natasha, is one of those three who pays the ultimate cost. I am only setting out the facts as they are.

Younger women often undergo natural and harmless changes in the cervix—it is part of their physiology—and screening could identify those as cervical abnormalities. In most cases the abnormalities resolve themselves without any need for intervention. The recommendation picked up by the NSC in 2012 concurred with a major review by the Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening undertaken in 2009, so the advice goes quite a long way back. The hon. Member for Warrington North asked me whether the NSC would publish its evidence on the decision to screen from the age of 25. The NSC publishes minutes of all its meetings and the full rationale behind any recommendations. However, I will ask Public Health England and the UK NSC to publish any relevant evidence used by the NSC in reaching its conclusions and on which they based their recommendations that is not already in the public domain, which I hope she will be pleased to hear.

I will talk about HPV primary screening. Every life is precious and we cannot be complacent in continuing to do all we can to prevent cancer—those who know me know that I am not complacent. Therefore, we are modernising the cervical cancer screening programme by introducing the detection of human papillomavirus as the primary test in the NHS cervical screening programme. I can confirm that this will be implemented across England by 2020. Cancer Research UK estimates that, when fully implemented, HPV primary screening could prevent an additional 600 cases of cancer every year. As we have heard, almost all cervical cancers are caused by HPV, which is a very common sexually transmitted infection which is linked to the development of the disease.

In addition to changing the primary test in the cervical screening programme itself, I want to highlight that vaccination against HPV, introduced in 2008 under the previous Government, is now routinely recommended for all girls aged 12 to 13. In England and Wales the first dose is offered in school year 8. The programme aims to prevent cervical cancer related to HPV infection and the best way to do that is to vaccinate girls and young women. We are fortunate to have achieved good uptake of the HPV vaccination in adolescent girls since 2008.

The first cohort of teenage girls to receive the HPV vaccination in year 8—those born in September 1996—will turn 23 this year and become eligible for routine screening in two years' time. It will be of intense interest to all of us to see what impact the vaccination will have on the number of abnormalities detected through routine cervical screening and we will be monitoring this very carefully. I will be watching it like a hawk, as Members would expect. We have already seen that the vaccine has led to a reduction in HPV infection in young women and we anticipate a fall in the numbers diagnosed with cervical cancer at the age of 23 to 24 this year.

Boys have received a level of protection from the girls' vaccination programme over the last 10 years and we have had debates in the House about that. I referred to the previous Chair, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale), because he led a debate in the House about HPV vaccination for boys and there was a lot of debate about it. A lot of people said that the boys get herd immunity and therefore they do not need the vaccination programme. Again, I am led by the evidence and the advice that I am given, but my personal view was that I did not agree with the herd immunity argument. I was pleased that I agreed with the advice and from September 2019, all boys aged 12 and 13 will also be offered the HPV vaccination against HPV-related diseases, such as oral, throat, penile and anal cancer. I know the hon. Member for Rotherham wanted to hear about that. That will help reduce the incidence of HPV infection circulating in the population.

It is worth saying that, although HPV infection is the primary cause of cervical cancer, many other cancers, such as head and neck cancer, will be seen a long way down the line. Without wishing to be indelicate, I am told that the popularity of oral sex means that HPV vaccination will have a big impact on the incidence of oral cancers. As the dental Minister, I often hear from dentists that that is a growing problem, so I am pleased that we are able to make a positive policy response, which has been well received.

As the hon. Members for Warrington North and for Rotherham said, there are plenty of people who disagree with HPV vaccination. Whenever I speak on the subject—I can feel the tweets landing in my inbox as we speak—I open myself up to the responses of those who vehemently disagree. All I can say is that I think they are wrong and that that is what the evidence suggests. This is a free society and they are of course entitled to that opinion, but we base policy decisions on the evidence. That is where we are. What I have said about the HPV vaccination for girls, and now boys, is important, but I reiterate the message that it is still important for women who have been vaccinated to attend their cervical screening appointments when invited. It does not turn people into Wonder Woman.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West asked me what we are doing about education for young adults on HPV vaccination, and regional variations in uptake, a point that she has raised with me before. NHS England works in close liaison with Public Health England to deliver the HPV vaccination programme for girls, and in future for boys, and closely monitors uptake rates. It sends me regular reports. Local NHS England commissioners have access to those uptake rates in their area and, in due course, so will MPs. They work with providers, schools and healthcare professionals to improve coverage, sharing best practice where relevant. It became clear to me when looking at the information that there are variations, which is a concern. I made my concerns about regional variation in vaccination uptake clear to the NHS and have had meetings with NHS England and Public Health England on a number of occasions—twice in recent months—asking for additional action to increase uptake across England. I want them back in my office on a regular basis to report to me. That somehow seems to stimulate them.

