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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday 5 February 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Imprisonment

1. **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): What the Government's policy is on the use of imprisonment for offenders. [908987]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): Sentencing must match the severity of the crime, but there is persuasive evidence that short sentences do not work in helping some offenders to turn their backs on crime, which is why we are exploring options that would see them used much less frequently.

Gareth Johnson: A deeply concerning incident took place in my constituency at the weekend involving an assault using a noxious substance. May I ask the Secretary of State for a clear commitment not only that the sale and possession of acid will be targeted, but that he will ensure that those guilty of these despicable and evil crimes receive significant prison terms?

Mr Gauke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising a very serious incident. Such attacks are truly dreadful and have life-changing consequences, and anyone committing them must feel the full force of the law. That is why the Offensive Weapons Bill, which is currently being considered in the Lords, will change the law to stop the sale of acid to under-18s and to make it an offence to possess a corrosive substance in a public place. It is for the independent courts to determine sentences handed down in individual cases, but it is already the case that the use of a weapon, including acid, in any offence is treated as an aggravating factor meriting an increased sentence.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Statistics show that 36% of rough sleepers in London have previously been in prison—the figure is up three percentage points on the year before—which is deeply concerning. Short sentences do nothing but exacerbate the issue and do not reduce reoffending. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is now time to introduce a presumption against prison sentences of less than 12 months?

Mr Gauke: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. If someone is given a short sentence, it can mean that they lose their home, which would put them in a more difficult position, and then on their release they would be at much greater risk of rough sleeping. We are looking at our options, and I welcome her support. We are running pilots at Pentonville, Bristol and Leeds to see what we can do to address the problem of rough sleeping.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I very much welcome the Secretary of State's much more realistic and nuanced approach to sentencing and the use of imprisonment. Does he agree that it is essential that we have space in our prisons for those whose crimes are so serious that only custody is appropriate, but that we do not overcrowd prisons with those who have mental or medical difficulties, or literacy or social problems, or those who might be better dealt with through rigorous community sentences?

Mr Gauke: I completely agree with the Chair of the Justice Committee. There are serious crimes for which a strong custodial sentence is exactly the right answer, but there are also cases for which short sentences, in particular, are ineffective for rehabilitation and do not serve society well. Prison should be used when appropriate, and we should look to develop alternatives to prison wherever possible.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am heartened by the Secretary of State's answers thus far. Last September the prisons Minister, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), said that

"the evidence on what could be done to reduce reoffending by not overusing short prison sentences inappropriately is a good lesson from Scotland from which we wish to learn."—[*Official Report*, 4 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 41.]

At Holyrood, however, the Scottish Conservatives have long campaigned against the presumption against short sentences, claiming it to be a soft-touch approach. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Scottish Conservatives are out of touch in wanting to pursue an old-fashioned and entirely ineffective approach?

Mr Gauke: I will focus on the approach that I want to take in England and Wales. If we can find effective alternatives to short sentences, it is not a question of pursuing a soft-justice approach, but rather a case of pursuing smart justice that is effective at reducing reoffending and crime. That is the approach that I want to take in England and Wales.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): But the full force of the law too often is not very forceful at all, is it?

Mr Gauke: In reality, sentences and the prison population have gone up in recent years. I maintain that there are circumstances in which significant prison sentences are right as a means of punishment and a demonstration of society's abhorrence at particular behaviours, but we also have to bear it in mind that some people who go to prison end up in a cycle of reoffending, with little achieved to the benefit of society or those individuals.

Probation Service

2. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): If he will make it his policy to return the probation service to the public sector. [908988]

18. **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): If he will make it his policy to return the probation service to the public sector. [909005]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer Questions 2 and 19 together.

Mr Speaker: Order. I think that the Secretary of State's intended grouping of Question 2 is with Question 18, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), who was looking mildly perturbed, but whom I hope will now be greatly reassured.

Grahame Morris *indicated assent*.

Mr Speaker: It is good to see the hon. Gentleman reassured.

Mr Gauke: We have made it clear that the probation system needs to improve, and we have taken decisive action to end current community rehabilitation company contracts and to develop more robust arrangements to protect the public and tackle reoffending. We have seen examples of good and innovative work from CRCs in Cumbria, where probation is being adapted to a rural setting, and in London, where CRCs are working with the Mayor's office on programmes to rehabilitate offenders involved in knife crime.

I believe that public, private and voluntary organisations all have a role to play. The reforms that we are making are crucial to integrating the system better so that different providers can work more effectively together, and we will set out our proposals later this year.

Alex Cunningham: I am grateful for that comprehensive answer but, in the light of the prisons Minister's praise at our last session of Justice questions for the not-for-profit Durham Tees Valley CRC—one of the best, if not the best, at inspection, and, according to Napo, also one of the best to work for—may I ask how the Secretary of State will protect this rare success story, given that his own reprivatisation plans are set to allow security giants such as Sodexo to swallow it up?

Mr Gauke: I, too, pay tribute to the work of that not-for-profit CRC and its focus on rehabilitating offenders. The expertise and commitment of not-for-profit organisations are vital in helping offenders to turn their lives around, and the changes on which we are working will ensure that the probation system benefits from having a diverse range of providers, while also doing more to deliver operational stability.

Grahame Morris: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer, and for drawing attention to the statistics that we have seen in Durham. However, probation failures cause reoffending and place strains on already overburdened police resources. Will the Secretary of State consider meeting police and crime commissioners

such as Ron Hogg, Durham's police, crime and victims commissioner, who happens to head the only outstanding police force in the country, to discuss the devolution of probation services so that they can be tailor-made to meet the needs of local communities?

Mr Gauke: I have already met a number of police and crime commissioners to talk about this very issue, but I should be happy to meet Mr Hogg, as well as other PCCs, to discuss these matters again. We want to ensure that PCCs can play a full and active role in this process, and I am heartened by the determination and willingness of many of them to do all that they can to help to develop it and to ensure that we have a strong probation system.

Prisons: Criminal Activity and Drug Abuse

3. **Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to tackle criminal activity and drug abuse in the prisons in the 10 prisons project. [908989]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): Turning around the problem of drugs in prisons involves focusing on relationships, staff and perimeter security, but for the first time, every one of those 10 prisons will have proper dog teams, X-ray scanners and full airport-style security. I believe that that will drive down the supply of drugs in those prisons, and I expect to be judged on the results.

Mr Goodwill: The Minister won the admiration of the nation when he put his neck on the line in pursuit of his ambitious targets to reduce drugs and violence in our prisons. What other practical steps is he taking to meet those targets and to ensure that our prisons not only keep prisoners in, but keep drugs out?

Rory Stewart: As well as ensuring that people are searched at the gates, we are investing more in netting and grilles. We are also investing a great deal more in staff training and support. Last week, I was lucky to be able to visit Newbold Revel, our prison officer training college, to see the passing out parade of the new set of individuals who are bringing standards to those 10 prisons.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): Violence in prisons has reached record levels, with assaults on prison officers up by 30%. When will the Government realise that their cuts are causing this crisis in our Prison Service?

Rory Stewart: The assaults on prison officers are genuinely shocking. That is why we have doubled the sentence for such assaults, and why we are investing in perimeter security. It is also why I have said that if I do not bring down the incidence of that violence, including assaults on prison officers, I will resign.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): When I last visited HMP Bullingdon, it was explained to me that much of prisoners' mail is saturated with drugs. How is the plan to photocopy mail where appropriate going?

Rory Stewart: Every one of the 10 prisons where we are running the pilots will either photocopy the mail or put it through it through a Rapiscanner, which will identify Spice and other psychoactive substances to ensure that prisoners cannot use mail to bring drugs into prison.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. In calling the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), I congratulate him on his tie, inserting only the modest caveat that it is perhaps a tad understated.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): This is my celebration tie for Autism Day, Mr Speaker—a little bit of flamboyance for autism.

Nobody wants our prisons to have a culture of drugs and violence, but can the Minister imagine what it is like to be in prison and not to be guilty? I co-chair the all-party group on miscarriages of justice—we are meeting tonight. Some people do 18 years in prison are then found not guilty, but have no compensation and no reintroduction into society. When are we going to do something about that?

Rory Stewart: I think that this is a slightly different subject, but I would be very happy to sit down with the hon. Gentleman to look at the rare but tragic cases when somebody is wrongfully convicted.

Domestic Abuse Victims

4. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What support his Department provides to victims of domestic abuse in taking abusive former partners to court. [908990]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): Domestic abuse is a dreadful crime. We are determined to ensure that those who commit it face justice and that the victims of it are supported and feel able to come forward. A range of measures is available to support victims in taking their abuser to court, including eligibility to apply for special measures, and the use of video links and recorded evidence. However, we believe that we can and should do more, as we set out in the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, which was published last week.

Robert Halfon: In June 2012, Eystna Blunnie, a 20-year-old, heavily pregnant young woman, was unlawfully beaten to death by her abusive former partner—her unborn child also died—despite the abuser being known to the authorities and the Crown Prosecution Service. Will my hon. Friend take steps to strengthen the support and protection available to victims of domestic abuse to help to prevent such tragedies from ever happening again and so that such a situation never occurs in Harlow again?

Edward Argar: I was sorry to hear about the dreadful and tragic case of Eystna Blunnie in my hon. Friend's constituency. Strengthening the protections that are available to victims lies at the heart of the draft Bill. Its provisions include automatic eligibility for special measures in court for domestic abuse victims and, to better protect victims, a new domestic abuse protection order to enforce

more stringent conditions on suspected and convicted perpetrators where breach will constitute a criminal offence.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Before Christmas, Sammy Woodhouse and I met the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer). Will the Minister update the House on the action taken after that meeting, particularly in relation to guidance issued to local authorities on exemption regarding the duty to notify? Is the Department willing to conduct a review to get to the heart of the scale of the issue that affected Sammy?

Edward Argar: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady and to Sammy for their work in highlighting the terrible situation and looking at what more can be done. I know that she had a positive meeting with my hon. and learned Friend and we are determined that the family court system should never be used to coerce or re-victimise those who have been abused. My hon. and learned Friend is liaising with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services in respect of councils' obligations and has invited the president of the family division to consider clarifying the practice direction on notification.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): The Public Accounts Committee held an inquiry into children's social services yesterday. Does my hon. Friend agree that domestic violence is one of the key causes of the growth in the number of children being taken into care in local authorities? Will the Department work closely with the Department for Education to ensure that children's social services have the information and finances that they need to deal with that growing problem?

Edward Argar: I can offer my hon. Friend the reassurance that we are working extremely closely with colleagues across Government to do that. We often see that some of the young people who end up in the criminal justice system have come from homes or families where they have witnessed domestic abuse. It is incumbent on us all to do all we can to tackle that.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): Practice direction 12J requires that a court must be sure, when ordering parental contact, that neither the child nor the other parent is at risk of harm. The direction makes it clear that this is an obligatory requirement, but campaign groups and lawyers say that its implementation is patchy, as we saw in the Sammy Woodhouse case. Will the Government task the new domestic abuse commissioner with responsibility for monitoring its implementation, with annual reports of any breaches to be laid before Parliament?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the shadow Minister for her question, and I should have said in response to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) that I knew that the shadow Minister was concerned about this case and had done work on it. As I have set out, in the shorter term we have asked the president of the family division to look at that practice guidance to see whether it is working as it should. The hon. Lady mentioned the domestic abuse commissioner. In the context of the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, the commissioner will have powers to investigate these matters. I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady, as my opposite number, to discuss how that might work in practice.

Prisons: Violence

5. **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle violence in prisons. [908991]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): The scourge of violence in prisons must be tackled. To do this, we need to get the basics right. We have strengthened the frontline with more than 4,300 new staff so that we can run full, purposeful regimes, and we have moved to a new key worker model to support prisoners. We are also supporting prisoners with measures to tackle drugs and to make the physical environment in prisons decent and safe.

Vicky Ford: We know that a positive working relationship between staff and prisoners is key to running safe, decent prisons. Will my right hon. Friend tell us more about what is being done to improve the relationship between staff and prisoners?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to the work that she does in this area. I know that she is a frequent visitor to Chelmsford prison in her capacity as its constituency MP. In fact, I understand that she might almost have her own cell there, such is the regularity of her visits. She highlights the important relationship between prison officers and prisoners. We are introducing the key workers programme across the prison estate, and the early signs are that it is making a positive difference in terms of relationships and of reducing violence. There is more work that we need to do, but I am pleased that we are able to do that and to ensure that prison officers get the training they need to make best use of it.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Out-of-control drug use in prisons fuels violence. Yesterday I met the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), the Health Minister who is dealing with this issue. I want to know what more can be done both before a prisoner enters the prison system and afterwards, as well as how we can ensure that during that crucial period when he—it is usually a “he”—is in there, he can have proper drug rehab so that his time in prison is not wasted.

Mr Gauke: The hon. Lady makes an important point. We have formed a drugs taskforce and we are working with law enforcement and with health partners across Government to restrict supply, reduce demand and build recovery. The taskforce is developing a national drug strategy, which will provide all prisons with guidance and examples of best practice to support them in tackling drugs. I should also point out that we are investing £6 million in 10 of the most challenging prisons to tackle drug supply and reduce demand. There is a greater focus on drug detection, on dedicated search teams, on body scanners and on improved perimeter defences.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Purposeful activity for prisoners is vital to encouraging rehabilitation and reducing volatility in our jails. What steps are being taken to drive down the number of prisoners who are locked up for 23 hours a day, which does not help to bring about peace in our prisons?

Mr Gauke: I agree with my hon. Friend. The additional 4,300 prison officers will help to ensure that we can do this. A particular area on which I have been keen to focus is the education and employment strategy, which will ensure that we provide those prisoners who are prepared to take responsibility with the opportunity to educate and prepare themselves for the world of work. I am very keen that we should continue to do that.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): We found out from the Secretary of State's Department last week the alarming fact that 51% of our youth offenders now come from a black minority or ethnic background. That puts us in a worse position than the United States. Given that context in our prisons, will he revisit my review, and may I meet him urgently to discuss how we can accelerate progress?

Mr Gauke: I am grateful for that question, and I would be happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman. I know he regularly meets the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), on this subject. I am also concerned about the proportion of BAME children in custody, which is something we take very seriously. My Department has introduced a dedicated team within the youth justice policy unit with a key focus on explaining or changing disproportionate outcomes for BAME children in the justice system.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The Justice Secretary has been in post for just over a year. In that time, every set of prison safety figures has shown violence spiralling out of control. In January 2018, assaults were up 12% year on year, reaching new record highs. In April 2018, assaults were up 13%, reaching new record highs. In October 2018, assaults were up 20%, reaching new record highs. And last week we saw yet more record highs—a record high for assaults on staff, a record high for prisoner-on-prisoner violence and a record high for self-harm. Does he agree that his Government have lost control of violence in our prisons? When will they get a grip?

Mr Gauke: Clearly, the figures set out last week, which relate to what was happening in July, August and September 2018, are not acceptable and we need to bring those numbers down. That is why we have increased the number of prison officer staff, it is why we are focusing on purposeful activity and it is why we are taking steps to reduce both the supply and the demand for drugs. We are seeing some encouraging signs, but I do not want to make too much of that as yet. We need to wait to see the numbers in April, when we will have details about the last quarter of 2018. I am beginning to feel that we have turned the corner, that the additional staff are making a difference and that the measures we are taking are making a difference, but I fully accept that much work still needs to be done.

Prison Officer Safety

6. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What progress the Government have made on improving the safety of prison officers. [908992]

24. Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): What progress the Government have made on improving the safety of prison officers. [909011]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): We do not tolerate violence against our dedicated and hard-working prison officers. We are strengthening frontline officer numbers and rolling out the key worker scheme so that we can improve prisoner-staff relationships and tackle the causes of violence. We are giving officers the tools they need, like body-worn cameras and PAVA spray, to respond where incidents occur.

Andrew Bridgen: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer but, in order to protect prison officers, what measures are the Government taking to ensure that the police and the justice system take crimes committed in prison as seriously as those committed outside in the community?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, and it is important that crimes committed within prisons are taken seriously, just as crimes committed outside prisons are taken seriously. We have taken a number of steps, and I have already alluded to some of the measures we are taking to help prison officers in these circumstances. We also recently changed the law to strengthen sentences against those who commit crimes against prison officers.

Gordon Henderson: A week before Christmas, one of my local prison officers, Ashley McLean, received horrendous facial injuries when he was violently attacked by a prisoner who was allegedly high on Spice. This was not an isolated incident. It happens every day of every week in one or other of our prisons. Much of that violent behaviour, as we have heard, is caused by drugs, so what steps are being taken to increase sentences for those found guilty of supplying drugs to inmates?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend rightly highlights an horrific incident, and I know the prisons Minister has already replied to a letter from him on this matter. We are fully committed to addressing the significant increase we have seen in the number of assaults on our hard-working prison staff. The new Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 increases the penalty for those who assault emergency workers, including prison officers, and I understand that the police are continuing to investigate this particular incident.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): We have already heard that assaults against prison officers are at record levels, and those levels are rising at a record rate. Why is the Secretary of State more interested in taking prison officers to court for raising health and safety concerns than in sitting around the table and working with them to develop an urgent violence reduction strategy?

Mr Gauke: We are very focused on reducing violence, which is why we are taking the measures that we are: introducing the extra staff; giving prison officers access to PAVA; increasing the use of body-worn cameras; and increasing measures to stop drugs getting into prisons—as we have heard, they can often be a driver of this violence. So that is precisely what we are doing and will continue to do.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I recently met someone who trained to be a prison officer and left the job after six months. He told me that the three months of training left him ill-equipped to deal with the violence and intimidation, and to deal with prisoners with mental health problems. The Secretary of State will know that this is not an isolated case—it is widespread. What is he doing to improve training for prison officers so that they are equipped to deal with these incidents and have support when they are encountering this type of violence?

Mr Gauke: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are constantly looking at ways in which we can improve the training for prison officers. The prisons Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), has been very focused on that. We have managed to increase the number of prison officers significantly—as I say, the figure is up by 4,300. We are now seeing those prison officers gaining more experience and becoming increasingly effective. As I say, there are reasons to be cautiously optimistic that we are moving in the right direction, but there is still much more that needs to be done.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What specific assessment has the Secretary of State made of the opportunities associated with the use of body-worn cameras by prison officers, given the successes we have seen in policing?

Mr Gauke: Again, my hon. Friend is right to highlight this issue. The increased use of body-worn cameras can help to ensure that we have evidence that can ensure that wrongdoing by prisoners can be brought to book—it can enable prosecutions to be brought. It also provides an ability to ensure that the truth can always be discovered, which is important. Body-worn cameras are not the sole answer, but they are part of an answer on how to bring the number of these incidents down. The nearly 6,000 additional body-worn cameras, alongside staff training, can help us to move in the right direction.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Every assault on a prison officer is, of course, one too many. In the last full year, there were five times fewer serious assaults on prison officers in Scotland than there were in English and Welsh prisons. Given that stark contrast, and the fact that while this Government were slashing prison officer numbers by nearly a third their numbers in Scotland actually rose, will the Secretary of State meet the Scottish Government to discuss what he could learn from Scotland's approach to this issue as well?

Mr Gauke: We have a co-operative relationship with the Scottish Government and that will continue. Let me point out that since October 2016 we have seen an increase in prison officer numbers of 4,300, which is to be welcomed. At one stage, people said, "Those are new numbers but they are very inexperienced", but of course as each month goes by those prison officers are gaining experience and confidence. I believe we will see improvements in the months and years ahead.

Prisoner Transfer Agreements

7. Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): How many (a) compulsory and (b) voluntary prisoner transfer agreements the UK has with other countries. [908994]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for advocating on this issue consistently and for reinforcing a policy that has led to nearly 45,000 foreign national offenders being deported. In answer to the question, let me say that 46 of the 110 prisoner transfer agreements we have are compulsory. However, it is worth pointing out that, were we to leave the European Union with no deal and no transition period, we would lose 26 of those and face significantly greater challenges in deporting foreign national offenders who constitute nearly 40% of the cohort.

Mr Hollobone: I understand that under those 26 EU agreements only about 200 prisoners have been compulsorily transferred to other EU countries, so that would make little difference. The point is that at any one time 10% of our prison population is made up of foreign national offenders. The best way to reduce overcrowding is to send these people back to prison in their own country. Will the Minister negotiate more compulsory prisoner transfer agreements so that we can get these people back to prisons in their own abode?

Rory Stewart: I agree strongly with what my hon. Friend says, and indeed we are actively engaged in this; my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor will be in Romania to discuss these issues, and I am meeting the Albanian Justice Minister this afternoon. But it is important to understand that, if we are going to put someone back into prison in another country, that country's police, courts and prison service need to be onside, and that is a diplomatic challenge.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): One of the saddest groups in our prisons are those women from abroad, usually with children, who have been duped into being drug mules. In the past, the Government have helped with the building of prisons abroad to allow those women to go back to their country of origin; is that still this Government's policy?

Rory Stewart: As a former Minister in the Department for International Development, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we remain open to that. We have recently faced problems in Jamaica because there has been political resistance, not from us but from the Jamaican Government, to British development money being used in that way. We remain open to investment in the rule of law, and if it helps us to return foreign national offenders, at the same time as helping prisoners in that country, we will do that.

Court Closures and Staffing

8. **Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the effect of recent (a) changes in court staffing and (b) court closures on access to justice. [908995]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): I assure the hon. Lady that any decision to close a court is taken incredibly carefully, but in circumstances in which 41% of courts were operating at half their available capacity in 2016-17, it is right that the Ministry of Justice considers how best to spend its resources. We are investing £1 billion in our courts, bringing them up to date, improving back-office systems and making it easier for people to access justice.

Helen Hayes: Three years ago, I expressed concerns about the impact that the closure of Lambeth county court would have on the efficiency of the court system and access to justice for my constituents. Lambeth was closed two years ago and the workload was moved to Clerkenwell and Shoreditch. Yesterday, I heard from a local legal aid solicitor that Clerkenwell and Shoreditch county court is completely overwhelmed, that delays of six to eight months to receive court directions are common, and that the contact centre cannot provide up-to-date information on cases. When will the Government act to sort out this shambolic mess?

Lucy Frazer: I am happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss that specific situation. The MOJ is taking a number of steps to improve court timeliness, which is of course important. We are digitising a number of services—people can now track their tribunal appeal online—and recruiting more judges to tribunals, with more than 225 recruited over the past year. I am happy to discuss that particular case.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Under the smokescreen of a digital revolution, the Government have taken the axe to our court system. A victim of crime who wants justice through their day in court will now have a much more difficult experience, perhaps having to travel much further after the closure of hundreds of courts, and perhaps finding that the help and support they need are lacking after the sacking of thousands of court staff. Given the recent chaos, instead of forcing through yet more court reforms, will the Minister agree to a moratorium on further cuts and closures, at least until this House has been offered a chance to scrutinise changes that will affect access to justice for decades to come?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify the fact that an IT issue affected courts towards the end of January. That disruption was caused by an infrastructure issue in our supplier's data and I apologise for any issues for people who were affected. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have consulted on what principles will guide any future court closures, and that consultation has now come to an end.

Victims: Policy Alignment

9. **Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure that measures in the victims strategy, the forthcoming violence against women and girls strategy and domestic abuse Bill are aligned. [908996]

22. **Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure that measures in the victim strategy, the forthcoming violence against women and girls strategy and domestic abuse Bill are aligned. [909009]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): The victims strategy is the first time that we have looked in such detail and in such a joined-up way at how we treat victims of crime. The strategy provides the vision for the Government's approach to victims. The Government's violence against women and girls strategy refresh and draft domestic abuse Bill have

been developed with this vision in mind, and have been designed to sit within the framework of the wider victims strategy. The Bill is a joint Home Office and MOJ Bill, with close ministerial and official-level working to ensure close alignment.

Huw Merriman: To return to a theme raised on the Opposition Benches earlier, there is great support on the Government Benches for closing the loophole that may allow convicted rapists to gain notification rights to children conceived through those heinous crimes. Will the Minister assure me that if it turns out that practice directions will not have the requisite strength, legislation will be looked at? When he meets the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) to discuss the possibility of the commissioner having powers with regard to practice direction 12C, will he consider including practice direction 12J under those same powers? That will also give safeguards to women and children.

Edward Argar: Building on the answer that I gave to the shadow Minister, I hear what my hon. Friend says and I know his work in this area and his commitment on the issue. I am very happy to look at the points that he raises. It is a draft Bill and I very much hope that he will consider putting his views to us in that process.

Mike Wood: For many victims of domestic violence and coercive control, like my constituent Chloe, and for their families, the process of giving evidence and preparing for trial adds to the pain of the original abuse. What is the Minister doing to support vulnerable witnesses, including victims of domestic abuse?

Edward Argar: We are determined to improve the family justice response to vulnerable witnesses, including people such as my hon. Friend's constituent Chloe and victims of domestic abuse. Family judges have a range of powers to make sure that difficult courtroom situations are handled sensitively. In particular, we are looking to give the courts a specific power to prevent perpetrators of certain offences, including domestic abuse, from cross-examining their victims in person. We will also give the courts the power, in certain circumstances, to appoint a lawyer to conduct cross-examination on the preventive party's behalf.

Victims Law

10. **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): When the Government plan to consult on a victims law. [908997]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): In the victims strategy published on 10 September, we committed to consult on the detail of a victims law in the course of 2019. In taking that work forward, we have already begun discussions with both victims and victims' groups. We will consult on amending the victims code before bringing forward detailed proposals for a victims law. That will allow us to update entitlements to ensure that they better reflect victims' needs before considering the detail of legislation.

Mary Robinson: I welcome the Department's victims strategy, particularly the review of the criminal injuries compensation scheme. The Manchester Arena bombing almost two years ago left people with serious and life-changing injuries and brought to light questions about the scheme's suitability in providing support for

victims of terrorism. Will my hon. Friend outline what plans are being considered by the Department to improve support for victims of major tragedies such as the Manchester bombing?

Edward Argar: The Government are committed to ensuring that victims of terrorist attacks such as the Manchester Arena bombing receive the help and support that they need. In the victims strategy, we set out our intention to consult on changes to the criminal injuries compensation scheme, including considering how the scheme can better serve victims of terrorism. Terms of reference were published on 18 December 2018, with the review expected to report this year.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): My constituent, Helen Hill, whose husband was murdered in 2002, has started a petition that has more than 8,000 names. The petition is about having supervision for life for murderers. I am sure the Minister understands the suffering that she has endured and is enduring to this day. Is not she the sort of person to whom he should be talking as a result of this, and will he please agree to meet me and Mrs Hill in the near future?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that specific case and I am very happy to meet him.

Farmer Review

12. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What progress the Government have made on implementing the recommendations of the Farmer review, published in August 2017. [908999]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): I pay tribute to Lord Farmer for this review. We have accepted all its recommendations and have implemented more than half of them. I meet Lord Farmer very regularly, most recently last Sunday, because we realise that good family ties can reduce reoffending by 37%.

Fiona Bruce: Women prisoners face particular difficulties when parted from their families—as do their families. What consideration has been given to this issue?

Rory Stewart: The specific issue raised by my hon. Friend relates to women in the criminal justice system, many of whom are the primary care givers. So putting those women in prison has a very serious impact on their children, many of whom, unfortunately, then go on to commit crime themselves. We have therefore commissioned Lord Farmer to do a review looking specifically at the family ties of women.

Criminal Justice: Children

13. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What steps he has taken to reduce the number of children in the criminal justice system. [909000]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): As far as possible, we believe that children should be diverted from the criminal justice system through liaison and diversion services. A custodial

sentence should be used only as a last resort. As we have seen over the past 10 years, the number of children entering the criminal justice system has fallen by 86%, with the number getting custodial sentences falling equally dramatically.

Bill Esterson: According to the latest research, between 40,000 and 120,000 children are born every year with foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Those with FASD often do not understand consequences, so will the Minister look at the special courts that have been set up in Canada, designed to reduce reoffending by helping those with FASD to understand the consequences of their actions?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. If he writes to me with more details, I will be happy to look at the matter.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) were standing on this question, I would call her; if she does not, I will not.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: But she is doing so, so I will.

23. [909010] **Mrs Latham:** As well as the importance of employment opportunities for ex-offenders, does the Minister agree that the provision of affordable housing for former prisoners is a significant factor in preventing reoffending, and will he outline what steps he is taking on this?

Mr Speaker: Just a heads up in case the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) requires it—the same would apply to him in a moment.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: No, no, not now. The hon. Gentleman can work up his question while the Minister is responding to the hon. Lady. [*Interruption.*] No, no, I am giving him preparation time; he should be thanking me.

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) makes an important point about the importance of stable accommodation, which can play a key part in reducing reoffending and giving people the opportunity to get their life back on the right track. We are working with partners across the Government, local authorities and others to ensure that the system works for those people.

Jim Shannon *rose—*

Mr Speaker: We are all now uncontrollably excited.

17. [909004] **Jim Shannon:** You are most kind, Mr Speaker. Given that the latest report published shows the lowest reoffending rate in the 12-year time series for which data is available, will the Minister outline the correlation between training and education in prison, and employment and a clean slate? Will he also give us the most recent reoffending rates for those who have gained qualifications while in prison?

Edward Argar: Reducing reoffending is a key goal of the prison system, as we set out in the White Paper. Plans such as the New Futures Network show that we are serious about this. Research published by the Ministry of Justice last year showed that prisoners who have undertaken learning activity have a significantly lower reoffending rate on release than their peers, with a one-year proven reoffending rate that is 7.5 percentage points lower. Offenders who found P45 employment in the year after leaving prison had one-year reoffending rates that were six to nine percentage points lower than similar offenders who did not find employment.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): While the total number of children in prison has declined over the years, the number of black and minority ethnic children in the prison system has remained static. How can the Lord Chancellor reassure BME communities that their children are not being disproportionately targeted?

Edward Argar: The shadow Minister makes an important point, building on the point made earlier by the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). I am concerned about the black, Asian and minority ethnic people in custody. As the Lord Chancellor has said, we take this matter very seriously. This runs through our response to the Lammy review and the race disproportionality work that we undertake in the Department. I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady on this topic, if she would like me to.

Prison Overcrowding

14. **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reduce prison overcrowding. [909001]

16. **Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reduce prison overcrowding. [909003]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): We are making good progress with Wellingborough and Glen Parva Prisons, which will be modern and provide uncrowded capacity and will open in 2021 and 2022 respectively. This is against a background where the long-term population trend has put a stress on the prison estate. I am pleased that the prison population has decreased by around 2,000 in the past year. We will continue to look into how we can ensure further reductions, including looking at better community sentences. Our new prison estate will have up to 10,000 new uncrowded prison places, creating the physical conditions for governors to achieve better educational, training and rehabilitation outcomes.

Mohammad Yasin: Nearly two weeks ago, I raised concerns about broken screens at HMP Bedford that have resulted in my constituents having to put up with loud, intimidating and lewd behaviour from prisoners, and daily intrusions on to their properties by criminals smuggling contraband through their gardens and over the prison wall. The Minister committed to immediately raising the matter with the governor. Will he confirm what action has been taken?

Mr Gauke: The Prisons Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), has indeed visited Bedford Prison and is in contact with

the governor. The prison is introducing new scanners to help to address some of these issues. We will look at anything that we can do to ensure that no burden is placed on the local community.

Janet Daby: Overcrowding in our prisons leads to inhumane conditions and puts pressure on provision, services and training. That is unacceptable. The public expect reform and rehabilitation. What is the Minister doing to address this issue, as well as the over-representation of black men within our prisons?

Mr Gauke: I agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of rehabilitation. We have stressed that point, and it has been stressed a number of times this morning. Of course we want to bring overcrowding levels down. It would be fair to say that overcrowding levels have been pretty consistent; they are essentially at the same level as in 2010. On the disproportionate numbers of people from ethnic minorities within the prison system, we take that seriously, as the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), has just pointed out. I look forward to meeting the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) to discuss this shortly.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): One source of overcrowding is the indefinite detention of prisoners using the imprisonment for public protection—IPP—sentences, which were introduced under the previous Labour Government but ruled unlawful in 2007. Why are 3,300 prisoners still in prison having served their sentence? Many of them—51%—have served five years or more after their sentence and are still in prison to this day.

Mr Gauke: Over time, more of those IPP prisoners are being released, but the Parole Board has to make a judgment in each individual case on whether there is a risk to society from releasing a particular individual. Those judgments can be difficult. Sometimes the Parole Board faces criticism when it does decide to release somebody in these circumstances. These matters have to be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Last year, almost half of prisoners held at HMP Birmingham were held in overcrowded cells, contributing to the crisis of violence that six months ago forced the Government to step in and take control away from G4S. On the last occasion I asked about this, the Minister of State was unable to give a response, so will the Secretary of State now confirm that he will not be handing HMP Birmingham back to G4S, and will he draw the obvious conclusion that privatisation has been a failure in our prison system?

Mr Gauke: We will not hand HMP Birmingham back if it is not safe for us to do so. I am afraid that the attack on any involvement of the private sector in the prison system that we hear from Labour Front Benchers does not represent a balanced approach. We have to look at the successes that exist within the prison system, where the private sector has run very effective prisons. That cannot be ignored, notwithstanding the very real problems that exist, and have existed, with Birmingham.

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

Mr Speaker: Finally, before we move on to topicals, I say to the right hon. Gentleman that he is an extraordinarily senior and distinguished denizen of the House, but he will have to be a little patient and he may get his chance in due course, queuing up with the rest. Meanwhile, he will, I am sure, celebrate the success of his hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone).

Prisoner Rehabilitation

15. **Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of prisoners' access to rehabilitation programmes. [909002]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): Over time, we have invested more and more in this, particularly in individualised rehabilitation programmes. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Stephanie Covington and Edwina Grosvenor, in particular, for their trauma-informed approach to counselling.

Jamie Stone: When we think about prisoners, we should understand that we all have a past that we cannot change but a future that we can change, hopefully this side of eternity. Many prisoners out there have records of good conduct and are desperately trying to turn over a new leaf. Surely we should therefore be doing everything in our power to encourage still more firms, companies and other organisations to offer suitable short-term placements to these people, because those placements can be so successful in terms of rehabilitation.

Rory Stewart: Absolutely. It totally transforms a prisoner's life to have a job, and it leads them to be less likely to reoffend, therefore protecting the public. I pay tribute particularly to the work of Tempus Novo in Leeds, which brings businesses into prison, with two experienced ex-prison officers, and helps companies to become comfortable with employing ex-offenders, thus ultimately changing lives and protecting the public.

Topical Questions

T1. [909012] **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): Yesterday, I published my review of the Parole Board rules and the Government's response to the public consultation about creating a new reconsideration mechanism for Parole Board decisions. I have decided to proceed with changes to the Parole Board rules that will introduce such a mechanism later this year. Our report also sets out additional reforms that will bring greater transparency and improvements for victims. I announced the launch of a tailored review of the Parole Board that will consider whether more fundamental reforms are necessary in the longer term, including those that may require primary legislation.

Alan Mak: New technology can play a key role in reducing the flow of contraband into our prisons. Will my right hon. Friend outline what support and financial investment his Department is providing in that area?

Mr Gauke: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We are strengthening the countermeasures against contraband for every route into prison, and technology is an important part of that. In 2017, we invested £2 million in modern technology, including hand-held and portable mobile phone detection devices. In 2018, we invested a further £7 million to enhance security in prisons through scanners, improved searching techniques and phone-blocking technology. In the work that my hon. Friend the Prisons Minister has done with 10 of our most challenging prisons, he is emphasising the use of technology to search letters, bags and people, and he announced last week that those prisons all now have scanners that can detect drugs on clothes and mail.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): There is deep concern that the Government want to use the cover of Brexit to roll back citizens' rights. Such fears have been further fuelled by the recent failure of Ministers in a letter to the House of Lords EU Justice Sub-Committee to rule out repealing the Human Rights Act 1998 post Brexit. Labour introduced the Human Rights Act. We will fight any attempt by the Tories to undermine it or dilute our hard-won rights. Will the Secretary of State give a reassurance today that the Government will not repeal or reform the Human Rights Act in the aftermath of our departure from the European Union?

Mr Gauke: We certainly have no plans to do so, but on the subject of human rights, I am a little surprised that we are getting lectured by the hon. Gentleman, who will not condemn the Venezuelan regime.

T2. [909013] **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): Body-worn video cameras are available to every prison officer in England and Wales, but they are not routinely provided in Scotland. Will the Minister outline the benefits to both prisoners and officers of those cameras and encourage the Scottish Government to follow this Government's lead?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): We often pay tribute to the Scottish Government, but I am proud to say that we are ahead of them on this. We have rolled out body-worn cameras, which are making an enormous difference to safety in prisons. We are also ahead of the Scottish Government in having fully smoke-free prisons. There is something, at least, that Scotland can learn from us.

T3. [909014] **Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is unconscionable that the workers who clean his offices and the security guards who keep the Ministry of Justice safe are not paid the living wage? Will he commit today to finally paying them a wage they can decently live on, with terms and conditions that mean they can take a family holiday?

Mr Gauke: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the cleaners and security guards are employed by private contractors, and that is a matter for them.

T4. [909015] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Following the sexual assault of four female prisoners by a male claiming to be transgender, what additional advice has been given to prison authorities about housing transgender prisoners?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): We take the Karen White case very seriously. In the light of that, we are reviewing both the content of prison service instruction 17/2016, which sets the policy on these questions, and its application. New guidelines will be published shortly, to ensure that it continues to strike the right balance between ensuring that all female prisoners are kept safe, that transgender prisoners have their rights respected and that we comply with our legal obligations under statute.

T5. [909016] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Can the Minister tell the House whether it is a requirement for prison governors to stay up to date with control and restraint training to receive the required hours addition allowance?

Rory Stewart: That is a highly technical question. I will look into it and get back to the hon. Lady.

T6. [909017] **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): People were shocked to read that over half the knife crime in London is associated with teenagers or children. Can my right hon. Friend reassure the House that he is working with the Home Office to ensure that the new knife crime protection orders will effectively target children who are carrying knives and not end up putting into custody children who are at risk but have never carried a knife?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We are working with the Home Office to ensure that these orders are truly preventive in nature and put children on the right path away from a life of crime. These orders will give the police the opportunity to intervene earlier, and the court can include in the order a range of conditions that can be both prohibitive and proactive. They will be used only if the court is satisfied on the balance of probability that the child has carried a knife, or if they have been convicted of a relevant criminal offence and the order is necessary to protect the public or prevent crime. Sentencing is, of course, for the judge, but we are consulting on these proposals.

Mr Speaker: The Secretary of State is providing much exercise for the knee muscles of Opposition Members. It is an important fact of public interest that I think thus far he has not noticed, but of which he may wish to take account.

T7. [909018] **Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): The Government continue to drag their feet on publishing their review of legal aid. Will the Minister tell the House exactly when we can expect it by?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): We said that we would publish the review early in the new year, and we will be publishing it early in the new year. The hon. Lady should expect it shortly. This is a serious matter that takes time. I would like to quote the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who told the *Law Society Gazette* early last year

"that I would rather the government take this seriously and take their time with it."

That is exactly what we are doing.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): Access to justice was denied to a constituent of mine who had a child taken away from her, after birth, by social services. She has struggled find legal representation because lawyers refuse to take on a local authority with huge financial resources. How will the Government help constituents such as mine?

Lucy Frazer: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Care proceedings are incredibly important, and when a child is taken away from their parent, it is a tragic matter that affects them for a long time. My right hon. Friend should be aware that legal aid is available for public law cases. I am very happy to discuss that particular matter with her.

T8. [909019] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): The Minister of State said earlier that the best help for rehabilitation is to have a job. Do we not urgently need to reform the Disclosure and Barring Service system, so we still protect the public from dangerous criminals and dangerous people, but stop blighting the lives of hundreds of thousands of citizens who are trying to turn their lives around?

Mr Gauke: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that question. There has obviously been a recent case on this. We need to look very carefully at this to ensure we get the balance right between protecting the public and ensuring that those who have committed a crime in the past are given a second chance and have the ability to turn their lives around. I am keen to look further at this in the light of the recent judgment.

Mr Speaker: I call Bob Neill—one sentence.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is vital to ensure continuity of contractual obligations and enforceability of judgments once we leave the EU, which would be prevented by a no-deal outcome?

Mr Gauke: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Splendid.

T9. [909021] **Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): Nepacs provides a very valuable family support service to Kirklevington Grange Prison in my constituency, but its Big Lottery funding runs out in May. Will the Minister meet me and Nepacs to see whether there is any way we can continue this great service?

Rory Stewart: I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman, and to do so as soon as possible.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Over the past eight years, the number of trials listed at Northampton Crown court without a firm date—categorised as floating trials—has increased from 10% to 23%. Why is this, and what can be done about it?

Lucy Frazer: This is a really important point because it is important that justice is not only done but done speedily. I should emphasise that listing is a judicial function, but it is important that Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service works closely with the judiciary

on it. For that reason, I held a roundtable only a few weeks ago—with the judiciary, listing officers, the Bar Council, the Criminal Bar Association and the Law Society—to solve this issue.

Mr Speaker: I call David Hanson—in a sentence.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The number of outstanding repairs in prisons is 22,000 higher than this time last year and the number of outstanding planned repairs is 9,000 higher. Why is this?

Rory Stewart: It is largely to do with degradation across the estate, but we have had significant improvements in the performance of Amey recently, and we have of course taken Carillion back in-house so a Government company is now operating there. We therefore expect improvements to go with millions of pounds of extra investment into the estate.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Does the Minister agree with the Taking Control coalition of debt support charities that independent regulation of the bailiff industry is necessary to protect the public from the unscrupulous practices that have driven some of my constituents to the point of suicide and despair?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Lady is right to highlight that unscrupulous practice by bailiffs is unacceptable. I know that she will be aware that we are looking into the matter, and our call for evidence closes on 17 February, so I encourage anyone who is interested to submit. One of the questions we ask in the consultation is about an independent regulator.

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): Studies of offenders have suggested that 45% of young people and 24% of male adults screen positive for a childhood history of ADHD. Will the Minister therefore agree to attend the next meeting of the all-party parliamentary group for attention deficit hyperactive disorder to discuss the ways in which we can reform the criminal justice system?

Rory Stewart: I will do my very best to attend that meeting.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Wales has the highest incarceration rate in western Europe, which has risen to 154 per 100,000 of the population. Custodial sentences are also up in Wales but have dropped 16% in England. What more can Ministers do to bring about a bespoke solution for Welsh prisoners and to try to improve the criminal justice system in Wales?

Rory Stewart: The big transformation that will take place in Wales is bringing probation back fully under Government control, so we will have a much closer connection between prisons, probation and the devolved authorities. In the Welsh context, we think that is particularly suitable for the devolved Administration and should address some of those concerns.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Why is it that grown men in their 30s and 40s involved in county lines cases are escaping jail, even though we know that their trafficking in drugs and children is blighting the lives of children growing up in communities such as mine?

Rory Stewart: This is an enormously important issue. It is fundamentally a question for the police and Crown Prosecution Service, but I absolutely agree that those people should be prosecuted and put into jail.

Mr Speaker: I call a south-west London knight, a former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and, by all accounts, a cerebral denizen of the House of Commons, Sir Edward Davey.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker, especially for allowing me to exercise my knees more than usual today.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the offer and acceptance of payments to and by an MP for the benefit of their constituents by a Minister of the Crown in an attempt to influence votes in this House could represent breaches of sections 1 and 2 of the Bribery Act 2010?

Mr Gauke: I am loth to provide legal advice, but the right hon. Gentleman has clearly raised a significant point. I would like to hear more of what he is saying and I am happy to discuss this with him. He is clearly alluding to something, but I am afraid that I am not quite aware what it is.

Clerk of the House

Mr Speaker: Before we move to the Urgent Question in the name of the right hon. Member for Tottenham, I have a brief announcement to make to the House.

Her Majesty the Queen has been pleased to approve that Dr John Benger be appointed Under Clerk of the Parliaments—that is to say, Clerk of the House of Commons—in succession to Sir David Natzler KCB who will retire in March.

For the benefit of colleagues and others who take an interest in our proceedings, I can say that Her Majesty's approval of the appointment of Dr Benger followed an open competition and selection process composed of an independent non-executive member and four members of the House of Commons Commission—myself, the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and Stewart Hosie MP.

I wish to emphasise that it was a robust and rigorous process and that Dr Benger was the unanimous choice of the selection panel. For those of you who do not know him, I hope that you will come to do so. He is at present the Clerk Assistant of the House and Managing Director, Chamber and Committees. He has held that post since July 2015. My colleagues on the panel and I have come to know him well over the years. We believe that he has outstanding qualities and that he will be an outstanding successor to the outstanding Clerk who will retire shortly.

I hope that that public information notice is of interest to the House.

Windrush Scheme

12.39 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement on the operation of the Windrush scheme.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Righting the wrongs done to the Windrush generation has been at the forefront of my priorities as Home Secretary. That is why I apologised on behalf of this Government and our predecessors. History shows that members of the Windrush generation, who have done so much to enrich our country, were wrongly caught up in measures designed to tackle illegal migration long before 2010. We all bear some responsibility for that. This Government are acting to right that wrong. Our Windrush taskforce is helping those who have been affected. We are making it easier for those affected to stay and we have waived all fees. By the end of last year, some 2,450 individuals had been given documentation confirming their status. They were all helped by the taskforce which we set up in April. At least 3,400 have been granted citizenship under the Windrush scheme, which we opened on 30 May 2018.

The taskforce's vulnerable persons team has provided support to 614 individuals, with 52 cases ongoing, and it continues to receive up to 20 new referrals each week. The taskforce has made 215 referrals to the Department for Work and Pensions to help people to restore or receive benefits, 177 individuals have been given advice and support on issues relating to housing, and 164 individuals have been identified by the historical cases review unit. Eighteen people have been identified who we consider to have suffered detriment due to their right to be in the UK not being recognised. Sadly, three of them are now deceased. I have written to the remaining 15 to apologise.

As part of putting right what has gone wrong, we are putting in place a compensation scheme to address the losses suffered by those affected. We have consulted on this to ensure we get it right, and we will bring forward more detail on the final shape of the compensation scheme as soon as possible, having carefully considered the views submitted. In December, the Home Office also published a policy for providing support in urgent and exceptional circumstances. This set out the approach and decision-making process for such cases. The policy will support those who have an urgent and exceptional need, and compelling reasons for why they cannot wait for the full compensation scheme.

Mr Speaker, I said on the day I became Home Secretary that I am determined to right the wrongs suffered by members of the Windrush generation. Let there be no doubt: my commitment remains resolute.

Mr Lammy: Home Secretary, I have asked you to make a statement to the House on the operation of the Windrush scheme. Your Department's treatment of the Windrush generation has been nothing less than a national scandal. In November, we learned that at least 164 Windrush citizens were wrongly removed, detained or stopped at the border by our own Government. Eleven of those who were wrongly deported have died. You have announced three more today. Every single one

[Mr Lammy]

of those cases is a shocking indictment of your Government's pandering to far right racism, sham immigration targets and the dog whistle of the right-wing press. You have spoken about being a second—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have the highest regard for the right hon. Gentleman. Occasional descent into the use of the word “your” by accident is one thing, but a calculated repetition of the word “your” is not appropriate because a debate is conducted through the third person. I have not made any statement. I am not responsible for any scandal and I mildly resent any suggestion to the contrary. [Interruption.] Well, not this one anyway, as an hon. Lady rightly chunters from a sedentary position. But I do not want to interrupt any further the flow of the right hon. Gentleman's eloquence, or, for that matter, the eloquence of his flow.

Mr Lammy: You are quite right, Mr Speaker.

Every single one of these cases is a shocking indictment of this Government's pandering to far right racism, sham immigration targets and the dog whistle of the right-wing press.

The Home Secretary has spoken about being a second generation migrant himself. On taking this job he promised to do whatever it takes to put this wrong right. We are now 10 months on from when the scandal broke. Not a penny has been paid out to any Windrush victim in a compensation scheme. The independent Windrush lessons learned review has not yet reported. I say to you, Home Secretary, before the review is even complete, why, why are you deporting people? We have heard about deportation flights to Jamaica this week. You have detained up to 50 black British residents and given them open window removal notices. Why are you deporting them, given that this review has not reported and there has been no compensation?

How can you be confident that you are not making the same mistakes? Movement for Justice is working with 26 of those who are at risk of removal. Thirteen first came to the UK as children; nine came under the age of 10. Eleven people have indefinite leave to remain. Another has a British passport. Thirty-six British children will have their parents taken away by this charter flight—once enslaved, then colonised and now repatriated. Why do you say that these children should live without their parents? Why do you say, to the families of black British people who have been killed by your Department's incompetence, that this is acceptable? That is what happens. We are now 20 years on from the Macpherson review, which found institutional racism in this country. I ask the Home Secretary: why is it that still in this country, black lives matter less?

Sajid Javid: First, let me thank the right hon. Gentleman. At least he has raised this important issue of Windrush—it is good at any time to update the House on this, in many different ways—but I have to take issue with his tone. He does himself no good service—a huge disservice—in the way that he speaks and the tone that he has used to suggest that there is even an ounce of racism in this House, and to ignore the facts. He chooses to ignore—[Interruption.] He could have made this into an honourable debate by looking at the actual issues and thinking about how we can help people who have been affected.

The right hon. Gentleman chooses to ignore that, for members of the Windrush generation who have been affected in a wrong way—as I have recognised and as many Ministers have recognised at the Dispatch Box—this began under previous Governments and continued under successive Governments, including the Government that he was part of, when he voted time and time again for compliant environment restrictions. He supported those restrictions on a number of occasions and now he chooses to speak out about some of the inadvertent effects of that.

The right hon. Gentleman also rightly brought up the issue that—as I have said before, including in the House—sadly, some people who were wronged are deceased, but he should know that a number of those people died under a Labour Government. The deportations took place under a Labour Government and he makes no apology for that. The right hon. Gentleman mentions the deportations of foreign national offenders. I think the information that he referred to, if I have understood him correctly, is about a charter flight to Jamaica of foreign national offenders only—every single one of them convicted of a serious crime. The UK Borders Act 2007, which he supported, requires that the Home Secretary issues a deportation order for anyone who is a foreign national offender. It does not matter which part of the world they are from, whether it is the United States, Jamaica, Australia or Canada. That is a legal requirement. If he does not want that to happen, he is asking me to break the law, and he is also saying that a person who is convicted of a serious offence as a foreign national offender should be allowed to stay in this country, so either he has changed his mind or he does not know what he is talking about.

Lastly, the right hon. Gentleman brings up the compensation scheme. He is right to raise that because we are absolutely committed to making sure that those who were wronged receive proper compensation. That is why I appointed an independent person, Martin Forde, QC, who has done an enormous amount of good work on this. He asked for an extension of the compensation scheme so that he could speak to even more people who were affected. I brought that to the House and I accepted that extension, and we are now working through what he and his team have done to come forward with a well thought through compensation scheme that is generous and supports members of that generation. In the meantime, we have put in place the vulnerable persons scheme that I referred to earlier, and an exceptional payments scheme, which has started making payments.