I am pleased that the NHS long-term plan featured involving local co-ordinators to encourage uptake. That came out of those meetings along with various other commitments to improve vaccination rates, not just for HPV but across the vaccination piece. That includes requiring CCGs to ensure that all vaccination programmes are designed to support a narrowing of health inequalities. They know that I remain on their case. If the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West would like to continue the conversation on that with me, I should be pleased to hear it.

The review that the Secretary of State has asked Sir Mike Richards to carry out has been mentioned. Cervical cancer affects many women and their families, and screening can help to prevent many people from developing cancer each year. It is obviously important that women take up their screening appointments to help spot abnormalities. However, with uptake only at about 75%, we know that we need to make it easier to book appointments and more convenient for women to attend them—that point about access came up a number of times in the debate.

I met Mike recently and said that I have an app on my phone that tells me when my car is due for a service and lets me book a local appointment at a time that suits me. We do not embrace that kind of no-brainer technology enough in healthcare. We have to embrace modern technology to ensure that screening programmes are fit for the 21st century. The Secretary of State and I feel passionate about that, and it should offer greater ease

[*Steve Brine*]

of access. Doing that will, I am sure, improve uptake rates. That is one key reason why we are considering comprehensively how our current national screening programmes can be improved, particularly in the light of recent issues that could affect public confidence in screening and lower uptake.

Professor Sir Mike Richards will be leading a review of all three cancer screening programmes, which of course includes cervical screening. His review will report in the summer and will specifically assess the strengths and weaknesses of the individual programmes. It will also address, as I have just outlined, how the latest innovations can be utilised and integrated with research to encourage more people to be screened, and to make it easier for them to do so. That point was raised by many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Warrington North. I met Sir Mike a couple of weeks ago to discuss the fact that his review clearly needs to set out how we can bring our screening programmes right up to date to make them fit for the people who use them. I await his recommendations with optimism. Mike ran screening programmes in the Department of Health and Social Care before the passing of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. He has great experience and credibility within the system, which is important. We have great optimism about his work.

We must do more to raise awareness not just of the importance of taking up screening, but of how to recognise the potential symptoms of cervical cancer. Breast cancer awareness campaigns have been phenomenally successful in that kind of work. In her petition, Natasha said that she wanted to make a difference to the next generation of young women by raising awareness of the symptoms. I have seen the videos online of her little girls—they are heartbreaking. Natasha certainly raised awareness of the symptoms of what is a terrible disease. I believe she has already made a difference, highlighting how vital it is for women with symptoms to contact their GP as soon as possible. Indeed, it is 10 years since Jade Goody, who also took on the fight to raise awareness, sadly died of the illness. We shall, with the permission of Jade's family, use the anniversary to help raise awareness of the importance of screening, and of taking up appointments. In the aftermath of Jade's sad death attendance rates rocketed. Obviously that has waned. We will, in Jade's and Natasha's honour, make the most of the 10-year anniversary to save other women.

Jenny Chapman: It is encouraging to hear what the Minister says, and his comments about the legacy of Jade Goody and others. It is a tremendous thing that they have left to us, with the campaigns we have benefited from. However, is there not, up to a point, cause for concern in that the examples being used are younger women, which could reinforce the misinformation about the need for younger women to be more concerned about cervical cancer—and therefore for older women to be less concerned? Sometimes I wonder whether the prominence given to the examples in question may create an issue for another group of women.

Steve Brine: The hon. Lady makes a good point, and there is always a danger with public awareness campaigns, even down to the models, actors and actresses used in

the advertising campaigns, with presentation and positioning. I take the point, and Public Health England, which works on such campaigns for me, will also take the point the hon. Lady raises. I assure her it will be sent a copy of the debate.