I just say this finally: if the right hon. Gentleman really wants to help, he should reflect on his tone and not use this as some kind of political football.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It was a Labour Government who in 2007 passed the UK Borders Act making it a legal requirement for Her Majesty's Government to deport foreign national offenders who commit serious crimes in this country. May I support what the Home Secretary has said and urge him to ensure that foreign national offenders who commit crimes are sent back to the countries from where they came, because we do not want them in this country?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend refers to a law, which represents the will of this House, that was passed in 2007, which, I say again, the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and many of his colleagues supported, and which requires the Government to deport foreign national offenders who have committed serious offences. None of those being deported is a British citizen a member of the Windrush generation, who are exempt under section 7 of the Immigration Act 1971.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): This morning, the news broke that Ms Sims had been denied help from the Windrush compensation scheme because she was not from the Caribbean. Just like Windrush, this is a result of the Government ignoring credible warnings about the impact of their policies. The National Audit Office found that the Home Office showed a surprising “lack of curiosity about individuals who may have been affected, and who are not of Caribbean heritage.”

What steps is the Home Secretary taking to ensure that, as Martin Forde QC has recommended, officials are aware that people other than those from the Caribbean are eligible? Will he commit to widening the remit of the Windrush review and compensation scheme? Can he justify Windrush victims being defined so narrowly? Some 186 people were formally refused help from the Windrush scheme. Can he guarantee that none of them was in fact eligible?

We have heard reports that the Home Office is restarting charter flights to Jamaica. Like those of many MPs, my constituency office phone has been ringing off the hook. Some 85,000 people have signed a petition. Why does the Home Secretary consider now an appropriate time to restart these flights? Victims of this scandal have not yet received compensation. The Windrush lessons learned review has not yet reported. A full year after the scandal broke, we do not know how many people have already been detained or deported. The hostile environment remains in place.

I understand that many of the detainees have been convicted of a criminal offence, but after Windrush, the Government have not proved they have the processes in place to make sure the wrong people do not end up on this flight. Will the Home Secretary urgently bring proof to this House that none of the people on the flight is a British citizen or has any other claim to be in this country? I understand the flight is due to leave from a Royal Air Force base. Does he accept that the militarisation of deportations sets a dangerous precedent of deportation happening behind closed doors?

Sajid Javid: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's tone and approach of asking sensible questions, and he deserves answer to them all.

The hon. Gentleman raised the case of Ms Willow Sims, who I heard on the radio this morning. It was the first time I had heard about the case, and I was very concerned. She said she had written to me, which I was interested to hear, and I checked this morning. We received the letter on 28 January, which might help to explain why I have not seen the letter yet. That said, the Department was aware of the case before that, because her Member of Parliament wrote to the Department—in October, I believe—and Ms Sims is now getting the help

she deserves. We will look further at why she was turned down for help by the taskforce, because that should not have happened.

The hon. Gentleman then mentioned the compliant environment. I remind him and the House that what he refers to as the compliant environment, which is about taking action against those who are in the UK illegally—in other words, people who have broken the law—began with laws that were passed under a previous Labour Government in 1997, 1999, 2002 and 2008 and which many of his hon. Friends will have supported. If Labour's policy is now to abolish all those rules, it should be clear about that.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the compensation scheme, which I have said a bit about already. We are determined to have it in place, and I want it to be as fair and as generous as possible, but, in the meantime, the exceptional payment scheme has begun. I set out exactly how that would work in a policy paper published and made available to the House at the end of last year.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned foreign national offenders. I want to make it very clear that the flight in question, assuming he is talking about the same flight as the right hon. Member for Tottenham, is to Jamaica and that everyone on it who is being deported is a foreign national offender from Jamaica. All of them have been convicted of serious crimes, such as rape, murder, firearms offences and drug trafficking, and we are required by law, quite correctly, to deport anyone with such a serious conviction. This law applies universally to all foreign national offenders.

The hon. Gentleman should know that most liberal democracies around the world have similar laws in place. British offenders in foreign states are often deported back to the UK, including from Jamaica, which has in the past deported British nationals who have committed serious offences back to the UK.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments. It is very important that we clear up these difficult cases. Can he confirm that those applying to settle under the Windrush scheme are receiving support in navigating the immigration system and that his Department continues to take a sympathetic and proactive approach when resolving applications?

Sajid Javid: I am happy to confirm that to my right hon. Friend, and he is right to raise it. From the moment the taskforce was set up, it was designed to make it as easy and simple as possible for people to use, and, as I said earlier, it has so far correctly documented almost 2,500 people.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I wish also to raise concerns about removals and deportations to Jamaica being resumed. By all accounts, we are talking about people who came as children, about parents with British children and even about Commonwealth soldiers. To all intents and purposes, therefore, we are talking about people who are British even if they are not formally citizens. The Home Secretary has mentioned foreign national offenders. Will he publish the full list of offences people are being deported for?

[Stuart C. McDonald]

Even the issue of foreign national offenders is not straightforward. Stephen Shaw said in his updated report on detention that

“a significant proportion of those deemed FNOs had grown up in the UK, some having been born here but the majority having arrived in very early childhood. These detainees often had strong UK accents, had been to UK schools, and all of their close family and friends were based in the UK.”

In other words, the Home Office is often really deporting UK offenders to other countries. Has the Home Office even begun to engage with the issue Mr Shaw himself has raised? I am asking the Home Secretary not to break the law but simply to review it and change it if necessary.

What work has been done to establish how people from other countries, including Commonwealth countries, have been impacted by Windrush-type disasters? Finally, what will the Home Office do to prevent probably hundreds of thousands of EU nationals from being subject to the same hostile environment measures when they miss the cut-off date for settled status applications?

Sajid Javid: I want to be clear again about the flight to Jamaica mentioned by hon. Members: not a single person being deported is British—a person cannot be deported and be British; they are all foreign national offenders, and under the 2007 Act, where someone is given a sentence of at least one year, the Home Secretary is required to make a deportation order, and where it is four years or more, the Home Secretary is required by law to order a deportation.

The wording of the hon. Gentleman's question seemed to suggest that he knew who was on the flight and who was not. Let me say gently to him that the flight has not happened yet, but the deportation of anyone who is on it will be carried out absolutely according to the law. Ultimately, this is about public safety, because these are individuals who have committed serious offences. I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the fact that if we did not carry out the law, we would not only be breaking the law. Let us imagine what would happen if one of these people—someone, say, who had been convicted of murder—were allowed to stay in the UK and then committed that act again, against one of our constituents. What would the hon. Gentleman be saying to me then?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me gently point out that approximately 30 Members are seeking to contribute. I am keen to accommodate them, but it is imperative that we have short questions and short answers.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I remember the Macpherson report, in which I was tangentially involved, and I would say that we have come a very long way since then. With that in mind, will the Secretary of State confirm that he will give a date soon for the compensation scheme?

Sajid Javid: I can confirm that we will be saying something about the compensation scheme very shortly.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary said that he would supply monthly updates to the Home Affairs Committee, but

we have not received an update since December, and that referred to the circumstances up to 31 October. Since then a very damning report on the Windrush situation has been published by the National Audit Office, raising a series of concerns about ongoing immigration casework and policies and the impact that they might have. The Home Office has not issued a proper response to that report either. When will we receive a substantial response to its recommendations that recognises the serious anxiety about the possibility that many of the failings relating to the Windrush situation are continuing today?

Sajid Javid: Let me first thank the right hon. Lady and her Committee for their scrutiny of this important issue. She knows that we are absolutely committed to providing her and the Committee with regular updates, and we will continue to do so. We always endeavour to include as much information as we can, and I hope she agrees that we have tried to make those updates as detailed as possible. She mentioned the NAO report, and I welcome that scrutiny as well. We looking into the report carefully in order to establish whether more needs to be done.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for the constructive, honest and compassionate way in which he and his Ministers have dealt with a very difficult situation. However, the treatment of members of the Windrush generation highlighted a number of deep-seated concerns about the manner in which the Home Office operated. Can the Home Secretary reassure the House that all the lessons that can be learned from the situation—not just specifically in relation to the Windrush generation, but in the wider context of the culture of the Home Office—will be learned? In particular, can he reassure us that there will be a greater emphasis on the fact that we are dealing with people, and that this is not just about policy?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am acutely aware that almost every decision that the Home Office makes has an impact on someone's life, and we must ensure that every single one of those decisions is fair and made appropriately. That is the reason for the lessons learned review and a further, deeper review of some of the operations of the Home Office.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): As the Home Secretary will know, I have encountered dozens of Windrush cases, and the taskforce has dealt with many of them well. However, one of my constituents, Owen Hainsley, will be on the plane that has been discussed. He came here, aged four, in 1977. He has left the country only twice since then, and on neither occasion did he go to Jamaica. He has no family there, but he has three children in this country, all of whom have British citizenship. He is well known on the music scene in Manchester, where he works with disadvantaged young people. He served two years in 2015. His British citizenship should have been regularised, but owing to an administrative error on the part of the Home Office, that did not happen. He is now being deported to a place to which he has not been for more than 40 years.

This is a grey area. Owen Hainsley is not a foreign national in any terms, and we are effectively making him stateless. I dealt with a very similar case—a Windrush

case—in which the Home Office did not deport someone but granted that person, who had a criminal record, indefinite leave to remain. So the Home Secretary does have that discretion. Can he use it in this case, because this is a scandal?

Sajid Javid: The deportations to which the hon. Lady refers took place under the UK Borders Act 2007, which I mentioned earlier and which was debated in the House as a Bill. It gives little if any discretion to the Home Secretary, but every single person who is being deported is a foreign national who has committed a serious offence.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Is not a significant issue in all this the decision made in 2009, by the Labour Government of which the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) was a member, to destroy the landing cards and registry slips that constituted the only official documentation of some people's arrival in Britain? Was not a mistake made then?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend has highlighted an important point, and it is worth emphasising. Members of the Windrush generation were affected by decisions made by a number of Governments, including the last Government.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Is not one of the lessons of the Windrush that when people have lived in our country for 20, 30 or 40 years, the idea that they should be deported if they do not have precisely the correct documentation is inhumane, and is not supported by the wider public? In the light of the Windrush scandal, will the Home Secretary review the unrealistic and draconian documentation requirements imposed on such people by the Home Office?

Sajid Javid: If the right hon. Gentleman is referring to cases in which someone does not have—to use his own words—precisely the right documentation, of course that should be looked at very carefully. The whole purpose of the taskforce is to work with such individuals to make the process as easy as possible, and to ensure that issues such as incorrect documentation are sorted out.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): As we have already heard, it was a Labour Government who started destroying the landing cards of the Windrush generation. It was also a Labour Government who, under the Harold Wilson regime, forcibly exiled the Chagos islanders from the British Indian Ocean territory. As a result, members of the second and subsequent generations of the Chagos community do not have British citizenship. Will my right hon. Friend commit himself to looking into that as well?

Sajid Javid: I commend my hon. Friend for taking up this issue so energetically on behalf of the Chagos islanders, and I should be happy to discuss it with him further.

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): In December last year, the Home Office agreed to support members of the Windrush generation who had been mistreated by the Government with up to £5,000, but four of my constituents have found the arrangements for access to the fund overly stringent. Victims require immediate

and ongoing assistance. Does the Home Secretary not agree that we should be ensuring that the people who were affected by the Windrush situation can re-establish themselves in the community? Moreover, there has been no cohesion between central and local government in this regard. I ask the Home Secretary to look at the system and make sure that it works for the most vulnerable people.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady has made an important point about joined-up government and the need to ensure that that approach is taken when we respond to the most difficult cases in particular. I can assure her that the Home Office has been working carefully with a number of other Departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Treasury.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if he did not authorise this latest flight carrying foreign national offenders, he would be failing in his duty of care, and he would be breaking the law?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is correct. It would be breaking the law, and it would mean that we were not putting the safety of our people first.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): In compelling evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee, we heard how difficult it was for Windrush victims to obtain housing. The Home Secretary listed the people whom he was helping, but the fact is that local authorities will need to allocate that housing, and given the squeeze that they are experiencing and the current housing demand, that is just not happening. Will he think again about what central Government can do to ensure that these people are not in the general housing queue, and that local authorities do not have to provide them with much-needed homes?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady makes an important point. As I said at the start, some people may have lost housing or been affected in other ways in their housing, and they are being helped. We are working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which is speaking to local authorities. Where possible, we are trying to prioritise those cases.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I am grateful for the speedy resolution of individual cases, but will my right hon. Friend say something about the role that those who have been affected are playing in helping to shape the compensation so that we get this right?

Sajid Javid: Yes. When we started work on the compensation scheme, it was right to appoint an independent person, and that is exactly what we did. Martin Forde, QC, travelled across the country and spoke to as many members of the Windrush generation who were affected as possible. He asked for an extension to speak to even more, and we granted that.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I cannot respond to constituents who contact me about deportations tomorrow. They and I want to know whether any of my constituents are on those flights. I have phoned the Immigration

[Lyn Brown]

Minister and been stonewalled again and again. The flights need to be suspended so that all individual circumstances can be properly examined. I am sure the Home Secretary agrees that this is an issue of trust and that, at the very least, the Department should engage in good faith with MPs on the matter.

Sajid Javid: I agree with the hon. Lady. I know that she has asked our Department a question, and we are looking into that. I hope she knows that, because I believe that we have communicated to her that we are looking into it. She is right that if any Member of Parliament has a question about any constituent, we will of course help in any way we can.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): All of us who have Jamaican and other Afro-Caribbean communities will have apologised deeply, as I did, for the shameful, inadvertent mistreatment by successive Governments of some of the Windrush generation. I thank the Home Office's Windrush help desk for its work in quickly resolving the immigration status of my two affected constituents. One has a strong case for compensation. Will my right hon. Friend confirm whether my constituent can file his application before the end of this financial year?

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, which I welcome. He was right to put things the way that he did. We will issue more details on compensation shortly, but we want to ensure, in the case of his constituent and others who are affected, that it is as generous as it can be.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): In the light of the Sims case, which we heard about a few moments ago, and Sir Martin Forde's comments, will the Home Secretary commit to further training for the Windrush taskforce in handling cases correctly, particularly complex cases?

Sajid Javid: I have asked for more information on the case of Miss Willow Sims, to which I referred earlier. When I heard her on the radio this morning, I was very concerned and determined to find out more. I do not want to prejudge that—I am waiting for further information—but I can make a commitment that if that information shows that more training is required or something needs to be done to ensure that such a case does not arise again, it will happen.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I know that the Home Secretary recognises that the Windrush generation have made a huge, positive contribution to the life of this country. It has therefore been strange to see Opposition Members defining them by the very small minority who have committed serious criminal offences. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that ensuring that compensation is available for those who have been unduly affected is important and should not be conflated with some of the issues we have heard about from Opposition Members?

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with my hon. Friend.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): My constituent Willow Sims came to the UK in the early 1980s and spent part of her childhood in the UK care system. She went on to have a career as a teaching assistant in local primary schools, where I first met her. In October, Willow came to see me. She had failed some immigration checks at work, so she lost her job and her recourse to public funds. My constituent is fully entitled to assistance under the Windrush taskforce scheme, yet due to mistakes at every level of government, and despite numerous representations to the Home Office by Willow, her solicitors and me, going as far back as October, her status has wrongly been brought into question. She now risks eviction from her home. Will the Home Secretary urgently rectify that chaos, apologise to Willow and meet me to discuss her case and what has gone so badly wrong?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Lady for raising the case, not just today but in October. Had she not done so, Miss Willow Sims might not be getting the support she now gets. I am happy to apologise to Miss Sims for the Home Office's mistakes in not recognising the importance of her case from the first moment she contacted the Home Office. I would be very happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss it further.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Anybody listening would be horrified at some of the cases, and they are not interested in which Government introduced schemes under what Act in what year. Unfairness and injustice must be rooted out wherever they lie, and I trust the Home Secretary to get on and do that. I have considerable sympathy with the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who raised the matter, and I agree with him that the Windrush scandal is a result of the dog-whistle politics that has plagued immigration. Does my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary agree that from now on, we will have an informed, grown-up, honest debate about immigration, particularly the benefits that it has conveyed to our country for centuries?

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with my right hon. Friend about the tone of the debate on immigration—on anyone who has settled in our great country, regardless of where they came from, why they came here and how long they have been here—and with her point about our taking more opportunity, across the House, to highlight the benefits of immigration, whether from the Commonwealth or elsewhere, and how those people have helped to make this country great.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The Macpherson definition of institutional racism is:

"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping."

There is no doubt that that—and much worse—has been the experience of the Windrush generation. Is not it time that the Home Secretary learned lessons and took action to prevent further institutional racism from continuing against the Windrush generation and others?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady chose not to listen to the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) made about the tone of the debate. If

she is trying to suggest that there is institutional racism, she must accept that that was what existed under the previous Labour Government.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): According to Movement for Justice, 18 people on the chartered flight are connected to the Windrush generation. One is a grandfather who served in the British Army; another one's grandfather died as a serving British soldier, and two others are former British servicemen. I therefore do not understand how the Home Secretary can say that they are foreign nationals. I find his tone most disturbing. I am half Jamaican and very proud of it, but I feel that what he says is unhelpful to the Jamaican community in this country. Like him, I am second generation, but I feel that he sounds like a reincarnation of Enoch Powell.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady chooses to lower the tone of the debate when she could try to help her constituents. The whole House is proud of immigrants who have come to this country, whether they are first or second generation, and whether they came from Jamaica, Pakistan or anywhere else. The hon. Lady does herself no service by lowering the tone of the debate.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) on securing the urgent question. Will the Home Secretary confirm that 13 of the detainees who are scheduled to be deported this week came to this country as children? We know that there is a grey area in the definition of "British citizen" and "foreign national"; does not the right hon. Gentleman believe that it is time to review it?

Sajid Javid: The law is very clear on this. It focuses on the crime and on the nationality of the individual, as in whether they are British or not. When someone has committed a serious crime such as rape or murder, the law requires that, as a foreign national offender, they should be deported.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I should just point out that the two debates to follow are very heavily subscribed. I am happy to try to accommodate remaining would-be questioners on the understanding that each of them will put a single-sentence question. We will be led in this important matter by Ruth Cadbury.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The Home Office said last year that Windrush applications would be turned round within two weeks, but my constituent, who has retired after many years working as an NHS midwife, is still waiting, six months later. When will the Secretary of State admit that the overstretched immigration system cannot cope with Windrush generation cases and apologise to those who are living in limbo?

Sajid Javid: Most applications are being turned round within a matter of weeks, but if the hon. Lady sends me the details of that case, I will take a closer look at it.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): The Home Secretary says, "The law is very clear on this," but when I held a Windrush surgery, all the people who came to it had been told by the Home Office that they were not

British citizens. They have all now been told that they are British citizens, so I suggest that the law is not very clear and that there are grey areas. I have also been told that someone from my constituency is on that flight. Will he commit to looking into whether there is someone from my constituency on that flight and whether they should be there?

Sajid Javid: If the hon. Lady sends me more information about the individual she has in mind, I will of course look into that case.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State please estimate how many people have had their access to healthcare affected? Also, if an individual has passed away due to being a Windrush victim, is the scheme open to a claim by their family members?

Sajid Javid: We plan to ensure that the scheme is open to family members in such cases.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): My constituent has been waiting since 26 December for a decision on his Windrush application. The process has taken nine times the length of the two-week turnaround period that was promised. That is unacceptable when people cannot work, cannot claim benefits and are struggling to live, even though they are from this country.

Sajid Javid: If the hon. Lady sends me more details, I will take a closer look at that case.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Before the Windrush scandal became the Windrush scandal, many cases took years to resolve and victims disappeared because they feared deportation. To avoid future injustice, will the Secretary of State guarantee that all Windrush-style cases, including those involving people not from the Caribbean or Commonwealth countries, will be dealt with in a similar fashion?

Sajid Javid: The work of the taskforce is open not just to members of the Commonwealth who have come to Britain, but to anyone who came to the UK before 1988.

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Last year, I helped a family in my constituency to get the passports to which they were entitled but were scandalously being denied. The family now find themselves in dire financial straits due to a family member's terminal illness. When will they be paid the compensation that they are due, and when will they get a decision from the exceptional circumstances fund?

Sajid Javid: The exceptional payments scheme has started to pay out, and decisions are being made. We will be announcing more details of the compensation scheme shortly.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Home Secretary will have heard Members expressing their very real concern about the status of those who are due to be deported this week. Will he therefore personally review the documentation and circumstances of each of those individuals before any deportation takes place?

Sajid Javid: Every one of those cases already has to be reviewed by a Minister.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I have written extensively to the Immigration Minister and to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about my constituent, a Windrush citizen, who has been denied attendance allowance because she was not in the country during the assessment period. The only reason why she was not in the country was the illegal action of the British Government. Will the Home Secretary now accept that a lack of joined-up working between Government Departments on the Windrush scheme is compounding, increasing and prolonging the injustice that the Windrush citizens are suffering?

Sajid Javid: We work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions, and the hon. Lady gives an example of why that is absolutely necessary. If she wants to give me further details of her constituent's case, we will look into it as a matter of priority.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Given what the Home Secretary has heard, does he really believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) was inappropriate in his tone? Does he really think that someone is going to take him to court for exercising appropriate discretion, or does he in fact believe that it is right to deport first and ask questions later?

Sajid Javid: When it comes to the deportation of foreign national offenders, a lot of questions are asked first, including on the right of appeal, and we carry out deportations only if they are absolutely correct under the law. Ultimately, it is worth remembering that they are there to protect members of the public.

Mr Speaker: In conclusion to this important series of exchanges, I want to make two points. First, as colleagues will recall, I said nothing whatsoever about the tone of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). I referred simply to a minor breach of normal procedure in terms of the debate going through the third person,

but I made no other comment about tone. This is an extraordinarily important matter affecting people's lives. People can comment on each other's tone, but for my part, from the Chair, I do not underestimate the intensity of feeling and the sense of real anger about this subject, which was extremely eloquently voiced by the right hon. Gentleman and many other Members.

Secondly, I have a sense, on the basis of some experience of sitting in the Chair over the past nine and a half years, that this matter will be raised again and again. It affects very vulnerable people, as Members on both sides of the House with any sensitivity will acknowledge, and it will not go away. Quite a lot of activity—I am not saying it is nefarious activity; I am not criticising the Home Secretary—is taking place under the radar, but the purpose of this House is to give voice to grievances and to seek redress for them, and there is nothing to stop Members raising this matter over and over again in the Chamber, day after day, if that is their inclination.

Anna Soubry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I should like to thank you for your comments, with which I am sure we all agree.

On the matter of tone, I know that the Home Secretary is robust, but he gets a great deal of abuse, even though he might not like to talk about it. I do think that the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) likening the Home Secretary, or indeed any Member of this place, to Enoch Powell is profoundly offensive. Would you agree, Mr Speaker?

Mr Speaker: I note what the right hon. Lady has said, and I sense that the Home Secretary might well feel greatly offended by that comment. He might feel that it does violence to his values, his record or his intentions, but nothing disorderly has happened, and I therefore do not feel that I can intercede. I would just say that we should all weigh our words carefully and remember the precept of "Erskine May" that moderation and—in so far as it can be deployed in matters as serious as this—good humour in the conduct of parliamentary debate tend to conduce to better outcomes. I will leave it there for today.

Leaving the EU: No Deal

Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

Mr Speaker: I now call Tom Brake to make an application for leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration under the terms of Standing Order No. 24. The right hon. Gentleman has up to three minutes in which to make his application.

1.28 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Thank you for granting this request, Mr Speaker. I rise to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration: the consequences of leaving the European Union without a withdrawal agreement or future political agreement. I have been pleased to receive support for this application from Plaid Cymru, which is well represented here today, as well as from the Scottish National party, the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), my Liberal Democrat colleagues and others who are here in the Chamber today.

On Thursday, the Prime Minister will board the latest shuttle to Brussels to attempt to recast the backstop she had painstakingly negotiated over a two-year period. This is the backstop that she described as a necessary guarantee for the people of Northern Ireland, adding that there is no deal available that does not have a backstop in it. Frankly, I doubt very much whether she expects to return from Brussels with anything more than her duty-free. The EU has made it clear for months that the backstop that the Prime Minister secured for the UK is the backstop that is on offer. This is just another round of kicking the can down the road, bringing us two weeks closer to crashing out of the EU. This reckless game is costing jobs, business investment—Nissan being the latest example—and damaging our international standing and credibility.

Airbus said that if the UK left the EU without a deal it would

“lead to severe disruption and interruption of UK production.”

Airbus employs 14,000 people in the UK. Ford warned that a no-deal Brexit would cost the company an estimated £612 million this year. Sainsbury’s, Asda, McDonald’s and others have warned that stockpiling fresh food is impossible and that the UK is reliant on the EU for produce, particularly in March. Standard & Poor’s warned that UK unemployment would rise from 4% to 7% by 2020 in the event of no deal. In the face of mounting evidence of the damage that no deal would cause, leading Brexiters still maintain the pretence that it would do no harm, with some saying that

“We want to be out and we know it will work just fine”, and that a free trade deal could be “done in an afternoon.”

Yesterday, we debated sport in the UK, and we will debate beer and pubs later this week. I do not want to minimise the importance of those debates, but with an uncontrolled departure from the EU just 50 days away, I ask you, Mr Speaker, to allow an urgent debate in this

House to consider the Government’s unwillingness to rule out crashing out of the EU without a deal, with all the associated harmful consequences.

Mr Speaker: Let me respond to the right hon. Gentleman, to whom I granted the opportunity of a three-minute application. I have listened carefully to his application. At this time, I am not persuaded that the matter is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24, but I have a little more to say. The right hon. Gentleman is a former deputy Leader of the House, and he will doubtless know that the Standing Order does not allow me to give the reasons for my decision or, at any rate, does not exhort or compel me to do so. However, the House will be aware that the Standing Order states:

“In determining whether a matter is urgent the Speaker shall have regard to the probability of the matter being brought before the House in time by other means.”

There have of course previously been SO24 debates appertaining to Brexit, and it is perfectly possible and readily imaginable that there may be others in due course.

I do not skit at the right hon. Gentleman. I am conscious of the pressing timescale. I am also conscious that we have been promised a statement on, if memory serves me, Wednesday of next week and a debate and likely votes on Thursday of next week. I genuinely believe that there is something to be said for observing processes taking place outside of this Chamber and coming to a view about what further consideration of this subject will be required.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the growing proximity to the intended departure day of 29 March, and I have that in my mind. He may rest assured that this matter will not be allowed simply to rest or to linger, nor is it the case that only the Government can choose when it is debated. I think I have demonstrated several times that I do not accept for one moment that only the Government can determine when the matter is debated or, indeed, the terms and amendability or otherwise of any motion. The Chair is rightly the custodian of some of those powers, which I exercise for the benefit of the House. I say no for now, but I have the matter under review, and I feel sure that the right hon. Gentleman and a great many other Members on both sides of the House will be doing the same.

BILL PRESENTED

KITCHENS IN RENTED ACCOMMODATION (BENEFIT CLAIMANTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Frank Field presented a Bill to require landlords to meet standards for the hygienic storage and preparation of food and the provision of cooking appliances and equipment in accommodation provided for tenants in receipt of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 March, and to be printed (Bill 329).

Crime (Impact Statements)

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

1.34 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for statements made by persons adversely affected by a crime to be used in sentencing proceedings in court; and for connected purposes.

This Bill follows on from the great work by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) with the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018, which allows for judges to charge those who assault our emergency workers under a new offence that doubles the maximum tariff that can be handed out in court. The Act was a crucial step towards giving prosecutors the ability to ask for a sentence that is proportionate to the injuries caused by attacks to frontline workers in our emergency services. However, my Bill is about ensuring that judges are able to consider the full impact of the cost to communities, as well as to individuals, of losing staff time, which has an impact on public service delivery, as a result of attacks on police officers, firefighters, ambulance workers and many others who put themselves on the frontline to help the public.

The inspiration for this Bill comes from an incident that occurred in my constituency last May, when Humberside police officers attended after early morning reports of a man with a knife wound and evidence of drug use. When they moved to arrest 27-year-old Josse Jackson, he spat at them while telling them that he had hepatitis C and AIDS. Repeatedly threatening to bite them, he told one officer that he would

“find out where you live and you will be dead before the end of the week.”

When he was sentenced in October, he received just 13 weeks and was released almost immediately. That left officers with a sense that, no matter the impact of abuse against them, and the demotivation and reluctance to continue on the frontline that it could encourage, it was not relevant and such abuse was therefore acceptable as it had little consequence.

Any of us would find being on the end of such an attack both emotionally and physically taxing but, for those on the frontline, facing conflict on a daily basis, the cumulative strain is immense, and that strain does not lie with one individual, but permeates beyond to teams, departments and organisations. Many of us would be able to take measures to ensure that we do not end up in such a situation again, but that ability is not afforded to frontline workers, who will be expected to run towards situations that could bring them into contact with dangerous individuals and to deal with them professionally and confidently.

Emergency workers often have to take time off to recover following the worst attacks, taking up important staff time and stretching budgets, or be kept off the frontline, reducing levels of other available staff. From April to December 2017 in the west midlands, the local police force lost 356 days—nearly a whole year—while officers recovered from their injuries. The sick pay alone could have provided for another full-time officer or call

handlers or PCSOs, but it still does not quantify the additional stress burden on the remaining colleagues who are required to pick up the workload. Nor does it consider the work not done as a result of absence.

Our communities are missing out on an important community presence and resources as a direct result of the actions of criminals towards public sector workers. The professional impact of crimes can be severe and wide reaching, yet there is no national standard for how such impacts are considered in sentencing. We need to change that and to make our justice system more responsive to the effects that crime has on our public servants and our public services.

My Bill would introduce a professional impact statement, to be considered as part of the sentencing process, ensuring that the impact of a crime on public sector workers' ability to do their jobs is considered when sentences are being handed down. A number of police forces produce professional impact statements when officers and staff are injured in the line of duty. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) mentioned on Report during the passage of the 2018 Act that the local Crown prosecutor in Bedfordshire advises officers and staff to give personal impact statements to the court so that they are given the same attention as those of victims. In the west midlands, police chief Dave Thompson outlines the impact on his force and the wider community during sentencing in his area.

There should be a national standard for how such statements are produced and considered. By making professional impact statements part of national sentencing guidance, my Bill would enhance the support to public service workers who have come to harm through their work and send an even stronger message that assault and abuse should never be part of the job for any worker in the UK. My Bill would take the 2018 Act further by acting on calls from the likes of Humberside police for the broader consequence—the impact on the force's ability to continue its core function—to be considered at sentencing. Professional impact statements would help to ensure that those who attack frontline workers have to pay their full debt to society, by taking into account the impact on our communities of the lost presence of emergency workers on the street, or the criminal damage to equipment, such as ambulances, that means members of the public have to wait longer to get the care they need.

If the justice system is partly intended to reflect the payment required to society, we must recognise the full impact, the full cost, in all its guises to bring about a sense of fairness in justice. We must make it clear that those who rush into dangerous situations to keep us all safe will be given the strongest possible protection should they come to any harm, and my Bill would help to do just that.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Melanie Onn, Chris Bryant, Sir Graham Brady, Gareth Snell, Ruth Smeeth, Ms Harriet Harman, Martin Vickers and Nic Dakin present the Bill.

Melanie Onn accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March, and to be printed (Bill 330).

Police Grant Report

1.41 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): I beg to move,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) for 2019/20 (HC 1896), which was laid before this House on 24 January, be approved.

I start by paying tribute to the police. Coming from a policing family, I have seen their bravery, their dedication and their professionalism. They take extraordinary risks to protect the public day in, day out. I am in awe of what they do to protect us all. They undoubtedly deserve this House's gratitude and support.

As Home Secretary, my mission is to keep the public safe and, of course, the police have an absolutely crucial part to play. When I took this role, I vowed to stand with them, to support them and to listen to them. I have met police leaders, and I have heard what they have to say. My right hon. Friend, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, has done the same.

We know the demands the police are facing, how those demands are increasing and how crime is changing and becoming more complex. Previously hidden crimes such as child sexual exploitation are increasingly being reported, which we encourage and welcome. More criminals are moving online, which is bringing fresh challenges. We are battling the worst spike in violent crime for a decade, and we are giving the police more of the powers they need, such as those in the Offensive Weapons Bill. I vow to ensure they have the tools and resources they need to help keep our communities safe.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I welcome what the Home Secretary says about supporting the police. Can he therefore explain why, since 2010, the Government have cut Merseyside police's funding by over £90 million?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady is clearly arguing for more police funding, so I hope she welcomes the settlement, including the extra £18 million for her own force.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am sorry that I do not have much voice.

One of the new tools we have given to the police is the ability to take people to court for assaults on emergency workers, including police officers, but it would be a terrible problem if, after bringing in this new law, the police have no time or facilities to implement it. Will the Home Secretary make sure the police are taking this on board seriously and have the time and financial resources to ensure that we protect all our emergency workers? Some of the violent crime he talks about affects ambulance workers, mental health nurses and nurses in accident and emergency.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I thank him for his work in introducing the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018, which the Government were pleased to support. The Act will make an important difference to the police. He is right to raise the importance of making sure there are proper resources behind the Act to help it to make that difference, and I therefore hope that he will welcome the settlement today.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (Ind): The Home Secretary has already alluded to how policing has changed considerably over the past x number of years. Does he support the national campaign, which has over a quarter of a million supporters, demanding a police royal commission? We have not had one for almost 60 years and policing has changed considerably during the intervening period. We hear so many different stories about resource, or the lack of it, and about what modern policing is. Does he agree that the most effective way to deal with this so that the public, and even the Government, understand exactly what policing is today would be to have a police royal commission?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Because of the change in demand caused by the rising demand of certain crimes and by the complexity of certain crimes, it is important to make sure that the Home Office, the National Police Chiefs Council and others are continually looking at this. I am not convinced that a royal commission is the answer, because it may lead to decisions being delayed or not being made, but he makes an important general point about making sure we are on top of what is needed by considering the changes and the complexity of crime.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): My right hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention to the challenges facing the police. Is it fair that, in facing those challenges, so much of their time is taken up by dealing with mental health emergencies that, frankly, are properly the concern of another Department of State?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. It is not fair if police time is taken up by issues that should be dealt with by, in this case, health professionals. This has been recognised by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who has committed to using some of the extra resources the Government are now putting into the NHS to help to relieve the police and to work with them more closely.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sajid Javid: I will give way one more time, and then I want to make some progress.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): May I make the Home Secretary aware that in parts of Coventry, both in affluent parts and in less well-off parts, there has been an increase in burglaries and knife crime? The police used a dispersal order in the centre of Coventry on Saturday after a young man was badly stabbed. Will the Home Secretary increase police numbers in the west midlands, particularly in Coventry, where I am told by the police that they operate at only 75%?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman raises the very important issue of knife crime, and I am sorry to hear about that incident in Coventry. This is about powers, which is why the Offensive Weapons Bill is bringing new powers for the police, but it is also about resources. I therefore hope that he will support the Government's settlement today because of the extra £34 million it will provide to his local force.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

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

The settlement provides the biggest increase in police funding since 2010, up to an extra £970 million in 2019-20. This will boost capacity and help forces recruit the extra officers they have told me they need. This is a significant increase. Last year, the House approved an additional £460 million for policing, including from the council tax increase. The latest workforce figures show that, by September 2018, this was starting to pay off, with officer numbers up by 466 in that year. At the time, the Policing Minister, who has shown steadfast support for the police, indicated that our intention was to provide a similar settlement this year, subject to improved efficiency, productivity and financial transparency. The police have met those conditions.

The police are on track to deliver £120 million in commercial savings by 2020-21. They are adopting more digital technology, including mobile working. All police and crime commissioners have published strategies demonstrating how they plan to use their financial reserves. They have kept their side of the bargain, and I am keeping mine. I am going further than we promised last year to provide the support they really need.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): People in Corby and east Northamptonshire want to see more police out on the beat, catching criminals and deterring crime. Will my right hon. Friend be impressing on police and crime commissioners that a good chunk of the additional funding being made available should be directed towards that priority?

Sajid Javid: Yes, my hon. Friend's point is an important one. He knows that with PCCs there is a lot of independence in setting priorities, but we work carefully and closely with police forces, including his, which will benefit by an additional £9 million through this settlement, to make sure that those strategies are the right ones.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I thank the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service for the supportive comments he has made about the improvements that South Yorkshire police force has made in the past year. However, it has the legacy issues of Hillsborough and child sexual exploitation in Rotherham to deal with, and each year it has to come to the Government with an application for a special grant. It has been given that, but the grant has to be top-sliced, putting an additional burden on police funding. Will the Home Secretary agree to a meeting with the South Yorkshire PCC and local MPs, involving either him or the Policing Minister, to see whether we can find a better way to deal with these issues in the future?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman highlights that there are sometimes special situations, and special grants are needed to deal with exactly what he has mentioned. I am happy to make sure that Home Office Ministers meet him to discuss that further, as it is a very important point.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for understanding the need and coming up with a much better settlement for us. Does he agree that Thames Valley, which contains fast-growing areas of

the country such as mine, where a lot of extra housing is going in, needs some extra money just to keep pace with the extra number of people who require a police service?

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with my right hon. Friend on that, and I thank him for his support. He highlights the need for this extra funding, and I know that he will welcome the support that will be provided—I believe it is almost £34 million—to his force.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary agree that as a result of having 21,000 fewer police officers on our streets, our intelligence-gathering capabilities have been severely restricted? Does he also agree that the proposal he is putting forward today is just nowhere near enough?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady will know that, when it comes to evidence gathering, a lot is needed by the police; it is not just all about resources, although they play an important role. She will know that today's settlement gives a significant increase for her local force. I know that she supports that, so I look forward to seeing her in the Lobby.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sajid Javid: I am going to make progress, but I will give way later on.

I want to be clear with the House on how this increase of almost £1 billion breaks down. Government grants to PCCs will rise by £161 million, which will protect their grant funding in real terms. This package includes an additional £12 million for the Met, to recognise the extra costs and challenges of policing in London. We will allocate more than £153 million to help forces manage increases in pensions costs. We are investing £90 million in much-needed capabilities to combat serious and organised crime at national, regional and local levels. Funding for counter-terrorism policing will increase by £59 million next year, to £816 million—that is £160 million more than we planned at the last spending review. We will support forces through a continued investment of £175 million in the police transformation fund and £495 million to replace and upgrade critical police technology infrastructure.

We are giving PCCs the flexibility they need to use their precept to raise more public money where it is needed most. We have listened to requests from PCCs and empowered them to increase the amount they can raise through council tax precepts. This will allow them to ask for an additional £2 a month per household without the need for a local referendum. The extra cost to a typical household will be up to £24 a year. We know that money is tight, and we did not take this decision lightly. The decision to use this flexibility is up to locally elected PCCs—they must make the case to their electorates. Providing this additional flexibility will allow them to raise up to £509 million in total. Many PCCs have welcomed the funding settlement we set out in December.

Almost all PCCs in England have chosen to use this new council tax flexibility in full, and local people have shown their support. For example, 6,500 people responded to the PCC's precept consultation in Hampshire, with 76% indicating that they support the proposed increase. In Suffolk, nearly 70% voted for the full £24 rise. PCCs

have been explaining what they want to use this extra funding for, and I am delighted that many of them plan to use it to strengthen frontline policing. They are consulting on plans to use the money to recruit more than 2,800 extra officers, potentially leading to the biggest annual increase in numbers for more than 10 years. If all PCCs use their full precept next year, overall police funding will have increased by £2 billion in just four years.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Police recorded crime figures for the last full year showed that police areas with the highest number of crimes per 1,000 people have received the smallest increase in funding. Cleveland has the highest crime figures yet it has the lowest increase. The Minister has ignored the letter from Cleveland MPs about our budget, so will he explain this bizarre outcome or, better still, recognise that he has got the Cleveland settlement very wrong?

Sajid Javid: First, the hon. Gentleman will be all too aware, given his closeness to this, that there are some other issues in Cleveland as well. He talks about resources and funding, and there is a £7 million increase for Cleveland in this settlement. If he means what he says, I am sure he will be joining me in the Lobby tonight.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Let me ask the Home Secretary the question that Ministers seem reluctant to answer. Police numbers have fallen by 21,000, and by 2,000 in the west midlands, and crime is soaring. Are the Government seriously suggesting that there is no link between falling police numbers and increasing crime?

Sajid Javid: Where the hon. Gentleman is right is that there have been increases in certain types of crime. For example, as I said earlier, there have been increases in serious violence, cyber-crime, and the reporting of sexual offences, especially historical sexual offences. We welcome such reporting, including of historical offences; we want to see more of those being reported so that we can investigate more. It does require more resource and, in some cases, with some forces, it also requires changes in practices. He has raised his concern for the West Midlands police force and making sure there are enough resources. I believe that there is about £34 million more for his force, which represents a significant increase. It is fair to say that it is more than would have been expected by the force this time last year. If he supports his local force and wants to see those resources going to it, I am sure he will vote with the Government later this afternoon.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): May I press the Home Secretary a little more on these figures? I am talking about the support that local forces get from his Department, not what is being passed on to local council tax payers. The West Midlands PCC has estimated that simply to stand still West Midlands police force needs an increase in excess of £24 million. As the additional amount the Home Secretary is putting forward is just over £15 million, how is that anything other than a real-terms cut?

Sajid Javid: Again, the hon. Gentleman, like so many other Opposition Members, has raised the issue of resources. That is why I am sure he will welcome the

biggest cash increase collectively since 2010. He talks about the West Midlands force, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) did. That force is receiving an increase of more than £34 million. I gently point out that the force has £85 million in reserves, which is one of the highest levels of reserves in the country, so the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) should have a chat with his PCC to ask whether he can do a better job.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It may have slipped the Home Secretary's mind, but he did not actually answer a very important question. Is he seriously suggesting that there is no link between falling police numbers and rising crime?

Sajid Javid: I have been clear that in recent years we have seen an increase in certain types of crime, but it would be lazy of any of us to attribute that to just one factor. I recognise that resources are an important issue, which is why we are giving this record settlement today.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sajid Javid: I will make some progress, then take some further interventions in a moment.

Supporting policing is not just about money; the police chiefs I have met have also consistently raised concerns about, for example, their officers' welfare. That is why there will be more support for frontline officers, with a new national wellbeing centre of excellence. We will also help forces to identify mental health issues earlier with psychological screening, so that officers can access support and, where appropriate, stay in work.

The impact of next year's funding increase will be immense. Forces will be able to continue to recruit and fill crucial capability gaps. They will be able to prevent more crime and deliver better outcomes for victims. We will work with PCCs and chief constables to make the most of this funding settlement. We are asking them to use the extra investment to address four priority areas next year. First, they should continue efficiency savings. Forces must see beyond their own boundaries and continue to join up to get better procurement deals and drive more benefits from shared services. Secondly, they should resolve the shortfall in detective numbers identified by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services. We will work with the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council to support forces in meeting this challenge. Thirdly, they should continue improvements in productivity, with a view to delivering £50 million of productivity savings in 2019-20. That will include the smarter use of data and improved digital capabilities, including mobile working, where appropriate. Finally, I expect all forces to respond effectively to the threat from serious and organised crime. This is an area that cannot and must not be ignored by anyone. I have delivered on my own promise to the police, and I now expect them to respond to the challenge that we have set them, as they did so well last year.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Home Secretary accept that the real lived experience of many people in Greater Manchester is that many crimes do not even get investigated, and are simply recorded? In many communities, police stations

[*Jim McMahon*]

have been closed altogether, and in my own town we do not have a single custody cell left open for a population of quarter of a million.

Sajid Javid: Like so many Members, the hon. Gentleman makes an issue of the need for more resources. I have met his local chief constable and other police officers from his force, and they are doing some excellent work in difficult circumstances, with some particular challenges in Manchester. I hope the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming today's settlement, which contains an additional £35 million for his local force. If he wishes to discuss the needs of his local force further, I would be happy to meet him, as would the Policing Minister, to listen more.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I welcome the biggest rise in police funds since 2010, which is excellent news for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. However, will my right hon. Friend concede that, as a force, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has been historically underfunded relative to its size? When he considers future funding formulae, will he therefore take into account the historical underfunding of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and seek to rectify it?

Sajid Javid: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that commitment. He makes an important point and I am glad he has raised it. We have been clear in the Home Office that when the upcoming spending review, on which I will say more in a moment, comes around, it is important that we also look at the national funding formula for policing.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that the increases he is talking about will lead to better crime-fighting results, but he is denying that the cuts that led to 1,000 fewer officers in the Merseyside police force have affected the rise in crime. Will he now answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey)? There is actually a link between police funding and crime levels, and he should come clean about it. The right hon. Gentleman cannot claim that if money is going up, crime rates will get better, but deny there is a link the other way around.

Sajid Javid: I thought the hon. Lady was taking over my speech for me, but she raises an important point. On fighting crime, as I mentioned earlier, there has been a particular rise in certain types of crime, especially those that are more complex and so by definition require more resource. That is what the settlement recognises—that where crime, especially more complex crime, has risen, more resources should be provided. This is a record settlement—the largest since 2010—and contains £18 million for the hon. Lady's local force.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Will the Home Secretary confirm that the question before the House on the police report is about national support for police forces and has nothing to do with council tax rises, which may or may not happen? Furthermore, will he admit to the House that if one looks at where the rise in knife crime has been greatest, one will see that it is in those areas that are more dependent on national support?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong in saying that this debate is just about national support. The report also includes the Government's decision, subject to the will of the House, to allow an increase in the precept of up to £24 without a referendum, as I mentioned earlier. That is part of the total funding package, to which I have referred, of £970 million.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sajid Javid: I need to make some progress.

The police will continue to face pressures, and my commitment to them is ongoing. The Policing Minister has also shown unwavering support and will of course continue to do so. This is the last settlement before the next spending review, which will set out the resources available to the police in future years. I will continue to make police resourcing a priority in that spending review. Once again, though, it is of course a two-way street. The police must continue to improve efficiency, productivity and effectiveness, to provide value for money, and to give the public the top-class service they deserve. I will back them in the spending review, but any increased support must come with an important condition: the police must commit to a long-term action plan to further improve effectiveness and productivity. I am determined to give them the investment that they need, but it must be used efficiently. We have the best police force in the world, but they must also be as effective as they can be.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): In Warwickshire, we have one of the smallest police forces in the country, but this year's and last year's settlements are enabling the police and crime commissioner to put in a further 150 police officers and staff. Will my right hon. Friend look carefully at the funding for county areas, which are under great pressure from a lot of criminality and problems coming from the city areas, which have traditionally been funded a lot more significantly than the county areas?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and it draws me back to my earlier comment in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) about the national funding formula for policing. We are committed to looking at that when we consider longer term funding through the spending review process.

The Government are determined to respond to the threat from terrorism, organised crime and serious violence, and the police are of course a vital partner in that work. We must give them the resources they need to get the job done, which is why we are proposing the largest increase in police funding since 2010.

Sir Edward Davey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Home Secretary to tell me, in answer to my question, that the £24 that the Government are allowing local police authorities to raise is in the report, when I have checked the report and cannot find any mention of the £24 to which he drew the House's attention? That report is the subject of tonight's vote.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): In fairness, I think you have clarified the record in the way you have read the report.

Sajid Javid: Today, every Member of this House can show their support for this increase, for public safety and for our police. I commend the motion to the House.

2.9 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): There can be no question but that the biggest indictment of this Government's record on law and order is their long-standing failure to fund the police properly. Sadly, that is as true of this year's funding allocation as it is of any other year's. I have to say to the Home Secretary, in the kindest possible manner, that he is brazen in expecting Opposition Members to follow him into the Lobby on this funding settlement. We would be less than responsible if we voted for one that is patently inadequate. It is not just Members on the Opposition Benches who are saying that but ordinary police officers. The chair of the Police Federation, John Apter, said:

"This appears to be a quick fix. A sticking plaster solution that injects extra money in the short-term, but one which sees the burden falling unfairly on local council tax payers."

Senior police officers think that this settlement is inadequate. The president of the Police Superintendents Association, Gavin Thomas, has said:

"Whilst I welcome this injection of funding, it is still far short of what the service requires to effectively meet the challenges of 21st century policing."

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. In Derbyshire, my own area, the Government's increase in the grant does not even meet the increase in the police pension costs. There is a shortfall of £400,000, which has to be met by council tax payers before they even start to contribute towards the extra policing that we so desperately need, and which officers on the frontline need to help them combat the stress that the Home Secretary mentioned.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend makes an important point on behalf of her constituents in Derbyshire.

The West Midlands police and crime commissioner says publicly what many PCCs say privately—that this Government funding does not come anywhere near to covering what the force requires just to stand still.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): On that point, does my right hon. Friend think that it is the outspoken nature of the police and crime commissioner's comments that has led to the Home Secretary trying to abolish his job?

Ms Abbott: I would never accuse the Home Secretary of being so petty. This is what the West Midlands police and crime commissioner said:

"This government funding does not come anywhere near to covering what the force requires...£25.6m is needed to cover extra pension costs, government-set pay increases and rising fuel costs this year."

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): I strongly endorse what my right hon. Friend is saying. People in my constituency will have listened with incredulity to the Home Secretary talking about extra resources when, yesterday, they were told that Newton-le-Willows police station will close, except for a few hours on a Friday, precisely because there is a lack of resources. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, on this Government's

watch, there are fewer police officers and they are further away from the communities that they seek to serve?

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend makes a very important point.

Having spoken about what policing professionals think about this settlement, I have to stress that it does not take policing professionals to make the public aware of the consequences of the failure to provide resources and therefore police capacity. All over the country, the public are aware of issues such as the delays in responding to 999 calls. The inspectorate of constabulary, in its annual review, found instances of the police taking days to respond to calls that should have been acted on within an hour. At a recent meeting in Wolverhampton to discuss public safety, I found many people saying that they had reported instances of open drug dealing, for instance, but that no police officers had turned up—nothing was done. This all points to a lack of capacity.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must also find a way to adequately fund capital cities outside London? Cardiff hosts 400 major events a year and is the seat of the Welsh Government, yet it does not receive any extra funding as a capital city, which means that resources come from elsewhere. Could that perhaps be reflected in any settlement?

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Later in my remarks, I will come to how the Home Office manages resources in general.

Ministers seem to remain in denial about the consequences of their actions. At least the Home Secretary was able to admit on the BBC that the Government have cut 21,000 police officers, but, as my hon. Friends have elicited in questioning, Ministers continue to insist, almost alone in the country, that lower police numbers have had no negative effect in the fight against crime. That is an absurd idea.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that, apart from Leicestershire, where there has been a very small increase in the number of police community support officers, the only part of the country where there has been such a rise is Wales, where there has been an increase of 217 PCSOs since 2010? Will she join me in praising the Welsh Labour Government for funding 500 PCSOs across Wales and standing up for the people of Wales when this Government are failing them?

Ms Abbott: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Government of Wales, particularly on their emphasis on community policing.

The real record of the UK Government is this: police officer numbers have not been this low in decades, chief constables up and down the country are warning about the consequences of the cuts in their areas and in their forces, and police-recorded violent crime is now at its highest level on record. Earlier, the Home Secretary tried to ascribe that increase to better recording of crime, but he is not supported on that by the Office for National Statistics, which says:

"Over the last year we've seen rises in vehicle offences, robbery, and some lower-volume but higher-harm types of violence."

[Ms Abbott]

Recorded knife crime offences are at their highest level since records began. We know that the effectiveness of the police has been compromised, as arrests have halved in a decade and the sanction detection rate of charges and cautions has plummeted. Tory cuts have consequences.