A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Henley, who is no longer in his place, have raised the matter of GPs. Guidance for GPs has been developed and published, specifically aimed at improving the primary care of young women who present with gynaecological symptoms. That guidance, produced by a multidisciplinary group, including professionals, patients and the voluntary sector, and endorsed by the relevant royal colleges, offers clinical practice guidelines for the assessment of young women aged 20-24 who present with abnormal vaginal bleeding. GPs are continually made aware of the symptoms of cervical cancer and the need to refer women under the age of 25 for further investigation. From today's debate, it sounds as if we have further to go, but we knew that, of course. As part of the delivery of essential medical services under the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contract) Regulations 2004, GP practices must offer consultations and, where appropriate, they must also offer physical examinations for the purposes of identifying the need, if any, for treatment or further investigation and, if needed, referring the patient onwards as soon as possible. The hon. Member for Rotherham made an excellent point about understanding the history of trauma that some women on their lists had had. Obviously it is a subject that she has a lot of experience of in her constituency; I thank her for making that excellent point, and I will ensure it is fed into the Mike Richards review.

I have mentioned the "Be Clear on Cancer" campaign a couple of times, and said that Public Health England will work to raise awareness of this disease through that campaign, which we have run in partnership with Cancer Research UK since 2011. It has covered many different areas and is scheduled to promote the uptake of cervical screening from next month.

While we are still on the awareness point, in the 2016 Budget the Government announced that Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, which does so much good work in this area, as has been said, would be a beneficiary of the tampon tax. It received £650,000 in funding to kick-start a campaign to get closer to eradicating cervical cancer. I take part in many of these debates and talk about cancer, as does the shadow Minister. One third of cancers are preventable and two thirds of cancers are just bad luck. With some cancers, we are nowhere near, but this is a cancer we can get rid of. This is a "bad" that we can eradicate. That is why we are so determined to get it over the line.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust ran a campaign on eradication in 2017 and 2018; it was a wide-reaching awareness programme, with a specific focus on groups where there is a higher prevalence of non-attendance of cervical screening: interestingly, that is women from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, women from disadvantaged backgrounds—a point already made—and women in the 25-to-29 and over-50 brackets. The funding enabled the trust to provide targeted education and information to those groups and to produce a body of evidence on the barriers to screening and how to overcome them.

The trust found that some young people do not attend appointments because they are embarrassed; that finding received a lot of press coverage and came out in Prime Minister's questions last year. Others do not think the test is important, and yet more do not think they are at risk because they lead healthy lifestyles. One in four do not attend their screening appointment, and that needs to change, so this is important work.

From talking to Rob from Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, I know that one thing they found on the roadshows when they were testing this work in 2017 and 2018 was the importance of talking to women's partners and the role partners can play in reminding, or nagging—whatever word we choose to use—women about taking up their screening appointments. Last week, the trust led their annual cervical cancer awareness week, with an event here in Parliament. The aim is to help as many people as possible to know how they can reduce the risk of the disease, and to promote that among their constituents.

The #SmearForSmear campaign reinforces the message that smear tests prevent 75% of cervical cancers, so while they may not be pleasant, as we have heard, they are important. I was pleased to support them myself, as most of the Health team did, at the event in Parliament last week, and I thank all hon. Members who took part; I know Jo's Trust found it helpful. As Natasha's Army says—this is such an important message—we need to support all young women to “lose the fear, take the smear”.

If I may try to draw my remarks to a close, this Government—as did the previous Government, and as will the next Government—recognise that cervical cancer is a devastating disease, and we are committed to providing well-managed screening programmes based on the most up-to-date, peer-reviewed evidence. Cancer is right at the heart of the NHS long-term plan, which was published on 7 January, and I am very proud of that fact. The plan sets out a comprehensive package of measures that will transform cancer diagnosis and treatment across the country over the next 10 years, a decade in which patients can expect to see vast improvements in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The aim is to see 55,000 more people surviving cancer for five years in England each year from 2028. That is quite an ambition, but we will get there.

Cervical screening saves an estimated 5,000 lives a year, and the Government are committed to continuing to do all we can to prevent cancer and ensure early diagnosis, which is often rightly called cancer's “magic key”, so that more families do not have to go through these personal tragedies, as the Sales have done. We are up for the fight. I thank everyone for taking part.

6.24 pm

Helen Jones: I thank the hon. Members who have participated in this debate. I have learned more about some of my colleagues than I ever thought I would. I cannot compete with their stories of recognition; the only thing that happened to me was after I had had a smear test, which did not show abnormal cells but was a bit dodgy for various reasons. I was waiting in hospital for an exploratory op, and everyone was being very, very careful about not saying who I was, until the porter came in to take me to theatre and proclaimed loudly across the ward: “You the MP then, love?” God bless Warringtonians.

We have heard a lot of useful comments in this debate about the need to look at variations in the take-up of screening, including variations between regions; about the need to find out what is going right and what is not; and about the need to be careful how we communicate with women. I had a letter following a mammogram that began, “Do not be alarmed.” As I told the person in charge of screening, who happened to be someone I had gone to primary school with, that is immediately very alarming. People often do not think about what they are sending out in letters.