Tom Pursglove: I well recall the right hon. Lady's predecessor arguing from the Dispatch Box, back in 2015-16, that the Government should cut police spending by 10%. Does she regret her party's former Front-Bench team making that case, because if we extrapolate her argument out, would not that mean that we would have even fewer officers today?

Ms Abbott: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the Labour party is under new management now.

This may be, as Ministers say, the largest funding increase since 2010, but it is still inadequate, as ordinary police officers, senior police officers and PCCs say.

Ms Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend is recognising the truth that resources are connected to results when it comes to dealing with crime. Does she agree that the cuts that have seen 1,000 officers disappear from the Merseyside force have created a situation where those who are committing crimes see less evidence of the police being able to follow them up, which creates a view on the street that lawlessness can be got away with? That actually encourages criminality while making it much harder for the law-abiding to report it to the police.

Ms Abbott: I agree with my hon. Friend. Of course, on Merseyside we have also seen an alarming rise in knife crime.

Part of the problem is the new demands on policing to which the Home Secretary referred. However, an increasing problem is that, with the collapse of public sector funding elsewhere, the police have become the public service of last resort, particularly in relation to issues such as mental health. We will be debating this later this afternoon, but central Government have taken 60%—£16 billion—out of local government funding since 2010. Cuts to youth services, housing and schools must have a bearing on levels of crime, particularly youth crime.

Let me touch on something that is often not discussed—the problem with having annual funding reviews. Ministers will be aware of the long-standing concern about annual funding. City of London police has said:

“Annualised funding allocations result in short term strategies that deliver short term impact”,

and that they are a constraint. The PCC for Northamptonshire, Stephen Mold, said that that the “imposition of one year funding settlements...hampers effective long term financial planning”.

And the PCC for Dorset, Martyn Underhill, said that the

“absence of any indication of funding beyond 12 months”

compromises the ability to formulate

“a realistic medium term financial plan”.

Jack Dromey: My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, standing up for our police service. The Government may be in denial about the clear link between falling numbers and rising crime, but will my right hon. Friend join me in saying that what is also wrong is the grotesque unfairness on the part of the Government? Why is it that the high-need West Midlands police service gets cut by 25%, while Surrey police service—with much lower need and lower crime levels—gets cut by 11%? It is not just about cutting the police service; it is about the grotesque unfairness that goes with it.

Ms Abbott: I agree with my hon. Friend on the question of unfairness, particularly in relation to the precept, but I will come to that issue in a few minutes.

The Home Secretary needs to face up to the fact that there is an issue regarding the poor overall financial management of the police by the Home Office. Let me remind him what the National Audit Office had to say last year about the Home Office's overall management of police finances:

“We concluded that there were significant gaps in the Department's understanding of demand and of pressures on the service, and it needed to be better informed to discharge its duties of overseeing the police and distributing funding.”

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I completely agree with what my right hon. Friend is saying. Does she agree that the knife crime prevention orders that were announced this week as a late addition to the Offensive Weapons Bill have had no cost impact assessment whatever, that there is no evidential basis for them and no assessment of the impact on equalities, and that introducing them is therefore very short-sighted and probably expensive and ineffective?

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of knife crime prevention orders. One problem is that the issue is not the state of the law, but policing capacity.

The National Audit Office also said:

“The Home Office's light touch approach to overseeing police forces means it does not know if the police system is financially sustainable. It lacks a long-term plan for policing and significant gaps remain in its understanding of demand for police services and their costs.”

And this brazen Home Secretary expects us to join him in the Lobby tonight.

Let me move on to the precept, because I cannot leave any discussion about the funding of the police without mentioning how Ministers insist on talking as if allowing PCCs to raise more money through the precept is somehow new central Government funding. I would have thought that Home Office Ministers might have learnt from the admonition of the chair of UK Statistics Authority, Sir David Norgrove, who recommended that

“the Home Office's Head of Profession for Statistics speak to communications colleagues about the importance of clear public statements about police funding and ensure they understand the structure of police funding.”

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I am trying to make some progress.

Maybe the chair of the UK Statistics Authority should have spoken to Ministers. Ministers want to claim that allowing an increase in the precept to fund the police somehow counts as a loosening of the purse strings. It really is not. The precept is not some magic money tree.

Vicky Ford: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I am afraid that I have to make progress.

The precept is a tax; it is paid for by increasing charges on residents.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the powerful speech that she is making. Does she agree that areas such as Barnsley will be able to raise significantly less money than wealthier areas? This is absolutely outrageous. Crime is going up, police numbers are going down and this Government are in complete denial.

Ms Abbott: I agree. The precept is a tax, and Ministers know perfectly well that urban forces tend to be able to raise less per head from council tax than those in more rural areas. Urban forces such as the Metropolitan police and the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire forces rely more on central Government grants for their funding than rural forces.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): There is also a direct shift of spending to local forces on pension liabilities, which the Government are deliberately moving. The pension costs are going to be £330 million, yet the grant to local police forces is less than half that, at £153 million. In the case of Durham, that means that the police force's pension allocation and core funding allocation will all be wiped out by this single pension liabilities debt, which has been moved on to it.

Ms Abbott: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. The precept is not a progressive tax.

Vicky Ford: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: The precept is a regressive tax that bears down disproportionately—[*Interruption.*] Had the hon. Lady waited, I might have given way.

The precept is a regressive tax that bears down disproportionately on poorer people and poorer regions. It is unfair on the population within a given region and it is unfair between regions. As the Police Federation said:

“They are passing the buck of funding the police service to the public by doubling the council tax precept that police and crime commissioners are allowed to charge.”

This is no way to fund a cohesive police force.

We see a rise in violent crime, cuts to police numbers and increasing concern about public safety. This Government have let down ordinary police officers and the public. Their overall management of police funding is demonstrably poor. And no, we will not be joining the Home Secretary in the Lobby tonight.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Lots of Members wish to speak and I want to get everybody in, because this issue is important to every Member of

Parliament. My suggestion is that we have a six-minute time limit, but those who can speak for less than six minutes will be very welcome.

2.28 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am pleased that the total resources for Bedfordshire police will receive a welcome increase next year to £112.7 million from the current £104.6 million. However, even between rural forces, there is a difference in the ability to raise revenue from band D properties. For example Hertfordshire, which is a neighbouring force, has many more band D properties than Bedfordshire, and that is something of which the Home Office needs to be aware.

It is often said in the House that the Government's first duty is to defend this country. I would agree with that regarding our wonderful armed services, but I think we would also all agree that that duty to defend also relates to our constituents as they go about their everyday business in their homes and at their places of work.

Because of the way in which Bedfordshire is configured, there are significant issues about how the Bedfordshire police force works for my constituents and for Central Bedfordshire Council—the local authority in the middle of Bedfordshire. There is significant demand on police resourcing in Bedford and in Luton, in particular, which means that the middle part of the county is often extremely challenged. We are also one of 19 police forces to suffer from damping, which was introduced by Labour in 2004. In 2015, this Government had the courage to state that that was unfair. They tried to look at revising the national police funding formula to reverse the unfair impact of damping, which affects 18 forces along with Bedfordshire. In Bedfordshire's case, that means a loss of about 90 officers a year—about £3.3 million of funding that we have lost every year since 2004. I would expect that issue to be dealt with as we look forward to next year's comprehensive spending review, which the Home Secretary quite rightly pointed to. There is good news on this year's funding, but still more work to do regarding next year's very important comprehensive spending review.

I am struck by the fact that the police are less local than they used to be. Many years ago, there would be police officers living in individual villages in my constituency. Up until 1 October 2012, there were fully-functioning, 24/7 first responder police stations in Leighton Buzzard and in Dunstable. I want to restore that state of affairs. We have had incidences of shoplifting in our supermarkets, handbags being stolen from ladies outside nightclubs and bicycles being stolen from children, and when my constituents have rung the police, no one has been available. We also have issues with county lines operations—drug gangs coming up from London or down from Birmingham—which have had a significant impact on Bedfordshire police.

As has been said, we ask the police to do too much, particularly with regard to mental health. A failure to regulate children's homes properly puts significant extra burdens on police resources when the police have to find children who have run away. The owners of those homes should be doing much more and should be far more responsible. I will shortly be taking that issue up

[Andrew Selous]

with a Minister in the Department for Education. Significant challenges to policing and to law and order arise from the prevalence of Traveller sites in my constituency. We have had three major incidences of modern slavery—this is all a matter of public record and fact—and considerable extra demands are placed on Bedfordshire police as a result.

The chief constable wrote to me recently to say that on Sunday 16 September last year, the force literally ran out of officers as it had to deal with seven teenagers being stabbed in Luton, four rapes, five prison officers being assaulted in Bedford prison, a fatality in a road traffic incident, a 16-year-old being murdered in Bedford, and people with gunshot wounds coming into the accident and emergency department of Luton and Dunstable Hospital. That was a particularly demanding Sunday, but such demand is not unusual in Bedfordshire.

We should look at what the previous Mayor of London did through the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime when he identified the MOPAC 7, which were the seven crimes of most concern to the public: burglary, vandalism, criminal damage, theft from motor vehicles, theft of motor vehicles, violence with injury, and theft from the person. He focused on driving down those seven areas of crime, and that was successful. If we could relieve the police of some additional duties—perhaps regarding mental health and children's homes—that are not properly their responsibility, they could go back to those seven really important areas.

We need to think about what builds law-abiding communities. Cicero said in 52 BC: "We have a natural propensity to love our fellow men, and that, after all, is the foundation of all law."

2.34 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous). I agree with him on one specific point: we really do need a better understanding of why mental health is a problem within crime and of how it should be dealt with more appropriately than is currently the case.

I do at least agree with the Home Secretary on two points. First, he was right to pay tribute to the work that the police do on behalf of us and our communities. It is only the police who take the risk of trying their best to protect us. Secondly, I agree that it is his job to keep the people of this country and our communities safe. However, the sad fact is that although he acknowledges that that is the case, he does not seem to do much about trying to turn it into reality.

Much of what I say will be about facts and figures, but it is important to say that behind those facts and figures lie some incredibly terrible human tragedies. I will talk about knife crime in a moment. That is about a young life lost needlessly and, more than that, about a family who, for the rest of their lives, will be left asking, "What if?" We must always be mindful that while facts and figures tell one story, the effect on people's lives is often much more pronounced and vivid than the figures alone show.

First, inevitably, I want to talk about funding for Merseyside police. My hon. Friends the Members for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and for Garston and Halewood

(Maria Eagle) both referred, in slightly different ways, to the way in which the loss of central Government funding has affected policing in our constituencies. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) made a similar point about the closure of a police station in his constituency as an example of how things play out on the ground. My hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood rightly pointed out that since 2010-11, the Merseyside police force has lost £90,396,258 of central Government funding. That is a lot of money, and it has consequences. It means that we have lost over 1,000 police officers, which must have an impact on crime. We have lost over 200 PCSOs, and that in itself must have an impact on crime, at least in the sense of how the police get information about what is going on in communities. We cannot hide from the fact that there has to be a direct relationship between police on the ground and the ability to deal with crime.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) was right when he pointed out in an intervention on the Home Secretary that the additional money that the Government have provided will mostly cover only the additional cost of pensions. On Merseyside, of the £8.8 million of additional money that will be provided through the central Government grant, which is of course welcome, £7.8 million will go directly to plugging the gap in pensions.

At the same time, we are experiencing steep rises in very serious crimes. On Merseyside, over the past 12 months, knife crime has increased by 32%. I have talked about the impact of that on young lives. My hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood and I, along with others, want to get into a discussion with the Government about how the problem can be better dealt with by giving young people alternatives to a life of crime and by providing the police with the ability to intervene more effectively. After many attempts, we have not even been able to get a meeting with the Policing Minister. I have asked him in previous debates to meet me to discuss this, but answer comes there none. There has also been a massive 47% rise in domestic abuse, which means that whole families are in terrible crisis, with terrible problems.

There is so much more to say, but to keep within the limits you have set, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will conclude by simply saying this. The Government have done too little too late to resolve the problem that our communities and police forces face. Frankly, if the first job of the Government and the Home Secretary is to deal with community safety, I am afraid that this settlement goes nowhere near assuring people that they will be able to carry out that duty.

2.40 pm

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): It is good to see my right hon. Friend the Policing Minister on the Front Bench. I have pursued him with vigour for some months on the issue of police funding, including for Warwickshire. I thank him for the efforts he has made, the case he has put to the Treasury and what has been achieved so far, with additional police funding this year of up to £970 million. My constituents will be pleased because we face some significant issues in my constituency at the moment. We suffer a lot of cross-border crime that comes from the larger cities in the west midlands—

particularly crimes such as car key burglary, car jackings and burglary—and that has weighed heavily on my constituency in the last two years or so. I am therefore extremely grateful that extra resources will go to Warwickshire police, which it can use to bolster not only its response, but the prevention of those crimes.

Before I talk more about funding, I want to thank the police officers of Warwickshire for their determination and for the hard work they do for the people of Warwickshire. They do not always get it right, but they get it right in the vast majority of situations, which the public appreciate. The public in my area want to work with the police. We have a neighbourhood watch Facebook group made up of 15,000 residents, who provide the police with information about issues across my constituency.

For example, around Christmas time, there was a massive spate of car crime, including car key burglaries. Because of the work of the community and the police together, the person committing those crimes was apprehended. Unfortunately they only admitted to 15 of those crimes and, despite perpetrating a spate of crimes across the area and being a repeat offender, they received a measly three-month sentence. That is not a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister, but it is certainly one for the Justice Secretary. We must support police in our communities, but our courts and judicial system must also support our police to ensure that when they do their job, they are backed up.

Warwickshire is one of the smallest forces in the country, as the Minister knows. Our police and crime commissioner has been very happy with the last two settlements. He ran a significant consultation with local people on the precept to which 2,400 people responded, the vast majority of whom confirmed that they would be willing to spend an extra £2 per month—£24 a year—to see more police on the streets. As a result of last year's changes, we see 50 more officers on the streets in Warwickshire. As a result of this year's changes, we will see another 85 officers and another 15 police staff, including a number of investigators, who are extremely important in bringing offenders to book.

There is a balance to be struck with council tax. The public in my area have been quite content to pay some extra on their council tax in the last two years, but I am not sure that that is a good long-term strategy. Opposition Front Benchers seem to say that council tax takes money from local taxpayers and Government money is not taxpayers' money, but of course it is all taxpayers' money, so we need to strike a balance. Any money that the Government or police forces spend is taxpayers' money.

Mr Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Marcus Jones: I will not give way because of the time limit that Mr Deputy Speaker said we should observe. We have to get the balance right between the money we collect in national taxes and give to our police service and the money we collect locally.

Finally, I want to mention another local issue that I hope will be picked up in the spending review, which is what I call “Warwexit”. Unfortunately, as the Minister will be aware, the strategic alliance between West Mercia police and Warwickshire police, through which each force has saved £35 million, has been abruptly brought to an end by West Mercia. I hope that in the spending

review, the Minister and the Treasury will look carefully at the impact on Warwickshire, bearing in mind that it was not part of bringing the arrangement to an end.

I welcome the settlement. It is a good step in the right direction, but we still need to do more to make sure that our police have the right resources to keep our local population safe.

2.46 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) made clear, central Government funding for Merseyside police has been cut by more than £90 million since 2010. As a consequence, we have lost almost a quarter of our police officers. There has been a commensurate loss in civilian staff, who are down by a third. We have also lost 43% of our PCSOs, who are the eyes and ears of the police on our streets, the cornerstone of neighbourhood policing and an early warning system of incipient street and gang problems. The loss of those PCSOs will cause problems.

That lamentable decline in policing capacity has been the deliberate choice of the Lib Dem-Tory coalition Government from 2010 and the Tory Governments since 2015. They have all chosen to undermine public service provision in our great northern cities, including Liverpool, in the name of economic necessity, but this “austerity” has actually been a political project in pursuit of the ideology of a smaller state. It has affected Merseyside police severely. As a direct consequence of our police force being weakened, crime has been increasing in the last five years, and it is up overall by 162.5% on Merseyside. The argument peddled by Ministers that that has nothing to do with the £90 million cut in resource, and the loss of a quarter of our police and 43% of our PCSOs is laughably unconvincing. My constituents are not fooled; they know there is a link.

Just in the last year on Merseyside, overall crime is up by 12%, but that figure masks worrying trends that are developing: violent crime is up by 26% in one year; burglary is up by 23% in one year; drug crime is up by 25% in one year; and possession of weapons is up by a staggering 46% in one year. The Minister will know—my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley reminded him—that Merseyside colleagues and I have met Ministers over the last three years to discuss the increasing incidence of firearms discharges and shootings on Merseyside due to increasing and worrying gang-related serious and organised crime. Another meeting seems to be off the agenda, based on the response we have received. We have repeatedly received what have unfortunately turned out to be empty promises of assistance, but not one penny piece extra for tackling this increasing level of serious and organised violence.

The Secretary of State has today proclaimed that resources are being increased in real terms, but the extra £161 million increase in cash terms for all local police forces, in addition to the one-off pension grant of £142 million, amounts to less than the Government-imposed changes on pension liabilities. That means that, for the ninth year in a row, central Government funding to local forces will in fact be cut in real terms.

The Secretary of State proclaims that he has generously allowed local police and crime commissioners to increase their council tax precept from £12 per household a year

[Maria Eagle]

to £24. He then tries to claim that he has himself provided the extra resources that this allows to be raised, if it is imposed in full and everybody pays it. In fact, it is of course hard-pressed council tax payers, many of whom in Liverpool are already at breaking point to pay their bills, who have to find this money.

What does this settlement mean for Merseyside? First, the extra £8.4 million of Government grant is less than 10% of the cuts that Merseyside police have sustained since 2010. Crime is now rising strongly and more police resources are needed effectively to get to grips with it. Secondly, as the Merseyside police and crime commissioner has made very clear, the extra £8.4 million will be entirely consumed by the pension black hole caused by the Government. Talk about giving with one hand and taking away with the other. The Secretary of State's sleight of hand in providing a real-terms cut while proclaiming he has done the opposite is disappointing. In fact, there is no new money for running police services on Merseyside in this settlement whatsoever. How characteristic of this Tory Government that they then try to claim that there is. They have left increasing the precept on already hard-pressed council tax payers on Merseyside as the only way of practically supporting our police with new resources.

It is fundamentally unfair to use council tax to fund increased resource for local police because it takes no account of the policing challenges in each area, and it allows better-off areas with a higher council tax base and lower levels of crime to raise the same, if not more, than areas such as Merseyside that have greater challenges but less ability to raise funds. It makes public safety a postcode lottery, with better-off areas that have lower levels of crime able to do better. Even with this rise in the precept, the money recouped across the country will be a drop in the ocean compared with the £2.7 billion real-terms cut in policing budgets since 2010, as the National Audit Office found when it looked at this.

Is it any wonder that police-recorded violent crime is now at the highest level on record, that the number of knife offences is at the highest level since records began, that arrests have halved in a decade and that there are 2 million unsolved crimes? While we are afflicted with a Tory Government who believe in never-ending austerity in pursuit of their political priority to shrink the state, we can expect nothing better.

2.52 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I really do not want to enter the blame game, but I am going to start by just reminding the House and putting it on the record that, in 2010, we did inherit a financial mess. [Interruption.] Opposition Members groan but it is a fact. I want to add that I accept that that was also due to the banking crisis and other factors, but we inherited a mess and that mess has taken time. Eight years on, I accept that we are now in power and it is our responsibility to sort out our priorities, which I will come to in a moment.

Mr Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Drax: No, I will not give way. I am afraid I have only a short time. I want to press on.

I cannot stress enough my gratitude and that of my constituents to Dorset police, whose officers and PCSOs do their level best to keep us safe in our homes and on our streets. Secondly, I am grateful to our chief constable, James Vaughan, and the Dorset police and crime commissioner, Martyn Underhill—they both do an outstanding job—who will be providing the information I am giving to the House today to the police and crime panel on Thursday.

May I praise the Policing Minister, who I know has inherited a very difficult job? He is extremely accessible and helpful to me whenever I want to see him, and I am very grateful to him and those on the Front Bench for all the help they try to give us.

Dorset police face three problems—I must raise them on the Floor of the House because I believe it is my duty to do so: the continued reduction in Government funding, the increased demand in volume and complexity, and the continued financial pressures. First, on the reduction in Government funding, the general grant is designed to support the force in its core requirements, but the funding mechanism was frozen over 10 years ago and attempts to correct errors in calculations were abandoned, although they would have resulted in substantial funding increases. Unhelpfully so far as Dorset is concerned, the security grant was reduced by £400,000 this year after the policing budget was set.

Secondly, on volume and complexity, this cannot be overstated and Members on both sides of the House have commented on it already. There are new crimes, such as crimes across county lines that we are all aware of, cyber-crime and paedophilia online—tackling that places a huge demand on resources—quite apart from banking fraud and all other frauds online. There are new resources, such as drones, which save money on helicopters, but need training and expertise. There is the online non-emergency directory and the universal roll-out of body-worn cameras. The biggest single cost to police resources has been welfare-related calls, with more repeat calls from the vulnerable, including those with mental health issues. That was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne). Also, there has been a 100% increase in demand for resources to investigate missing persons over the past eight years. Dorset's population has increased by 20,000—by about 3%—this year, with changes to demographics and diversity, but there is absolutely no national recognition of this financially. Finally, airports and ports are busier, but the specific small grant has been reduced.

Thirdly, on the continued financial pressures, there is inflation, pay awards and pensions, which are all unavoidable. The police work for longer, retire older and no longer have a final salary scheme, which reduces pensions bills, but the Treasury is still attempting to pass pension costs on to police budgets. Dorset police are grateful for the £3 million to pay for that, but it still leaves Dorset to meet costs of £500,000 to meet that problem. There is no such grant funding for future years and that is of concern. Paying for pensions alone would require a precept of £10.70. There are also the costs of officer recruitment, capital requirements and national requirements, which all continue to rise.

Dorset's revenue and capital grant for 2019-20 has been set at £67.3 million. That represents £87.30 per person and is the second lowest nationally. Eight years

ago, the equivalent figure was £91.70. This settlement from central Government, which amounts to 2.1%, does not keep up with unavoidable cost pressures such as inflation, pay awards and pensions. Raising the precept to the maximum allowed of £12 per household this year has resulted in additional income of £3.4 million. That desperately needed money was spent in four main areas: protecting people at risk of harm, working with communities, supporting victims and reducing reoffending, and transforming for the future.

While we are grateful for this increase, the pressures for the next year are even greater. The bottom line, even with a continued and relentless drive on efficiencies, is that there will still be a need to increase the precept for 2019-20. The Secretary of State has given permission for PCCs to raise the precept by £24 in 2019-20, but this a delicate matter, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) has mentioned, and household budgets are already under strain.

The worrying fact is that, unless there is more money for the police in Dorset in the mid-term, more frontline officers might have to go, and this is unacceptable to me and my constituents. It may be of interest to the Minister and certainly to other Conservative Members that in Dorset, overnight, we have no more than 50 officers on duty at any one time. In my view, the police force is a force, not a service. Its job is to prevent crime and catch criminals. Let us cut out all the waffle, give it the assets and money to get on with the job and keep our people safe.

2.58 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax). Like him, I praise the work of my PCC, Barry Copping.

In November 2018, I wrote a letter to the Home Secretary highlighting the effects of underfunding in Cleveland police. This followed an alarming report on the national BBC News exposing a lack of police numbers in Hartlepool. My letter was co-signed by every Labour MP in the Cleveland police area, yet to date I have had no response.

Since 2010, this small force has lost 500 serving police officers and 50 PCSOs. That is a 37% reduction in staffing, alongside a budget cut of £39 million. The title of the BBC News documentary was “Hartlepool: The town where ‘police don’t come out’”. It revealed that on an average Saturday night the town, which has a population of some 96,000, had only 10 officers on shift. The film exposed the severity of Government cuts to policing and struck fear into our communities. It was seen as an open advert to criminals and has left citizens feeling under threat. The awareness of a lack of visible policing has led to increased reports from constituents of their concerns, including a noticeable trend in failure to attend reported crimes, despite the fact that Cleveland police records 163 crimes a day on average.

We all know that police forces face increased and complex challenges such as cyber-crimes. Cleveland police are no different and have successfully adapted to meet such demands. Working with partner agencies, they have created a strong focus on crime prevention, tackling drug dealing and human trafficking. But they too recognise the need to invest more in visible policing across the force area. They readily admit that

“things in policing are not ok”

and that the service is

“nowhere near where it needs to be.”

Last month, the custody suite at Hartlepool police station was mothballed, meaning that officers now have to make a 30-mile round trip to Middlesbrough, just to take people into custody—a ludicrous situation given staffing numbers and the already existing fear about safety on our streets. While I do not agree with that decision, the reality is that underfunding to the tune of £39 million, or 26% in real terms, from Government grants over the last seven years is taking its toll. In order to help Cleveland police keep the streets of Hartlepool safe, the Government need to make urgent improvements to the funding formula, and not just allow for increases in police precepts, which both penalise local taxpayers and push the perception of blame on to local forces.

The current situation is simply not good enough and our hardworking officers and PCSOs deserve better.

3.2 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill).

In the short term, the settlement enables the police and crime commissioner for Suffolk to deliver his immediate plans for the local police service and in that respect it is to be welcomed. I shall vote for it. The settlement this year, including the council tax increase, provides a cash increase of £9.2 million compared with £3.5 million last year. That will help to meet the additional pension liability, will fund a 2% pay increase and will lead to the recruitment of more frontline police officers. That said, difficult choices have had to be made, including a significant reduction in PCSOs, who provide an important link with local communities.

Suffolk police does a great job, but if it is to continue to do so into the long term its funding settlement needs a radical shake-up and additional Government resources need to be provided. Today, policing in Suffolk presents significant challenges. There have always been additional costs associated with policing of rural areas. Some 42% of Suffolk’s population is rural, which makes Suffolk one of the most rural counties in the country. But today there are additional 21st-century challenges to meet, including county lines, predominantly in Ipswich; an increasingly elderly population, with the number of citizens with dementia predicted to rise to more than 18,000 by 2025; and significant areas of deprivation, not just in towns such as Lowestoft but often hidden in rural areas.