We have also heard about the need to ensure that the guidance on young women presenting with abnormal symptoms and how they should be screened and treated is put into effect. I hope the Minister recognises the concern around the Chamber that that guidance is not always being followed; when it is not, it can have disastrous results. We have heard about the need to review the evidence on what should be the best age for screening and to keep that evidence continually under review.

We have heard about the need to counter any resistance to the HPV vaccination programme. There is now a lot of false information about vaccination programmes going around on social media and the internet, and it needs to be countered, not by us as politicians, but by doctors and clinicians who really understand the value of vaccination. Like the Minister, I will probably get a lot of angry tweets and emails after this debate, but we must ensure that the evidence, not false information, is what leads us. I am glad to hear that the Minister takes this matter seriously—I am confident that he does—and I hope we will make further progress in the coming years.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 225767 relating to lowering the age for smear tests for cervical cancer from 25 to 18.

6.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 28 January 2019

EDUCATION

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds):

Teaching remains a popular career choice for many. We recruited over 2,000 more trainee teachers for the 2018-19 academic year than in 2017-18, continuing the positive trend we saw the previous year. However, the growing number of pupils of secondary age means that we need even more teachers. This is at a time when we are losing more teachers from the profession than we can afford to, and are operating in the most competitive labour market on record.

To address this, the Department for Education has developed a teacher recruitment and retention strategy. Building on extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence, the strategy was developed collaboratively with teachers, headteachers, representative bodies, teachers' unions, initial teacher training providers and leading experts.

At the core of the strategy is the understanding that there are no great schools without great teachers. No other profession is as important to the fate of the next generation or as uniquely rewarding as teaching. The strategy outlines four key areas where focus, investment and reform can have the biggest impact on improving teacher recruitment and retention.

Priority One: Create the right climate for leaders to establish supportive school cultures

At the heart of this will be reforming the school accountability system. In particular we will radically simplify the system helping to reduce pressure, consulting on making "requires improvement" the sole trigger for an offer of support—replacing floor and coasting standards. The new Ofsted framework will have an active focus on reducing teacher workload, with inspectors considering staff workload as part of the leadership and management judgment. They will also look unfavourably on schools that implement burdensome data practices, and will refuse to look at internal assessment data.

Priority Two: Transform support for early career teachers

We are launching the early career framework, which will underpin a fully-funded, two-year package of structured support for all early career teachers linked to the best available research evidence—alongside funded time off timetable in the second year of teaching and additional support for mentors. We will create a major shift in the incentives for new teachers by introducing phased bursaries, with staggered retention payments to encourage good people to remain in the profession, as well as to join.

Priority Three: Build a career offer that remains attractive to teachers as their careers and lives develop

We will develop specialist qualifications to support clearer non-leadership career pathways for teachers who want to stay and excel in the classroom. We will invest in these new and existing leadership qualifications, and

will do so disproportionately in challenging schools. We will support headteachers to transform approaches to flexible working in schools.

Priority Four: Make it easier for great people to become teachers

We will launch a new discover teaching initiative, giving as many people as possible the opportunity to experience the unique opportunities that a career in teaching provides. We will radically simplify the process for becoming a teacher, introducing new digital systems designed to make application much easier and more user-friendly. In particular, we will introduce a new one-stop application service for ITT, which will be easier to use and designed to better meet the needs of potential trainees. We will review the ITT market to support it to work more efficiently and effectively.

This strategy builds on work already in hand to achieve this Government's vision to improve teacher recruitment and retention. We know that delivering this vision will take time; the issues are complicated and long-standing. But we are committed to continuing to work closely with the teaching profession to deliver this vision.

I will deposit a copy of the strategy in the House Library.

[HCWS1278]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Migration Crossings

The Secretary of State for the Home Department

(Sajid Javid): Since November 2018 there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals attempting to cross the English Channel illegally in small boats.

This activity represents a substantial risk to the lives of those attempting the crossing, as well as to the rescue services. Organised criminal networks are exploiting vulnerable individuals to drive profit from what is a highly dangerous activity.

As I set out to the House on 7 January, I declared a major incident on 28 December to send a clear message that we will not tolerate these life-threatening and illegal crossings. I established a Gold Command structure to co-ordinate my Department's response to this issue.