Suffolk police is meeting these increasing challenges, often with one arm tied behind its back. The cost of a police officer in Suffolk is £78 per head compared with a £98 average for England and Wales. The workload of an officer in Suffolk is 150 cases per year, compared with 132 for an officer in neighbouring Norfolk and 122 in the west midlands. Suffolk has one of the lowest costs of policing per person per day—44p compared with a national average of 55p in 2017-18. If Suffolk received the national average funding, our budget would be increased by nearly £30 million. If Suffolk police received the same level of Home Office funding as Norfolk police, with which we collaborate very closely and effectively, our grant would be £3.5 million higher.

[Peter Aldous]

Those disparities have been around for a very long time, but if they are not addressed Suffolk police will not be able to continue to meet the increase in demand for its services and to combat the increasingly complex nature of crime. As you well know, Madam Deputy Speaker, Suffolk is a great place to live, but from a crime perspective I am afraid that it is no longer a rural idyll. We have a wide variety of policing challenges to meet, and a new, sustainable, long-term system of funding needs to be put in place through the comprehensive spending review.

Feedback from residents shows that they are increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo, and we need to respond to their concerns. I urge the Minister, who has listened sympathetically over the past year, to work with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk, other Suffolk Members of Parliament and me to deliver this and to put the funding of policing in Suffolk on a secure long-term footing.

3.6 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous).

Norfolk constabulary has been forced to endure eight consecutive years of inadequate funding settlements, adding up to £40 million in cuts by 2020. In that time, more than 100 officers have been lost from our streets, all of our PCSOs have been abolished—we are the first force in the country to do that—10 police stations have been shut and the last one open in Norwich does not even open for a full week. This has left Norfolk with one of the lowest per capita number of police in the country.

The consequences in our area and nationwide have been stark. Never since records began has police-recorded violent crime been as high as it is today. Never since records began has knife crime been as high as it is today. Arrests have halved in a decade. Unsolved crimes stand at an almost unthinkable 2 million cases. Police and Home Office violent crime figures show that Norfolk has experienced the largest four-year surge in knife and gun crime anywhere in the country. That is topped off by serious crime being predicted to increase by up to 29%.

The Home Secretary, in presenting this statement, was looking to position himself as the man to clear up this mess, but he has voted for every single police cut since 2010. He is as much responsible for the crisis in Norfolk as the Prime Minister. It is a consequence of their political choices.

The Minister will no doubt claim that this year Norfolk will get an extra £3.2 million from central Government, but that will be totally wiped out by the £3.4 million cost of pension contributions imposed by the Treasury. Norfolk constabulary will be left with a cut in cash terms, never mind real terms. As is so often the case with the Government, they offer you a penny with one hand, while the other is in your pocket taking a pound.

Today, I want to reveal the latest twist in this tale of cuts and underfunding. As I told the House earlier, Norfolk constabulary has already taken the unprecedented decision to entirely abolish police and community support

officers. At the time, both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), the shadow police Minister, warned that that set a dangerous precedent. Now, we have discovered the next step. The constabulary has advertised for civilians, on £10 an hour and zero-hours contracts, to fulfil the role of guarding crime scenes. It describes the role as an “alternative reserve style model”. According to the job advertisement, the main activities of the role include “preserving crime scene integrity” and dealing with

“enquiries from public and media”.

Guards will also be expected to perform duties such as running the scene log and recording details of any witnesses who come forward. Criteria such as

“experience of working with confidential and sensitive information...dealing with confrontation”

and

“working in a police environment or similar”

were listed as desirable but not essential skills for applicants. As the chairman of the Norfolk Police Federation stated:

“with austerity, standing at a cordon is a luxury we cannot afford.”

These employees will save the force money, of course, but as we have warned the Government time and again, policing on the cheap will only put public safety at risk. Not only will it mean that there is no job security or guarantees for those employees, but our local police force will be hugely vulnerable to employees simply saying, “No thanks,” when they are called to ask for help. They are not and cannot be expected to be obligated to be there at every beck and call if they are not going to be given the respect of a real working contract that works in their interest.

In reality, where does this leave our police force? Who will be responsible if there is nobody to cover the vital role of protecting a crime scene? Who will be liable if a crime scene is breached, a witness lost, or any other eventuality where a civilian contractor is responsible? How do we avoid the risk that an ever-expanding casual civilian workforce is an easy target for criminal exploitation, infiltration or corruption? How long can it be before this becomes a path to the full privatisation of entire roles that are currently the responsibility of the police? Perhaps the Minister could answer that in his summing up.

The next step will inevitably be either an erosion of the status of the police, no doubt including their pay and conditions as public sector workers, or a slow shrinking of their role, downgrading it one function at a time. This is the first move of its kind in the country, but I fear it will not be the last. Responsibility lies squarely with the Government, not just in their political choices but in the ideology that underlies them. Here we can see all the elements of that approach in one disturbing example: never-ending austerity and cuts to every public service, forcing them into permanent retreat; the attacks on those public services and public servants, and the creeping privatisation of their functions for corporate profit; the burden of taxation and priority for spending gradually shifting in favour of the more affluent and against the poorest; and the driving down of terms and conditions and pay for ordinary workers to save money for their employers—all at the expense of the public good.

We have seen it before and we have seen it elsewhere, of course, but even in the 1980s Thatcher did not touch the police. Under this Government, no public service is safe. Unfortunately, the consequences are that the public are less safe. I will not stand by and watch. I reject the Minister's mantra that the cuts and their consequences are inevitable and unavoidable. I urge the House to do the same.

3.12 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I begin by paying tribute to Marc Jones, Lincolnshire's fantastic police and crime commissioner, Chief Constable Bill Skelly and the many officers who work so very hard to keep all my constituents safe. I do that because, as the Minister well knows from hearing my Lincolnshire colleagues talk at great length, Lincolnshire is and has long been the worst-funded constabulary per head in the country. We get about £157 per capita. In comparison, Merseyside and North Wales get about £220 per capita. The police funding formula, which I think all Members have mentioned or will mention, is at the root of a fundamental problem for Lincolnshire's police force.

With that in mind, I welcome the funding settlement because it does address some of the most pressing concerns we face. It lays the groundwork for a long-term solution that I hope will allow Lincolnshire police to address the challenges that come with being a large rural county with an incredibly sparse population, as well as genuine deprivation. Some of the worst deprivation in the country is in my constituency and to the north of it in our coastal communities in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins). We have real challenges that need to be addressed and the funding settlement will do that. The £3.3 million extra for a police force that does not have significant reserves on which it can draw will make a real difference, and we should welcome it. It is an absurd position for anyone to take that they will not vote for more money because they want even more money, leaving them with less money. Playing politics with this issue does not help our officers on the street.

What will Marc Jones do with the additional money? Following on from the results of a survey he conducted with local residents, he will expand the use of drones to across the whole county. This service has already caught alleged rapists and sexually violent offenders. It makes a huge difference and uses technology in a uniquely efficient way. He will expand neighbourhood policing so it is more visible and more focused on the vulnerable. He will also invest in a new fleet of vehicles, which will again make a real difference. The police force has already invested in improved call handling to enable the somewhat maligned 101 service to work better. It has a new way to deal with firearms licensing, so we are able to provide better value for money for taxpayers. It has a very productive relationship with G4S, delivering very good value for taxpayers on custody suites, freeing up officers to do what they must do most: fight crime and protect our constituents from the effects of crime.

I have to be honest with the Minister, who has been incredibly helpful to me personally on this difficult issue, and say that it is with mixed feelings that I vote for the settlement. I know it does the right thing today and it will do the right thing in years to come, but it does not solve the fundamental issue that the funding formula

imposes on a constituency such as mine. It does not go anywhere near addressing the historical underfunding of police forces such as Lincolnshire. The figure of £157 per head compared with £220 in Merseyside and Wales is an indictment of previous systems.

Of course I accept the fact—the Opposition might not like it—that we are still living with the consequences of the financial crash. We have to ensure that we live within our means for this police funding settlement. However, we surely must ensure, for my constituents as well as for people up and down the country, that in future we do all we can to deliver a fair funding settlement. My constituents see rising crime and a diversification of crime, whether modern slavery or newer kinds of crime, in particular cyber-crime.

I sincerely find it inexplicable that Members would not vote for more money because they want even more money. *[Interruption.]* It is indisputably an increase for Lincolnshire. *[Interruption.]* Lincolnshire police will be getting £3.3 million more than they would otherwise be getting. That is more money. If the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) wants to vote against the settlement, she is welcome to do so, but it is still more money. She will be voting against an increase in funding for the police. I would defend, to a certain extent, raising council tax locally. As others have said, however, that is not a sustainable way forward. I hope the Minister will accept that many of us are voting for it because in future we want to see root-and-branch improvement across police funding. That is what we need, even though today's settlement is to be welcomed.

3.18 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): Violent crime is rising after years of cuts to the police. The latest figures, published last month by the Office for National Statistics, show that there were 65,914 violent crimes in the area served by West Midlands police between September 2017 and September 2018. That figure is 26% higher than the previous year, which saw stalking and harassment rise by 54%. I ask the Minister to take a moment to let those statistics sink in. Violent crime rose by more than a quarter in one year. The Secretary of State assures us that the number of police and the depth of the cuts do not directly cause crime to rise. Will he come to my constituency and tell residents that? Will he come and look my constituents in the eye and tell them that under the Conservatives the 25% drop since 2010 in the total, full-time equivalent police workforce in the west midlands has played no role in the rise of violent crime?

On the frontline in the west midlands, we have lost more than 2,000 officers over the last eight years. That means 2,000 fewer officers serving the people of the west midlands and keeping us safe; 2,000 fewer officers to respond to reports; and 2,000 fewer officers to catch those responsible for committing crimes. Victims are being let down. Crimes are being reported but not responded to because there are not enough officers to deal with them.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services found that 22% of violent crimes were reported by the public but not recorded. The huge cuts to our police forces have affected not only police officer numbers but the number of community support

[Preet Kaur Gill]

officers, which has fallen a staggering 40% under the Conservatives. How much longer can this go on? West Midlands police has been forced to make hard choices since 2010. Some £175 million of central Government cuts have hit not only police officer numbers but other essential resources, and the proposal before us leaves those levels static.

I have constituents calling my office and coming to my surgeries who feel unsafe and scared. They are appalled that this Government have consistently and savagely refused adequately to support our police force and protect our communities, so I call on the Home Secretary to listen to the concerns of the police and our residents, and to reconsider this new settlement so that we support the police in reversing the unacceptable rise in crime. It is not right that my constituents have had to set up street watch groups due to the lack of police officers.

3.21 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Despite warm words from the Government about protecting the frontline, the funding provided in this year's police settlement falls way short of what is needed to reverse nine years of central Government funding cuts. As others have said, the total increase in central Government funding for local forces, including the pension grant, amounts to £303 million, yet the Government-imposed increase in pension contributions will amount to £311 million, meaning a ninth consecutive year of real-terms cuts in local forces. That forces police and crime commissioners in Wales to make tough choices in setting the level of their council tax precept. As others have said, the Government are passing the buck on to the local council tax payer, but they wrap the two things up as good news.

Police budgets have been cut by £2.7 billion in real terms between 2010 and 2018, with central Government funding slashed by over £400 million since 2015. Figures for 2018 show police numbers across England and Wales at their lowest level in 30 years. Since 2010, more than 21,000 police officers and more than 16,000 police staff have been lost. My local force, Gwent, has seen its budget reduced by over 40% since 2010, leading to the loss of hundreds of officers and staff. We have retained our CSOs only thanks to the Labour-led Welsh Government, who, in fairness, do not have responsibility for policing, but who have stepped in to fund them. That is a hugely welcome intervention, but it should not hide the wider problem of inadequate funding for our local police forces, which is clearly in the UK Government's hands.

Despite those pressures, Gwent maintained one of the highest spends on neighbourhood policing of any police force in the country. The force began recruiting again as soon as it could and last year added 176 new officers to its ranks. That has only been possible, however, because the chief constable and his team have done what they can to prioritise the areas that cause the biggest harm and because our local PCC, Jeff Cuthbert, has taken action and increased the precept. The precept increase this April will be the equivalent of 40 new police officers for Gwent, but the whole thing is unfair and he should not have had to do that.

Cuts to policing become all the more critical when we consider that crime rates are rising across the UK. The most recent available stats show a 20% rise in the overall crime rate in Gwent, a 32% spike in violent crime, a 40% increase in the number of robberies, a 31% increase in drug-related crime and so on. The link between rising crime and cuts to policing has been well made in this debate.

Gwent police has also had to divert resources towards tackling serious and organised crime. I would like to pay tribute to its Operation Jigsaw, launched last November to dismantle criminal gangs involved in child exploitation, violence, weapons and drugs. The work of Gwent officers on that is much appreciated in my community. We need a significant funding boost to help, and we need Ministers to review the Government's long-term police funding strategy as a matter of urgency, particularly at a time when crime is becoming increasingly complex.

On pensions, although the Government belatedly agreed to offset the pension costs that they forced on police for 2019-20, they have still not committed to tackling the £417 million UK-wide pension black hole in 2020-21. In Gwent, the pensions shortfall will add another £5 million in extra costs to the force's budget in 2020-21, equating to the cost of maintaining 100 police officers. It is vital that Ministers provide clarity on the future funding of police pensions as soon as possible.

Finally, the police are often reluctant to outline the effect that cuts have on the service, for absolutely understandable reasons, but morale in the service is low and we rely on the good will and dedication of officers and staff to keep things going. I thank the officers and staff of Gwent police for all they do—often at considerable risk and in extraordinary circumstances—to help to keep us safe, given the growing and changing nature of crime. I say to Ministers that they deserve more than warm words; they deserve to be resourced properly and given the tools to do the job.

3.25 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Crime, antisocial behaviour and the lack of visible policing is the biggest issue that I face when I am out on the doorsteps talking to my constituents. With the indulgence of the House, I will quickly read out an email that I received from one of my constituents; it exactly epitomises what I hear day in, day out.

My constituent says:

"I have lost count of the amount of times I have rang both the police and fire brigade because of youths trying to and succeeding in lighting fires on the playing field and also to the rear of my property. They are stealing wheelie bins, people's fences and various items from the back of the shops to set on fire. There is also large groups of youths hanging around in the area. There are motor bikes and quads flying around like they are untouchable"—I can vouch for that because I nearly got knocked flying myself by one the other week—

"both on the roads, the paths and the children's playing field. There is drug dealing (that is very clear to see) that has been reported countless times, regular vehicles back and forth that the police would catch in the act if there was enough of them in wait. In the 6 years I have lived here the last 18 months have been the worst and getting even worse. Why? Because they know they are getting away with whatever they please because we have no policing. Things are going from bad to worse and people are starting to take matters into their own hands. I hope and pray you get the funding that is needed."

That is not an unusual plea for me to get from my constituents.

I know that the police officers of Cleveland police are doing a fantastic job against all the odds, and I want to pay tribute to all of them today for the sacrifice and service they give to us, but they have been struggling with nearly a decade of year on year real-terms cuts. We have lost 500 police officers and 50 police community support officers—that is nearly 40% of our staff in Cleveland police. How on earth do the Government think we can have a functioning service that protects the public when they wipe out 40% of the resources—the members of staff—that are there to protect the public? That is why crime is rising. We have seen a rise of 12% in all crime in the Cleveland police area in the last year, and a shocking 95% increase in violent crime in the last five years. Those figures are appalling and are a direct consequence of the cuts to police numbers.

I do not understand how this funding settlement can have been set out with such clear inequality and such a lack of needs-based resourcing as we are seeing today. Cleveland has the fourth highest crime rate in the country, yet today it is receiving the lowest settlement in the country—just 5.77%. That is 1.42% lower than the average increase across the rest of the service. How can it be that the area with the fourth highest crime rate gets the lowest settlement? There is something fundamentally wrong with the way the Government are calculating the funding formula.

I would have liked to have put this question to the Home Secretary, but I cannot—I am sorry he cannot spare three hours of his life to listen to the entirety of this debate and hear from constituents around the country—so I will put it to the Minister instead. What on earth is the Government's funding formula based on, given that every single force area that received a lower than average increase, bar one, was among those with the highest levels of recorded crime per head? It is just not right or equitable. In line with all the other cuts, this appears to be politically motivated, not based on need, which is unacceptable.

I am shocked that my constituents are being asked again to pay through the nose for higher local precepts. Not only has the Home Secretary hidden the local collection figure in his national funding announcement today, but—this is the most important point—my constituents are paying twice. They are already paying for their police service through their taxes and are now being asked to pay again through the precept.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is nothing but a Tory police tax—no ifs, no buts—on top of the £2.7 billion of cuts? That is from the National Audit Office, not the Labour party. Those are the facts.

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is what we should call it: a Tory police tax. Not only are people paying twice, but this is a regressive tax that hits the poorest the hardest, and once again it is the poorest who are seeing the highest levels of crime. People are paying twice and getting fewer police officers and a lower standard of service. It is not acceptable.

The poorest are being made to pick up the Government's tab. It is no wonder that in my constituency there are private security firms being set up to reassure people who are desperately worried about their properties and businesses. That should not be happening in our society.

This is what a broken society looks like. People are having to set up companies just to maintain the peace and safety of the streets.

It is no wonder people are taking to public meetings and writing to me in desperation and despair. The funding formula is a disgrace. Cleveland police are yet again at the bottom of the pile. My constituents are angry and desperate and they want to know what the Government are going to do about it. In the meantime, I will not be voting for this funding formula tonight.

3.30 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the fantastic speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley).

Police funding is a major issue in my constituency, as it is across London, and has become a major issue because of nine years of devastating Government cuts. In the name of austerity, central Government funding for the Metropolitan police has been cut by more than £650 million since 2011, and the Government are enforcing a further £263 million of savings by 2023.

Those cuts have consequences, including for police numbers. More than 3,000 police community support officers have been taken off London's streets since 2010, which is a decrease of nearly 75%, and nearly 3,000 police officers have been taken off our streets, including hundreds from my streets in Battersea. Nearly one in six police officers in Wandsworth have been lost in the last three years alone. One result of these cuts has been the decimation of community policing, which used to ensure that police officers were embedded within communities, were trusted and knowledgeable, and had relationships with the local community.

As I said, funding cuts have consequences for the police and police cuts have consequences for crime, community safety and the wellbeing of my constituents. Just as the Government are slashing police funding, violent crime is rising dramatically. I wish the Home Secretary was in his place, because he refuses to acknowledge that the reduction in policing will lead to a rise in violent crime. It is a fact; the evidence is there. We on the Opposition Benches can acknowledge that, because we witness it daily.

Since 2013, violent crime has increased by 57%. In the first six months of last year in Wandsworth, it increased by more than 15%. Moped crime has been soaring.

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd) *indicated dissent.*

Marsha De Cordova: I ask that the Minister show me some respect when I am making my speech. I did not interrupt him, and he should not interrupt me. In 2014, there were 1,000 incidents of moped crime. By 2017, that had shot up to 17,500. That is an increase, in my opinion.

I am regularly contacted by constituents who are understandably fearful and shocked, be they parents who fear their children will be caught up in crime or those who have been victims of crime themselves. They are being failed by this Government, and too often in Battersea, as across the country, we see the tragic consequences of those failures. Last year, my constituency had two fatalities from knife crime—two lives lost too soon as a result of a reduction in policing.

[*Marsha De Cordova*]

The police funding grant is just a drop in the ocean. It means a ninth consecutive year of Government funding cuts. It means police numbers falling to the lowest levels in three decades. It is even forcing Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to warn that the police are so stretched that

"the lives of vulnerable people could be at risk."

Just as police cuts have consequences, cuts in public services across the board are also leading to a rise in crime. When public services are cut, that means that youth centres and services are cut; when school funds are cut, that means that there are not enough resources to enable our children to be taught and educated. Those are the results of this Government's funding cuts.

If evidence were needed, the last nine years have shown that communities cannot be safe on the cheap. Austerity for the police and public services means misery, fear and crime for the people. My constituency is suffering from the Government's failure to learn those lessons. Before more lives are lost, I call on them to invest in our services and invest in our communities.

3.35 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I shall be voting against inadequate Government funding tonight. It is as simple as that, no matter how Conservative Members try to spin or twist it.

Let me give the House a snapshot of the events dealt with by West Midlands police in the 72 hours leading up to New Year's eve. There was a ram raid at the Santander bank in Kings Heath, where the security guard was attacked with an axe. A pedestrian was killed in Highgate by a drunk driver. There was a shooting in Bristol Street, and an extremely serious and vicious assault on a woman in Halesowen. A 34-year-old man was stabbed to death. There was a carjacking in Handsworth, with the stabbed victim left in the road, and a 16-year-old boy was stabbed in Kingstanding. All those major events occurred alongside the normal everyday demands of policing. Our police are at breaking point.

Birmingham is the largest and most populated city outside London. Our crime figures have risen by more than 30% in the last three years, while charging is down by 26%. The level of violent crime in Birmingham is 40% higher than the national average, and the level of vehicle crime is the fourth highest in the country. No wonder people are fearful.

When Labour was last in power, we delivered a neighbourhood policing team in every area. Such an approach not only delivers visible policing, but provides a network of intelligence and fosters better community relations. When Labour left office, there were 143,000 police officers and nearly 80,000 police community support officers. Now neighbourhood policing is almost a nostalgia item. The teams that remain are stretched over areas three or four times the size of their original patch, and the West Midlands chief constable has warned that criminals know just how stretched his force is. The Home Affairs Committee warned that without extra funding, the police will be unable to fulfil their basic duties.

The chief constable blames a shortage of resources when his 999 response times are criticised. The reality is that 70% of 101 calls are now responded to by telephone

rather than a visit. Suspects who could be picked up are not, and jobs that are graded as not immediately important are delayed, sometimes for days or weeks. If someone is assaulted and manages to call the police during the assault, an immediate response is required, but if the person gets away and instantly gives a description of the thief who still has their bag or wallet, the odds are that the call will be downgraded. As the chief constable puts it,

"How can a force that's rated one of the most efficient in the country not get to 30% of emergency calls on time if it's not a resource problem?"

He has lost 24% of his officers since 2010, so I think he has a point.

West Midlands police relies on central Government for 83% of its funding. That is why the unfair application of the formula, the extent of the cuts and an over-reliance on the council tax precept has such a pernicious effect on us. This settlement is based on council tax rising by up to £24 a year. I suppose that that is marginally better than the £50 increase that the Government originally planned, but it still means that people pay more, and that £24 only just covers inflation, resulting in a standstill budget.

We heard earlier from the Home Secretary that this is the first above-inflation increase in nine years. However, Ministers are not so keen to talk about where the grant goes: £7 million is pension grant; and the other £8.9 million has to cover pay rises from this year and last year, and existing pension arrangements. The increased contributions to the police pension scheme for West Midlands are now £15.4 million a year. I defy anyone to make those figures add up to extra money for policing.

Recently the Home Secretary, and even the Tory Mayor of the west midlands, admitted that our police are underfunded. After eight years of denial, the Home Secretary told "Birmingham Live" in September that "resources are an issue" and that he would push the Chancellor for more. It is a pity he did not push a bit harder. The Mayor acknowledged that

"the settlement for the West Midlands has been less favourable than for other areas."

The reality is that the funding package is simply not enough to compensate for the damage that has been done, and our police will continue to struggle. They face changes in the nature and pattern of crime, and are expected to cope with falling numbers, outdated technology and fragmented leadership.

To compound it all, the Government now plan to impose another upheaval on the second largest force in the country by abolishing the post of police and crime commissioner just as it has begun to bed in, and replacing it with our hapless Mayor, who already has his hands full with rough sleepers, unemployment, skills shortages and transport issues. The last thing we need is a part-time commissioner borrowing from the police budget to finance his other pet schemes.

3.41 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I start by paying tribute to the police throughout our country. When we hear about violent crime, let us remember that the police are on the frontline of dealing with it. When we hear about the reduction in the number of police officers, let us remember that the

remaining police officers have to work even more overtime to make do. We should think about those police officers—the men and women who put their lives on the line for us day in, day out.

The Policing Minister needs to realise that people in our communities recognise the damage done by police cuts. My constituency has experienced one of the sharpest rises in violent crime in London and we have the slowest 999 response times in London. Antisocial behaviour in my constituency is higher than for some time, and there has been an increase in burglaries, particularly aggravated burglaries. People in places such as Chessington and New Malden are experiencing the reality of the police cuts, and they blame the Government. The Minister may say that that is the fault of the Mayor of London or someone else, but my constituents know where the fault lies. The £1 billion of real-terms cuts and the loss of 5,000 police officers since 2015 mean that they know where to pin the blame.

My constituency has lost more than 10% of our police force since 2015. We are being asked to support an “increase in spending”, but there is no increase in spending in the police grant report. The Government are not even funding the pension rise properly. The rise in the various allocations is just a freeze in real terms—it does not even manage to get above inflation. This is therefore a cut in national support for police funding throughout the country; there is nowhere hide from that.

The Home Secretary said, “We’re allowing council tax payers to pay the bill,” but that is not in the report. He was wrong when he answered me on that point. We are being asked to vote on the national support for our police forces in the report, but it is utterly inadequate and represents a real-terms cut.

When the Government talk about council tax, let us bear several points in mind. First, council tax is the most unfair tax in Britain today. The Government ask the most vulnerable and the poorest to pay a higher share than would normally be the case under national taxation, so their approach is unfair.

The situation is worse than that, however, as Labour Members have said. Many areas in the country have a low council tax base, so in order to make good the gap in national funds, people in poorer areas must be asked to pay even more. That cannot be right. If we relate council tax bases to the areas in which crime—particularly violent crime—is going up, we see some interesting findings. For example, the top five areas experiencing an increase in knife crime are all in the top seven areas where the police authorities rely on national Government funding—in other words, those areas where council tax rises will not do the job. If the Government are serious about knife crime, as they claim to be, they must realise that their over-reliance on council tax just will not do the job.

The situation is actually even worse than that. The Government want us to believe that, through these council tax rises that may or may not happen, police and crime commissioners will be able to recruit more police officers. Let us hope that that can happen, but I have talked to people in the Met police and to our local senior police commanders, and they say that they are having a real problem spending any money to recruit police officers. This is not just because of the lag effect of having to recruit new officers, but because the job is

no longer attractive, as police pay has been held down and people are aware that violent crime is on the rise. In all seriousness, the method that the Government are using might not deliver the police officers our communities need. We need a rise in police pay above what is currently proposed. We need a real package to be offered to existing police officers, and to the extra ones we will need if we are going to get on top of violent crime, knife crime and all the other things that are hitting our constituents.

The Government talk about the cost of spending more money on the police, but let us talk about the cost of crime. I am not even going to talk about the emotional cost, including the impact on people’s families, which we all know about. I am talking about the actual cost to the taxpayer. The cost of dealing with a knife fatality is £1.2 million. If we had more police officers and youth services working towards crime prevention, surely that would not only provide better value for the taxpayer, but prevent crime far better than the Government are currently doing. My colleagues and I will vote against the police grant motion because it is absolutely unacceptable in the face of rising crime in our communities.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. We obviously have to get all our colleagues in before the wind-ups start, so after the next speaker, I shall reduce the time limit to five minutes.

3.47 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I want to begin by thanking the men and women of Durham constabulary, including the civilian support staff who work for the authority and do a fantastic job. Durham is a high-performing, efficient force, and it is not me saying that, but Her Majesty’s inspector of constabulary. Since 2010—under the Liberal Democrat-Tory coalition and under this Government—Durham has lost 370 officers and 22% of its budget. According to the National Audit Office, that means that it has lost more than any other provincial force, yet it has been rightly pointed out that the demands on our police are increasing. It is ironic that very few Tory Members have spoken in the debate. I noticed that there was not a single person on the Tory Benches a few moments ago; the Whips have obviously been ringing round to get them in. What world do they live in? My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) hit the nail on the head when she said that the Government cannot cut mental health services and local authority services without expecting the effects to land on the police, and it is naive to ignore that fact.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the thin blue line is getting thinner? On top of cuts to police funding, our police face extra demands on their resources because of cuts to other services. Her Majesty’s inspector of constabulary has stated that the police are distracted from dealing with crime because they are too busy dealing with the tens of thousands of cases resulting from a mental health service in crisis.

Mr Jones: I totally agree. The police should be the last resort, not the first, as they are in many cases. The Government cannot cut services and expect the people who use them just to go away.

[Mr Kevan Jones]

The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) is right. The motion refers to the “Police Grant Report (England and Wales)”;

it does not say “Police Grant Report (England and Wales) and the ability to raise council tax”. The Government are spinning this as an increase in funding, but it is not. The hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) said that we must get the right balance between national and local funding, so I hope that his leaflets will include the fact that he is going to vote for an increase in taxes locally, but I am unsure that they will.

Mr Marcus Jones: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Kevan Jones: I will not.

Let me turn to what the motion is actually about. Durham police’s budget will not change. In extra core funding and the contribution towards pensions, which has already been mentioned, the force will receive £2.9 million, but all that money will be used to cover pensions, which were until recently the Government’s responsibility. The precept will raise £4 million, but after taking account of inflation, pay increases and increases in fees levied by the Government, there is no extra cash at all.

Somebody referred to the precept as a magic money tree, but that is not the case for forces such as Durham, which gets 75% of its funding from core funding and 25% from the precept. Surrey, for example, receives 55% from the precept and 45% from core funding. The Home Secretary said that police and crime commissioners’ flexibility to increase costs for band D properties will generate £24 per household, but the average in Durham will be £16. Some 55% of properties in Durham are in band A, and only 9% are in band D. We have fewer than 200 band H properties, which the PCC told me raised the great sum of £68,000 last year. That puts authorities such as Durham’s at a disadvantage.

The move away from national funding to an increased reliance on the precept, putting the onus on local tax payers, is not only unfair, but will not raise the same amount of money. Whereas Surrey will benefit from a large increase, deprived communities such as Durham will not be able to raise the same amount. Chief Constable Mike Barton and Police and Crime Commissioner Ron Hogg have raised the matter with the Policing Minister, but we have seen no movement, and it needs to be addressed, particularly if this movement away from national funding for our police forces happens next year as well. As we will see in the following debate on local government funding, under this Government the trend has been to move money away from the most deprived communities to some of the most affluent areas.

We are being asked to vote for an increase in taxation, and I hope that every Conservative Member who votes for the motion will tell their local electorate that. It is not down to the PCCs to make the decision, because they frankly have no choice but to increase the precept. The Home Secretary used the word “flexibility”, but that is complete nonsense, because if PCCs do not raise the precept, they will, in most cases, have to make even deeper cuts, leading to parts of certain areas not being policed at all, which is unacceptable.

As I said, we are being asked to vote for a tax this afternoon, so I will not be supporting the motion. It is unfair regarding how core funding is being distributed under the same formula. If that continues, forces such as Durham, which is high-performing, will be hampered in their ability to deliver such performance, because of the reliance on the council tax precept. The Minister must address that if it is how we are to fund policing in this country. The consensus over many years has been that policing is a national responsibility, and that needs to continue, not be eroded, although that is what the motion will do.

3.54 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), who gave a passionate speech about this being a tax on our constituents.

In West Yorkshire, our communities have suffered immeasurably from an almost decade-long assault on our police force’s budget. We have lost almost 1,000 police officers and PCSOs in West Yorkshire since 2010, yet we are repeatedly told by this Government that the cuts are having no impact at all on our communities.

Well, the people of Batley and Spen would beg to differ. They are kept awake all hours of the night by nuisance bikes and antisocial behaviour. The livelihoods of independent businesses are under threat due to persistent burglaries. Fatalities are being caused by speeding cars. There is open drug dealing on our estates and, while we have been sitting in the Chamber, an elderly man was attacked on the greenway in Liversedge.

In addition, plummeting charge rates make for extremely worrying reading. The charge rate for sexual offences in West Yorkshire is among the lowest in the country, falling over 60% since 2015. The charge rate for violence against the person has dropped by 40%. People feel let down. They feel that justice is not something that is available to them. People have lost faith in the institutions that exist to protect them and their family. That is a sad indictment of this Government’s systematic dismantling of public services, with year after year of cuts to our councils.

Where do we go from here? Do the Government listen to the desperate pleas to back those who keep us safe, or do they simply put the burden on the taxpayer? Sadly, it is the latter. The very people who have witnessed police officers disappear from their neighbourhoods will be made to fork out more. Communities will be made to chip in to fill the gaping hole left by years of austerity.

Hard-pressed communities such as Batley and Spen should not be forced to bear this burden. Indeed, the Government’s proposed funding settlement will recoup barely a fraction of what has already been slashed from budgets over the past nine years. In West Yorkshire, the precept increase will raise a further £15 million, which sounds like good news, yet we have lost £140 million in central Government funding since 2010 alone.

Communities such as mine with a low council tax base will lose out disproportionately. Surrey, for example, with half the population and a quarter of the violent crime of West Yorkshire, will be able to raise almost exactly the same amount as Kirklees. How on earth can this be fair? Everyone should have access to the same

level of policing. For that to happen, the settlement should be equitable. This funding settlement is too little, too late and goes nowhere near addressing the many complex issues our police forces face.

Recently in Kirklees, there have been 55 arrests in relation to non-recent child sex abuse. This crucial investigation put an extra strain on my police force and the local authority, which is already pushed to the brink after years of cuts. The victims of these crimes have shown incredible bravery in coming forward and they deserve justice. They are courageous women who have shown massive dignity and they need full confidence in this process, which demands resources. Such investigations are complex and take time. I know the police are working hard to tackle these crimes, but they need resources.

I had the privilege of spending a day with our local police and I know the enormous pressure they are under—it is an uphill struggle. It is obvious to us, and I hope it is obvious to the Government, that we need more officers on the beat. That desire is shared by our incredibly hard-working police officers, PCSOs and staff, but they need the Government's backing and they need someone to listen. This funding settlement is not the product of listening. It is unfair, it is unjust and it is not the answer. It amounts to another real-terms cut, another insult to our communities. It is simply not good enough.

I ask the Secretary of State, who is no longer in his place, to meet me and West Yorkshire police to discuss the funding opportunities and difficulties that Kirklees is currently under while it investigates these complex cases of child sexual exploitation. I will not be voting for the motion, and I encourage the Government to understand that communities such as Batley and Spen need to see fairness when it comes to the allocation of resources.

3.59 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Unlike Scotland or Northern Ireland, Wales is subject to having its policing policy set by Westminster, in the capital city of another country, far away from where the police forces are carrying out their duties. Our underpowered Welsh Parliament has been consistently denied the powers necessary to deliver the policing our communities need. As a result of having had our hands tied by the Home Office, Wales has lost more than 500 police officers since 2010. That is an incredible statistic. We have not only lost police officers; in Dyfed Powys, we lost our dedicated police helicopter to a pooled England and Wales service. The performance of the new centralised service, as far as the communities I serve are concerned, is woeful.

If Welsh policing were funded on the basis of population, as is the case with other devolved services, police forces in Wales would be better off by £25 million per year. Instead, we are tied to England and Wales funding criteria that penalise our police forces in Wales. I say this as a constant critic of the Barnett formula. If Barnett were reformed on the basis of need, or even if the funding settlement between Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland were equalised upwards, the windfall for Wales would be even greater.

There is little excuse for keeping these powers in Westminster, given that the British Government are actively considering devolving swathes of the criminal

justice system to English cities such as Manchester. In Wales, not only do we have to suffer the humiliation of being treated as a second-class nation by Westminster, but we are not even given the same status and respect as English cities. Rather than being in control of our own destiny in Wales, we face a situation whereby the British Government make PCCs the scapegoats and abdicate their duty to properly fund policing, instead relying on PCCs to raise the local tax precept, with 63% of the increase in funding for local police coming from an increase in local taxation. This is Westminster creative accounting at its best. As many colleagues have said today, this local taxation is extremely regressive.

The British Government boast about increasing the personal allowance and freezing income tax rises, but these things are largely eroded by the increased council tax bills. PCCs are given the stark choice between either increasing the precept or cutting services. Police forces are given no certainty about when the comprehensive spending review and review of the funding formula will conclude—whether it will be in 2019-20 or 2020-21—further hindering their ability to plan.

Rural Welsh forces are uniquely handicapped by the gearing—the proportion of total funding that comes from the police grant and local taxation. Welsh forces have an approximately even split of Home Office and local government funding, with local taxpayers in rural Wales contributing considerably more to policing than local taxpayers in English cities. For example, Northumbria police receive 81% of their funding from the Home Office, whereas the figure for North Wales police is 47.5%. Due to the lack of devolution, and the England and Wales funding framework, the people of my country are being asked to disproportionately pay far more for their policing than other parts of the British state. Once again, the British Government are placing the burden on rural Wales to pay for urban England; this is truly a partnership of unequals. As public awareness rises in Wales, the position of the Unionist parties will become untenable, as they are once again putting their own narrow ideological British nationalist dogma before the interests of their constituents.

I would be grateful if the Minister answered a few questions in his wind-up. First, will he confirm when the comprehensive spending review and funding formula will be finalised? If that is to be in 2020-21 rather than in 2019-20, as is looking likely, will he give an assurance that his Department will allow the same flexibility with the grant uplift next year as this year, and give PCCs the flexibility to increase the precept once again? Finally, when his Government do finally agree the comprehensive spending review and the funding formula, what is he going to do to ensure that Welsh taxpayers are treated fairly?

4.4 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): There was a time when the Conservative party claimed to be the party of law and order, yet we do not see a single Conservative MP still standing in this debate to defend this police grant. And who can blame them, given their record? We have seen £1 billion cut from the Metropolitan police over the course of a decade; and police numbers at their lowest level in three decades, with the loss of 21,000 police officers, 16,000 police staff and 6,000 PCSOs since 2010. There has never been a better time to be a criminal in this country.

[*Wes Streeting*]

Police-recorded violent crime is at the highest level on record; knife offences are at their highest levels since records began; arrests have halved in the space of a decade; and unsolved crimes stand at 2 million. That is a record that any Minister ought to be ashamed of, yet instead of reversals to central Government cuts to police funding, all we get from this Government, aside from a few scraps from the Treasury table, is the insistence that police and crime commissioners—and people such as the Mayor of London and others—should increase the burden on ordinary council tax payers. The wool has been pulled from the people's eyes. With this debate, as with the next one, the penny has dropped with the public, and they know that they are being asked to pay more in council tax for poorer services; more in council tax to fund local council services that are being cut by central Government; and more in council tax to pay for police numbers, because central Government are cutting the numbers available.

It is no good blaming police and crime commissioners or people like the Mayor of London. In London, Sadiq Khan has put £138 million into the police from London's resources, investing in the violent crime taskforce and the violent crime reduction unit. In my community, the London Borough of Redbridge does not have responsibility for policing, but it has invested £1.5 million in CCTV for automatic number-plate recognition and repurposed local authority enforcement officers to beef up the uniformed presence on our streets. The council knows, as do my constituents who gathered in Gearies School at the weekend and those who gathered in my office to meet the borough commander, that our community has been left less safe under the Conservatives. We have been left less safe as a direct result of central Government cuts to policing.

The Home Secretary left himself looking like a complete idiot earlier by refusing to acknowledge, plainly and on the record, what everyone else in the country knows, which is that if we cut police, crime goes up. There is a direct link between the number of police and the incidence of crime in our community.

I never want to attend another funeral like the one I attended late last year: a funeral for a young man who was murdered on the streets of my constituency. I have never attended a funeral with so many young people present. Looking around that room, I knew there was something inherently wrong in so many people having to come together to mourn the loss of a young life. It is not just police cuts that lead to violent crime and deaths on our streets, but I say plainly and honestly to the Minister, who must surely understand this, that we cannot cut crime while cutting police and we cannot prevent crime while cutting public services to the extent that this Government are. Those services include public health services, mental health services, school budgets, and education and youth services to get young people off our streets and into services that give them opportunities to expand their horizons, improve their life chances and help them to find a better way to fund their future than a life of crime.

In a week in which it became clear that three men in their 30s and 40s have been released without prison detention for running county lines that affect my community, all I say to the Minister is that we have to be

tougher on criminals, we need more police on the streets and we have to provide a better future for young people in my constituency and throughout the country than the £400 a week that young people in our country are being offered by drug dealers to run drugs. Until we solve these problems, I will continue to see in my surgeries and in my community people crying out for more bobbies on the beat in Redbridge, which is exactly what I will continue to campaign for.

4.9 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The first duty of every Government is to ensure the safety and security of citizens. Labour took that duty very seriously in government. We built up neighbourhood policing, with 17,000 extra police officers and 16,000 police community support officers. We introduced crime and safety partnerships and brought crime down by 43%. It was about not only detecting crime but diverting people from crime and preventing people from committing crime. It was a model celebrated worldwide.

In eight years of this Government, we have seen unprecedented cuts to our police service—21,000 nationwide and 2,000 in the west midlands. Those cuts are characterised by grotesque unfairness: the west midlands has suffered a 25% cut to police budgets compared with an average of 19% nationwide and 11% in Surrey. That is completely wrong. As a consequence, we have seen soaring crime, which puts our communities at risk. In particular, we have seen soaring knife crime, which is up by 19%.

I am the first to recognise that the problems that we face are not about numbers alone. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) was absolutely right when he talked about the social fabric of our society being increasingly stretched and degraded. That can be seen, for example, in youth services, which seek to divert young people away from crime. The simple truth is that cuts have consequences. If 21,000 police officers are cut, crime will rise, people will die, people will suffer serious injuries, burglaries and thefts, and justice will be denied to them. The Government cannot go on in this state of denial—they cannot go on denying the consequences of their actions. One day, I hope that a Minister—any Minister—will give a straight answer to this straight question: is there a link between falling police numbers and rising crime? Perhaps the Minister would like to address that in his response to this debate.

Every day in my constituency, I see fear stalking the streets. We had powerful contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill). In the Perry Common area, we have seen knife crime, gun crime, a shop attacked by people waving 30 machetes, the newsagent Jo Dhesi robbed at knifepoint, and the Castle Vale area beset by the growth in antisocial behaviour. Only last Friday in Slade Road—the Frances Road area—some 100 people turned up at a meeting to pour out their hearts. They talked about the consequences of bad local landlords putting vulnerable people into houses in multiple occupation and of not looking after those people. They also talked about the growth in drug crime and how their area was becoming the centre of county lines operations, leading to the exploitation of young people and to criminals making a fortune out of the most pernicious of crimes.

A woman said to me, “My great-great-great-grandad bought the house that we live in. We have lived in it for successive generations ever since. We loved this area.” Now, she says, people fear to go out at night. A young girl said to me, “Every time I want to go down to Slade Road to get a bus, I have to ask my Mum to come with me because I am afraid to walk down the streets.” The fact that, in Birmingham in 2019, we have such fear stalking our streets should make the Government feel utterly ashamed of themselves.

The Government say, “We have listened.” I say, “Oh, no, you have not.” The simple truth is that not enough money is being invested in our police service and that the burden is increasingly being put on the council tax payer. The increase in grant in the west midlands will just cover pension costs. The increase in the precept will just cover inflationary pressures. Our PCC David Jamieson does an outstanding job standing up for the police service. He says that we need at least 500 police officers. There is no chance of recruiting those badly needed officers to restore peace on our streets. This is a standstill budget in the west midlands that goes nowhere near meeting the demand of the people.

In conclusion, the first duty is to keep our community safe. This Government are letting down the public that we serve. We stand behind the thin blue line. We stand behind those excellent men and women in the police service and the communities that they serve. That is why we say to them that, tonight, we will vote against a measure that goes nowhere near supporting you in the way that you deserve.

4.14 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey).

I have spoken about the problems of antisocial behaviour in my constituency a number of times before, and I agree with so many right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken today, but this debate is about more than just police funding; it is also about the cuts to local government. Youth services have been mentioned frequently and, given my role on the Select Committee on Education, I have often mentioned the problem of exclusions contributing to children being involved in crime.

I fear that we are missing a fundamental point. What does not seem to be mentioned is that the general public are losing faith in our police service. That is more than an issue for just the Government or the Opposition; it should concern every single one of us. I am quite sure that every Member here will know of a constituent who has told them about crime and then followed it with, “I didn’t see the point in telling the police,” or “I tried to phone the police and I couldn’t get through,” or “My friend phoned the police, got through and no one came around, so why should I bother reporting it?” In some of the more wealthy areas of my constituency, residents are even talking about providing their own security services to check their streets. This is starting to sound incredibly worrying, when people no longer have the faith that our public services and our police will keep them safe, to the point where they are talking about funding their own.

My children went to South Africa in the summer, and they told me that everybody there pays for their own security services because they have no faith in the Government. Surely this is not what we want in Britain;

we do not want people to lose their faith in the police service. I say this not because I have any problems with the police service—the police do an incredible job—but because year on year of underfunding and of the police being stretched to a capacity that they cannot possibly sustain mean that crimes are not being dealt with.

When I talk to the police about an area where there is additional crime, they say, “We know it’s a problem, Emma, but the people there never report it.” I go and talk to people in certain tower blocks in my constituency, and what they are facing is horrific, but the figures give a really poor impression of where the crime is. If hon. Members were to look at the statistics for my constituency, they might say, “Oh, the crime seems to be worse in the wealthier areas.” No—the people in those areas are more likely to report it. Crime is actually much, much worse in the tower blocks. The people there are having a horrendous time.

What I am saying to the Minister is that this is not just about asking for more money. Yes, we do want some more money, and we need a hell of a lot more than the Government are offering us, but we also want to know how the Government will restore people’s faith that something is going to happen—that there is going to be an outcome when they make that phone call to the police.

The Home Secretary talked about the problem with mental health services, and I am sure that the Minister is aware of a wonderful police officer who, very sadly, committed suicide because she was not getting the support she needed. I say again to the Minister that this is not a criticism of any of our hard-working officers. I should especially mention Inspector Craig Mattinson, who I spent the day with and who does an incredible job locally. This is about me saying that, unless the Government take the problem of increasing crime more seriously, it will come back to bite each and every one of us. The last thing we want is people taking the law into their own hands, but I fear that that is what too many are being forced to do.

4.18 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) for speaking about her experience, and others across this House who have been out with their police and have seen what they are having to go through. I also pay tribute to my local officers. I have done shifts at both Buxton and Glossop police stations and seen the amazing work that the police do.

When I turned up in the morning at Buxton, the officers there had spent the previous night clearing up after a horrific road accident in which three young men lost their lives. It was an absolute tragedy that no one would want to see. Those officers were deeply affected, but they turned up the next morning, did their shift, and helped to deal with the families and with the repercussions of that incident. I absolutely pay tribute to them. Our officers do this because they know that there is no one else. The police are incredibly short-staffed in our rural area, covering almost 900 sq km from two police offices.

We in Derbyshire have had a 26% reduction in our funding, which means £38 million less for our police. Our police and crime commissioners have tried to protect the frontline, so the reduction has translated into 18% fewer officers, but that is still 337 in number. Police stations have been closed in Chapel-en-le-Frith and in New Mills,

[Ruth George]

leaving huge areas that are covered from a distance and where the police response, even to an emergency, cannot but take a significant amount of time.

This police funding settlement represents £8 million less from the Government than just the costs of pensioning off so many of the 21,000 fewer officers that there now are. In Derbyshire, the police will receive £400,000 less from the Government than they will have in pension fund costs. That means that our hard-pressed council tax payers are having to pay for the cost of police pension fund, which has increased due to getting rid of police. How is that fair or equitable? We have already had council tax rises of 5% last year and 4% this year, plus the police precepts, and more and more people are struggling to pay their council tax. In High Peak alone, 2,700 households have been referred to court in the past 18 months—that is 7% of all households. Increasing council tax is not an easy option. It affects the people who are poorest, who have to pay more as a proportion of their budget and who are also often those most affected by crime.

These people know that our police are suffering too. The police in High Peak are now having to look at closing the custody cells in Buxton. That means that to take arrested people to a custody cell, our police would have to take them an hour's drive over bleak moorland to Chesterfield or over the county border into Manchester, leaving our thin blue line even thinner than before. There has been a 43% rise in violent crime in Derbyshire, and there have been some absolutely terrible incidents in High Peak. Our officers have to deal with these incidents day in and day out, often working on their own, turning up to the most horrific scenes single-handed and having to wait until they can get cover from other staff who can join them, which can take far too long.

I absolutely pay tribute to our officers across Derbyshire and to the police staff who do the very best they can to deal with the rising levels of violent crime, murders and suicides. There are mental health incidents that take them hours to deal with, when they take people into hospital and have to wait for mental health services to assist. They go above and beyond the call of duty, day in and day out. No wonder it is more difficult to recruit to our police.

The Government should stop taking our police for granted. They should start by funding them properly and helping them to deal with crime. That is what people across the country want, and it is what I hope the Minister will respond with today.

4.23 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): This has been a fantastic debate with moving contributions from Members in all parts of the House. However, given that the Government announced this funding settlement with such fanfare and as if it was such good news, it is quite perplexing that only five Conservative Members have spoken on its behalf—all of them, as the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) put it, with mixed feelings. They all referenced the Government's failure to revise the funding formula as a cause for concern for their own force areas. The hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) said that it was not a long-term approach. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax)

said that without more Government funding we will continue to lose officers, which is unacceptable both to him and to his constituents. They all said that to keep asking for more council tax was not a sustainable way forward. Those are hardly ringing endorsements from those sitting behind the Home Secretary.

On the other hand, we have heard impassioned speeches from Labour Members on exactly why we will be voting against this completely inadequate settlement today. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) said, cuts have consequences. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), as Merseyside MPs, spoke about losing 1,000 officers and 200 PCSOs, which has undoubtedly had an impact on rising crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) spoke about the shocking documentary showing that only 10 police officers were available for the entire town on a given night, which seemed like an open advert to criminals and left local people feeling under threat and much less likely to report crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) spoke about the consequences of his force's decision to abolish all PCSOs, leading to the inevitable downgrading of staff and creeping privatisation, with people on zero-hours contracts now covering crime scenes.

My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) spoke about how fewer people are reporting crimes at all and about reported violent crimes not being recorded, despite the Home Secretary saying earlier that increasing crime is a result of better recording. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle said that the very legitimacy of policing is at threat, as people are losing faith in the police.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) spoke about the loss of thousands of officers and staff in Wales, cushioned only by the intervention of the Welsh Labour Government, who, faced with the same budgetary choices as the UK Government, have recognised the importance of community policing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) said that Cleveland police force shows the clear inequality that exists and the lack of needs-based resourcing. Despite having the fourth highest crime rate in the country, it will receive the lowest rise out of this settlement. As she said, this is a completely regressive settlement that fails her constituents and those of many Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) spoke about the loss of community policing, which means the loss not just of officers embedded in communities but of their crucial intelligence gathering and, even more crucially, the trust in the police that community policing brings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) described a horrific litany of violent offences in the west midlands and the horrendous inability of West Midlands police to respond to 999 calls, all of which is exacerbated by this settlement and all previous settlements delivering less to West Midlands police than to the vast majority of other forces.