Good progress has been made to date. The re-deployment of Border Force assets and use of aerial surveillance has substantially improved coverage in the Channel and our extensive work with our French counterparts has improved co-ordination, both on land and at sea. We have built on existing structures, such as the Centre Conjoint d'Information et de Co-ordination (CCIC), which sees Border Force and Police Aux Frontières working alongside law enforcement partners to exchange real-time intelligence on criminality at the border and work together to identify and dismantle criminal gangs involved in people smuggling and wider cross-border crime. The Immigration Minister attended the formal opening of CCIC with Interior Minister Christophe Castaner on 25 January and saw first-hand the efforts that both countries are making to enhance our co-operation around border security.

Through these efforts, we have managed to reduce the number of individuals attempting the crossing from around 250 in December to around 90 so far in January, with roughly half of the January attempts being intercepted by partners in France before they can make it to British waters. But even one crossing is too many and I am determined that we make further efforts to deter both the facilitators and the individuals making these crossings.

To that end, I met with Minister Castaner in London on 24 January to agree a Joint Action Plan. The plan solidifies and builds on our existing border security partnership by setting out over £6 million (£7 million) in investment for new security equipment, as well as increased CCTV coverage of ports, air surveillance and shared intelligence. We have also agreed that migrants encountered in the Channel will be taken to the nearest safe port, in accordance with international maritime law.

In addition, the plan features a mutual commitment to return more migrants to France who have used boats to illegally cross the Channel. The first of these returns took place on 24 January.

We will not allow illegal migration and its facilitators to flourish, and we will continue to work closely with France and other countries to provide a strong deterrent against these dangerous crossings. This includes making it clear that those fearing persecution should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach, and my officials are looking to strengthen our inadmissibility guidance for claims made by those who have travelled here through countries that are internationally recognised as being safe.

The Joint Action Plan comes into force immediately and builds on the existing framework of co-operation set out in the Sandhurst Treaty. I am confident that it will strengthen the achievements that we have made to date and I thank our French colleagues for their collaboration in working with the United Kingdom to tackle this critical issue—protecting human life, and our border.

I will place a copy of the Joint Action Plan in the House Library.

[HCWS1280]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government Funding: Brexit Preparation

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Local government will play a critical role in making a success of Brexit at the local level. My Department is committed to ensuring councils have the support and the funding they need to prepare for an orderly exit from the EU and do appropriate contingency planning.

Today I am announcing an additional £56.5 million to help councils carry out their preparations.

Councils will receive £20 million this financial year as well as £20 million to spend in the next financial year to fund additional planning and capacity. Across the two years, all district councils will receive £35,000, all county councils will receive £175,000, all unitaries will receive £210,000 and all combined authorities will receive £182,000, and £1.5 million will be allocated in 2018-19 only to local authorities facing immediate impacts from local ports, with details of the allocation and distribution of that funding to be announced shortly.

I am retaining £10 million for allocation during 2019-20 to respond to specific local costs that may only become evident in the months after we exit the EU.

Finally, £5 million will be split between teams in my Department and the local government sector for specific purposes such as strengthening resilience preparations and supporting communities.

This funding will help councils to adapt to changes caused by Brexit, while still protecting vital local services.

This will not be the only resources councils receive to fund Brexit costs. The Government have been clear that Departments will assess and, if appropriate, fund any potential new burdens arising on councils as part of EU exit work they are undertaking.

As for councils' overall funding, the provisional finance settlement which I announced before Christmas provides extra funding, with the confirmation that core spending power is forecast to increase from £45.1 billion in 2018-19 to £46.4 billion in 2019-20. This amounts to a cash increase of 2.8% and a real-terms increase in resources available to local authorities. I will be returning to this House shortly, following consultation, to announce the final settlement.

Table of overall funding allocations

	2018-19 (£m)	2019-20 (£m)	Total (£m)
Upfront funding for all councils*	20	20	40
Authorities affected by ports	1.5		1.5
Retained for specific local costs which arise		10	10
Split between Departmental teams and local government sector		5	5
Total			56.5

*Division by type of authority shown in table below

Table showing split of £40m upfront funding by type of authority

	2018-19 (£k)	2019-20 (£k)	Total (£k)
Combined Authorities (11 including London (GLA))	91	91	182
District councils	17.5	17.5	35
County councils	87.5	87.5	175
Unitary authorities*	105	105	210

*Unitary authorities will receive the sum of the county and district allocations. Metropolitan boroughs and London boroughs are unitary authorities.

[HCWS1279]

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**not later than
Monday 4 February 2019**

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