The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) is right that the vote tonight is on the Home Office's police grant, which equates to a

real-terms cut. That is why we will be voting against it, and we will be pleased to see the Lib Dems in the Lobby with us.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) spoke about the wider demands on the police from austerity and, in particular, mental health. My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) described a huge rise in all types of crime, yet the settlement she is being asked to vote for could hardly be less adequate for the challenges faced in West Yorkshire, not least child sexual exploitation.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who are steadfast supporters of and consistent campaigners for the police, spoke of the prevalence of violent crime and burglaries in their constituencies—constituencies left less safe by this Government. Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) spoke movingly of the impact on officers of the job we ask them to do day in, day out, despite cutting their numbers and their pay.

There is no precedent in post-war history for a Government undermining the police in the way that this Government have. Never, since records began, has police-recorded violent crime been as high as it is today. Never has knife crime been as high as it is today. Arrests have halved in a decade. Unsolved crimes stand at more than 2 million, and 93% of domestic violence offences go unprosecuted. That is the shameful legacy of this Government, and they remain the only people in this country who continue to deny the link between violent crime and falling officer numbers. Today's settlement has to stand in that context and in the context of eight consecutive years of real-terms reductions in central Government funding.

It is hardly something to boast about that this is the biggest rise since 2010, when this Government have cut the police every year since 2010. It is staggering that for the ninth consecutive year, we are being asked to vote for a reduction in central Government funding. The £161 million in the central Government grant and the pension grant combined do not meet the additional £311 million cost this year of Government-imposed changes to pension contributions. That means that 31 out of the 43 forces will lose out this year in not only real terms but cash terms. In real terms, almost every single police force will. Barry Coppinger, the PCC in Cleveland—one of the poorest-funded police forces in the country—estimates that he will see his real-terms funding fall by £2.1 million as a result of this settlement. When the Policing Minister promised the House during the settlement statement:

“Every police and crime commissioner will have their Government grant funding protected in real terms.”—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 432.]

did he somehow inadvertently mislead the House?

As my hon. Friends have said, this Government are giving with one hand and taking with the other, but we should not be surprised, because they have form. Since 2015 they have promised to protect police funding, yet we have seen police numbers fall by 5,900. The truth, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that when it comes to police funding you cannot believe a word they say.

Who is paying the price for these Tory failures to fund the police? This settlement asks hard-pressed local tax payers to bear that burden once again. Using council

tax to pay for increased funding for the police is perverse and unfair. It fails to meet need and it fails to meet demand, especially alongside the continued failure to reform the funding formula and the continued cuts to the Home Office grant. Merseyside will raise almost the same as rural North Yorkshire, despite having double the population and triple the level of violent crime. West Yorkshire has double the population and four times the level of violent crime of Surrey, yet it will be able to raise only about the same amount of funding this year.

What exactly was the point in the Policing Minister going from force to force to assess demand if he then fails to produce a funding settlement for forces that matches that demand? Nobody, as my hon. Friends have said, could think that an appropriate way to assess how much a police force needs is how big the houses are in that area. How can the Minister justify a postcode lottery that means the communities already seeing higher crime will receive so much less funding?

This Government have an abominable record on law and order, and no political will to redress it. By passing the burden of their political failure on to local taxpayers, they are storing up problems for the future, which will see the forces with the largest increases in crime, especially violent crime, hit time and again. The public know this Government have failed and will continue to fail in their first and most solemn duty, to keep their citizens safe, and today's settlement confirms that failure once again.

4.31 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): During this vigorous debate, I have clung to the message from Her Majesty the Queen about the need, in these divided times, to try to seek the common ground. That is relevant because when the Home Secretary and I spoke recently with a group of senior police leaders, billed as the leaders of tomorrow, one of the questions from the floor was, “Do you see common ground between the political parties about the future of policing?” The question was asked hoping for the answer yes. Listening to this debate, I asked myself what that police officer, who may end up leading a force, would have thought of this debate if she had had the time to watch it, which of course she does not.

She would have heard a common voice across the House with MPs going out of their way to express their personal admiration and thanks to their forces. That was the case with my hon. Friends the Members for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) and for South Dorset (Richard Drax), the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), the hon. Members for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and for Redcar (Anna Turley), the right hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) and for North Durham (Mr Jones), and the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George).

She would have heard a recognition across the House of changing demand on the police, with cyber-crime, county lines, child sexual exploitation and the critical issue of the increasing amount of time that our police officers are spending with people in crisis and suffering from mental health problems. Again, that was recognised

[Mr Nick Hurd]

by Members from across the House. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), my hon. Friends the Members for Nuneaton and for South Dorset, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill), my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness and the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) all talked about that.

She would have heard a determination across the House to bear down on this horrendous increase in knife crime. The right hon. Member for Knowsley and the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) again did the House a service by reminding us that beneath the statistics are terrible human stories of shattered families. The hon. Members for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) reminded us that this is not a London issue but a national challenge.

She would also have heard a recognition from across the House that a lot needs fixing in the CSR in how funding is allocated across the police system. We heard that from MPs from many different places across the country, such as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire, the right hon. Members for North Durham and for Knowsley, my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) in relation to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, my hon. Friends the Members for Nuneaton, for Waveney, for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) from a sedentary position, and for Boston and Skegness, the hon. Members for Newport East and for Batley and Spen, and most of the west midlands MPs.

That is where the common ground lies. Of course, there are also divisions. There are irreconcilable divisions on decisions taken in 2010 in response to the crisis in the public finances.

Vicky Ford: Will my right hon. Friend add Essex police to the list of those that need praise? A new cohort of Essex police officers will be passing out on Friday. They are in addition to the 150 new officers last year, and are part of the 240 new officers planned for this year, funded proudly by Essex people thanks to the precept.

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I congratulate—

Mr Kevan Jones: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have had a good debate, but it was undersubscribed on the Conservative Benches. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), who stormed off early in the debate when her intervention was not taken and has not been present, to use an intervention to make a mini speech?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Nothing disorderly has occurred. The right hon. Gentleman has put on the record his concerns about people not being present for the debate and then intervening.

Mr Hurd: Divisions do exist. Labour is desperate to assert its narrative that cuts have consequences. On this side of the House, we know that the cuts were the consequence of a Labour Government yet again running out of public money so that tough decisions had to

be taken. There is an artificial debate about the balance between the contribution from central and local taxpayers. If we want more money in policing, we have to pay, and the hypocrisy of this—from a Labour party that doubled council tax when it was in power—is overwhelming.

The common ground is that Members on both sides of the House recognise the increased pressure on the police and want to provide additional support to them. That is exactly what the settlement does.

Mr Howarth: The Minister offers us the tempting prospect of finding common ground, but does he not realise that the common ground he asks us to step on to is actually sinking sand?

Mr Hurd: As I have said, I am more than happy to meet the Merseyside MPs, but this settlement is set up to increase public investment in our police service by up to £970 million. If it is voted through tonight, it means that we will invest more than £2 billion more next year than we did three years ago. How that can be presented as a cut is beyond me. What the public will note is that the Labour party has fought us every step of the way—it voted against the settlement last year and it intends to vote against it tonight. Labour is apparently blind to the fact that while we are committing to almost £2 billion of investment in the police service next year, its commitment is for £780 million over the life of this Parliament.

Jack Dromey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: I am not going to give way.

I am delighted that police and crime commissioners up and down the country intend to use the settlement to do what the public want, which is to recruit additional police officers—300 more in London, 320 more in Manchester, 160 more in Bedfordshire, 58 more in Derbyshire, 270 more in Sussex, and 132 more in Yorkshire. Across the system, more than 2,500 more police officers are planned, plus 479 staff. That is the result of the police settlement that the Labour party intends to vote against.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): Thank you for establishing the ground rules, Madam Deputy Speaker, and allowing Members to speak, against the wishes of the Opposition. May I use this opportunity to wish Francis Habgood, the excellent chief constable of Thames Valley, a happy retirement next month?

Does the Minister agree that, while we always want more funding, smarter procurement can help? The Oxfordshire fire service saved £1 million, but we have a more efficient fire service through tendering and procuring fire engines with other authorities.

Mr Hurd: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend, and of course the Labour party has no interest in how our money is spent. After eight years of austerity, we can still find agreement with the police to fund—

Mr Kevan Jones: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: It had better be good. It is not fair not to let the Minister respond.

Mr Jones: It is good. We have another example of a Member who has not been present for the debate. He is being lazy and could not be bothered to turn up—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Sit down. Nothing disorderly has happened and the Minister has the right to respond.

Mr Hurd: This settlement demonstrates our recognition that our police system needs additional support. We have one of the best police systems in the world and we are determined to keep it that way. The settlement provides the opportunity to increase public investment by almost £1 billion. It allows PCCs to manage the cost pressures on them, which are real, and to recruit local police officers to bear down on local crime. It also provides additional money for national priorities, such as counter-terrorism and serious organised crime, which costs this country £37 billion a year and on which the Labour party is absolutely silent.

The settlement is another stepping stone—I have been candid on this—on the journey towards the comprehensive spending review and the opportunity to structure long-term funding for the police and to address the issue of fair funding, which exercises minds across the House. The Home Secretary has made it clear that police funding is his priority. We all want to register our thanks to the police, but they need more than that—they need our support. That is exactly what the settlement provides. I commend it to the House.

Question put.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that this motion is subject to double-majority voting: of the whole House and of Members representing constituencies in England and Wales.

The House having divided: Ayes 310, Noes 254.

Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England and Wales: Ayes 289, Noes 242.

Division No. 321]

[4.40 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Afolami, Bim	Bowie, Andrew
Afriyie, Adam	Bradley, Ben
Aldous, Peter	Braverman, Suella
Allan, Lucy	Brereton, Jack
Allen, Heidi	Bridgen, Andrew
Amess, Sir David	Brine, Steve
Andrew, Stuart	Brokenshire, rh James
Argar, Edward	Bruce, Fiona
Atkins, Victoria	Buckland, Robert
Bacon, Mr Richard	Burghart, Alex
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Burns, Conor
Baker, Mr Steve	Cairns, rh Alun
Baldwin, Harriett	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Barclay, rh Stephen	Cartledge, James
Baron, Mr John	Cash, Sir William
Bebb, Guto	Caulfield, Maria
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Chalk, Alex
Benyon, rh Richard	Chishti, Rehman
Beresford, Sir Paul	Chope, Sir Christopher
Berry, Jake	Churchill, Jo
Blackman, Bob	Clark, Colin
Blunt, Crispin	Clark, rh Greg
Boles, Nick	Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Bone, Mr Peter	Clarke, Mr Simon

Cleverly, James	Hammond, Stephen
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hancock, rh Matt
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Hands, rh Greg
Collins, Damian	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Costa, Alberto	Harrington, Richard
Courts, Robert	Harris, Rebecca
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Harrison, Trudy
Crouch, Tracey	Hart, Simon
Davies, Chris	Hayes, rh Sir John
Davies, David T. C.	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Davies, Glyn	Heapey, James
Davies, Mims	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Davis, rh Mr David	Heaton-Jones, Peter
Dinenage, Caroline	Henderson, Gordon
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Herbert, rh Nick
Docherty, Leo	Hinds, rh Damian
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hoare, Simon
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Hollingbery, George
Donelan, Michelle	Hollinrake, Kevin
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Double, Steve	Holloway, Adam
Dowden, Oliver	Howell, John
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Huddleston, Nigel
Drax, Richard	Hughes, Eddie
Duddridge, James	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Duguid, David	Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Jack, Mr Alister
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	James, Margot
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Javid, rh Sajid
Ellis, Michael	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Elphicke, Charlie	Jenkyins, Andrea
Eustice, George	Jenrick, Robert
Evans, Mr Nigel	Johnson, rh Boris
Evennett, rh Sir David	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Fabricant, Michael	Johnson, Gareth
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Johnson, Joseph
Field, rh Mark	Jones, Andrew
Ford, Vicky	Jones, rh Mr David
Foster, Kevin	Jones, Mr Marcus
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Kawczynski, Daniel
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Keegan, Gillian
Frazer, Lucy	Kennedy, Seema
Freeman, George	Kerr, Stephen
Freer, Mike	Knight, rh Sir Greg
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Knight, Julian
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Kwarteng, Kwasi
Garnier, Mark	Lamont, John
Gauke, rh Mr David	Lancaster, rh Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Latham, Mrs Pauline
Gibb, rh Nick	Leadsom, rh Andrea
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Lee, Dr Phillip
Girvan, Paul	Lefroy, Jeremy
Glen, John	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Goldsmith, Zac	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lewer, Andrew
Gove, rh Michael	Lewis, rh Brandon
Graham, Luke	Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Graham, Richard	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Grant, Bill	Lidington, rh Mr David
Grant, Mrs Helen	Lopez, Julia
Gray, James	Lopresti, Jack
Grayling, rh Chris	Lord, Mr Jonathan
Green, Chris	Loughton, Tim
Green, rh Damian	Mackinlay, Craig
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Maclean, Rachel
Griffiths, Andrew	Main, Mrs Anne
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Mak, Alan
Hair, Kirstene	Malthouse, Kit
Halfon, rh Robert	Masterton, Paul
Hall, Luke	Maynard, Paul
Hammond, rh Mr Philip	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick

McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 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
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 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
 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
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 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
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 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
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Iain Stewart and
Wendy Morton

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom

Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Philip
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 George, Ruth
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen

Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain

McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahaeme
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry

Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Wilson, Phil
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) for 2019/20 (HC1896), which was laid before this House on 24 January, be approved.

Local Government Finance

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We come now to the three motions on local government finance, which will be debated together. All three motions are subject to double-majority voting: voting by the whole House, and voting by those representing constituents in England.

4.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2019–20 (HC 1916), which was laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Report on Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Alternative Notional Amounts) (England) 2019–20 (HC 1917), which was laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.

That the Report on Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Principles) (England) 2019–20 (HC 1918), which was laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.

James Brokenshire: Strong, vibrant, resilient communities are, more than ever, key to unlocking a brighter future for our country. We must therefore celebrate them and help them to succeed, and, in turn, support councils and the many people who serve them every day in delivering essential services and changing lives. I hold those dedicated public servants in the highest regard and have faith in them to rise to the challenges that lie ahead, seeing their people and places flourish with no one left behind. To achieve that, they must have the necessary tools and resources to do their job and I am determined to ensure that they get them. That was why I published the provisional settlement on funding for local authorities in England late last year and invited contributions as part of our formal consultation on that.

We received around 170 responses and I am grateful to those who engaged so constructively with me and my Ministers. My particular thanks throughout the process go to the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), for all his work and immense efforts.

That important work has helped to shape the final settlement, which recognises the pressures that councils face and acknowledges their impressive efforts to drive efficiencies and strengthen our public finances. That paves the way for more confident, self-sufficient and invigorated local government.

I am pleased to confirm on behalf of the Government that, importantly, core spending power is forecast to increase from £45.1 billion in 2018–19 to £46.4 billion in 2019–20. That amounts to a cash increase of 2.8% and a real-terms increase in resources available to local authorities, which is good news for the many communities that will benefit.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State recognise that children's services are now at crisis point and that there will be a £2 billion—£2 billion!—shortfall by 2020?

James Brokenshire: We are spending around £1 billion more than at the start of this Parliament. Some £84 million is added into the settlement to ensure that we drive quality and support in the knowledge that, yes, there are pressures. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise the additional £410 million that has been committed to children's and adult social care in response to the good work that is going on and some of the pressures.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I welcome the £2.7 million extra for the Isle of Wight. More than that, I am delighted that, for the first time ever, the fair funding review mentions English islands and refers to the Isle of Wight by name as somewhere that requires extra study to analyse additional costs. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that that results in concrete extra support for English islands and the Isle of Wight in recognition of the needs of islands?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend is a fine champion of the interests of the Isle of Wight and I commend him for his work. He has made representations to the Local Government Minister and seen a recognition that different communities are affected in different ways as we look at the review of relative needs and resources. Obviously, we will listen carefully to representations we receive from hon. Members of all parties as we move forward with the review.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (Ind): The Secretary of State talks about the additional cash for local authorities. I spoke to a colleague who was at East Sussex County Council's budget meeting today, and I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that the situation is a catastrophe. The situation with core funding means that meals on wheels are being cut. Unless additional money comes next year, services for vulnerable children will be savaged. Will the Secretary of State today commit to giving East Sussex County Council fairer funding? Even though this is a Tory-led county, the council is on its knees. It needs the money urgently.

James Brokenshire: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that East Sussex is part of the business rates pilots and gets the benefits that attach to those involved in that process through the additional resources that are garnered from it. Councils across the south-east will get an extra £226 million in their core spend in the settlement if the House approves it today, which will mean around £7.1 billion of funding.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Ian Hudspeth and Oxfordshire County Council on the excellent way in which they have managed their resources? Does he agree that capital funding is equally important? I hope that he will look kindly on our housing infrastructure funding bid, because that funding would provide vital infrastructure for Didcot in my constituency, which is one of the economic engines of the United Kingdom.

James Brokenshire: I pay tribute to Oxfordshire and to all councils that have been working hard to provide services for their local communities. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will recognise the increase of about £16.9 million that will come through the settlement

for Oxfordshire. I am looking carefully at the housing infrastructure bids in respect of Didcot and elsewhere, and I note his lobbying in that regard.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Brokenshire: I will take one more intervention and then I will seek to make some progress.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Harrow Council is not unique in having had most of its revenue support grant axed over the past seven years. What conversations is the Secretary of State having with the Chancellor of the Exchequer so that we can, as we hope, see a significant increase in that revenue support grant in the comprehensive spending review?

James Brokenshire: I am looking carefully at sustainability and issues relating to local government finance more broadly. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise the change that is happening in the structure of local government finance and the move away from revenue support to the retention of business rates. In London, we have a 75% business rate retention pilot. We want to move away from the merry-go-round of money being collected so that it comes into central Government and then going back by way of a grant. We want to simplify the process.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Brokenshire: I will take one final intervention, but then I will make some progress, because I know that a lot of Members want to speak and I am conscious that interventions will eat into their time.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the measures he is outlining will help Leicestershire County Council, which is involved in the business rate retention pilot scheme, as well as Harborough District Council and Blaby District Council? Those three local authorities are led by excellent Conservative administrations.

James Brokenshire: I commend the Conservative authorities in my hon. Friend's area for their work, and I commend him for his recognition of the benefit that accrues from the business rate retention pilots and of how funding from the growth in business rates can be invested into local services. That is why we want to move to this new system throughout the next financial year.

These proposals will amount to a real-terms increase, but I know that we face a number of challenges. Among the most serious is the responsibility that councils—and, indeed, all of us—have towards the most vulnerable in our society. It is therefore right that out of the more than £1 billion of extra funding committed at last year's Budget, £650 million will go towards adult and children's social care in 2019-20. This will help to meet the pressures resulting from an ageing population. Some £240 million of that amount has been allocated to ease pressures on the NHS, and that is on top of the £240 million announced in October to address current winter pressures. The remaining £410 million can be spent on either adult or children's social care and, where necessary, to take pressure off the NHS. I know that local authorities will value that flexibility greatly.

We are investing a further £84 million over the next five years to expand three of our most successful children's social care innovation programme projects in up to 20 local authorities to keep more children at home safely. We are supporting local authorities to make the best use of available resources and to increase efficiency, as well as to innovate and improve the way in which they deliver services. Better integration of the health and care systems with other local services is essential, particularly in regard to social care. The long-term NHS plan, with its welcome shift from acute to community healthcare services, together with the upcoming social care Green Paper, will make a big difference.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I welcome the extra funding that is going into social care, notwithstanding reductions over the past several years. Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to ensure that that money is not just pumped into the acute sector? Integration far too often seems to mean bailing out hospitals that are struggling because of increased demand from an ageing population and people with multiple co-morbidities, so will he ensure that more of that money is directed into preventive care in the community? This would take pressure off the NHS and keep people well and properly supported in their own homes.

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend will recognise the work of the better care fund and some of the positive outcomes that it has driven for acute hospitals and social care, such as preventing people from having to go to hospital, as he highlights. Ensuring that the social care system works effectively to deal with some of the pressures is a core component of the NHS long-term plan.

Several hon. Members rose—

James Brokenshire: I will give way to the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) and then take a couple more interventions.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. A new study by the Centre for Cities shows that Slough has been the hardest-hit town in the south-east. In fact, it has been the 10th worst hit nationally by this Government's austerity measures. Slough's local government spending has been cut by 23% since 2009-10, while the UK average figure is 14%. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is unfair to mete out the deepest cuts in those areas that are most affected by issues such as childhood obesity, childhood poverty and homelessness?

James Brokenshire: The hon. Gentleman will recognise the need for us to look carefully at relative needs and resources. I encourage him to engage constructively and positively with our review so that we get the right formula to ensure that need is recognised. He makes an important point, but we are putting more funding into the system, and I hope that he will recognise the benefit.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Nottinghamshire County Council, which is run by an exceptional Conservative group, has had its funding cut by 52% since 2013—from £238 million to £118 million for 2019-20. Despite its

excellent budget management and real-terms cuts to services, the council's deficit is projected to be £34.1 million. I say to my right hon. Friend, who is a very good Secretary of State, that the cuts have been going on for too long, and county councils such as Nottinghamshire will now have to cut through the muscle and into the bone. They simply need more money. On that basis, I will be abstaining this evening.

James Brokenshire: I pay tribute to the work that councils such as Nottinghamshire have done over the past few years in making hard calls and difficult decisions as a consequence of the financial position that the Government have had to deal with. I encourage my right hon. Friend to look at core spending power, which combines all sources of local government income, because she will see that Nottinghamshire will have an additional £16.3 million between 2018-19 and 2019-20, which is an increase of 3.2%.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am terribly grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. West Sussex is thankful for the additional money and for the business rates retention pilots, but the truth is that we have had to make savings of £200 million over the past eight years and face a gross gap of £145 million over the next four years. We have one of the oldest populations in the country, with the consequent social care requirements, and we are in the bottom decile for schools funding. In addition to all that, we have "Think Family"—one of the best troubled families programmes—and it would be a catastrophe if its funding were not renewed next year, because it offers really good preventive early intervention work, the effects of which are great and save money later on.

James Brokenshire: I am a strong supporter in the troubled families programme, and I have been a strong believer in preventive work for young people, including through family units, for many years. My hon. Friend makes an important point based on his experience about the value of such services and interventions. I assure him that I will continue to focus on that as we look to the months ahead and the spending review.

Several hon. Members rose—

James Brokenshire: I need to make some progress due to the time available for this debate.

To do more, it is crucial that we listen and respond to what local authorities are telling us, not just on the NHS and social care, but on all issues. It is in that spirit that we are increasing the rural services delivery grant by £16 million in 2019-20 to maintain it at last year's level. In addition, after consulting widely, we have decided directly to eliminate negative revenue support grant—where changes in revenue support grant have led to a downward adjustment of some local authorities' business rates top-up or tariff—in 2019-20. I recognise the strength of feeling about that, and I believe this is the most straightforward and cost-effective approach for the next year.

We also want to continue rewarding councils for delivering the homes we need. I therefore confirm that the new homes bonus baseline threshold will be maintained, at a cost of £18 million. The message about councils wanting certainty to help them plan also came across

[James Brokenshire]

loud and clear in the consultation. To that end I can confirm that, in 2019-20, local authorities, with the exception of police and crime commissioners, will retain the same package of council tax referendum limits as in 2018-19. This will protect local taxpayers from excessive increases, in line with our manifesto commitment.

Every council has the freedom to set higher council taxes if it wishes, provided it gains the consent of local people in a referendum. I am also providing an additional 2% council tax flexibility to Northamptonshire County Council to assist with improvements to council governance and services after its serious issues.

With the end of the current multi-year deal in sight, it is clear that we need to take a longer view on how we fund councils as we move to a stronger, sustainable, smarter system of local government. Preparations this year for increased business rates retention, a new approach to distributing funding between local authorities and the upcoming spending review will be pivotal to this, as will the important work under way with local authorities and the wider sector to better understand service costs and pressures. Again, we are listening and responding.

For years, councils have asked for more control of the money they raise, and we are giving it to them through our plans to increase business rates retention to 75% from 2020, in the process providing local authorities with powerful incentives to grow their economies. Local authorities estimate they will retain around £2.4 billion in business rates growth in 2018-19 under the current system, a significant revenue stream, on top of the core settlement funding I am outlining today.

The pilots testing increased business rates retention have, unsurprisingly, proved very popular, and I am delighted there will be 15 new pilots for 2019-20 covering 122 local authorities. We will also be piloting 75% business rate retention in London and continuing our existing pilots in devolution deal areas.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for including West Sussex in the business rates retention scheme and for the 4.2% increase the county council is getting. Crawley Borough Council has reserves of over £21 million. What more can be done to make sure that councils use such large reserves more efficiently?

James Brokenshire: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the way in which he has championed his local area. As a former local government leader, he has shown what can be delivered through local authorities, and I commend him for that.

My hon. Friend highlights the increased spend that West Sussex will gain as a consequence of the settlement before the House, but obviously it is for local authorities to work smartly and thoughtfully in relation to their retained reserves. There is a clear need for reserves, which he will understand, but he rightly underlines the need to use those funds sustainably, appropriately and effectively.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State rapidly skipped over the funding review. Will he confirm that the consultation proposed in December to take deprivation out of the foundation

element of the funding review? That would transfer money from deprived areas to non-deprived areas. Is that fair?

James Brokenshire: Obviously we will look at all the representations that continue to be made during the review of relative needs and resources, but our analysis in the review demonstrates that, overall, population is by far the most important cost driver for both the upper-tier and lower-tier foundation formulae. Although in aggregate terms deprivation is not shown to be a major cost driver for the services included in the foundation formulae, I am of the view that relative levels of deprivation remain an important cost driver for some specific service areas such as social care. I welcome views as part of the current consultation, and I am sure the Select Committee will continue to focus on this important work.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Can it be right that prior to the new fairer funding formula central Government grants for inner London were £437 per person per year, whereas the grants for county areas were £153 per person per year? Do we not simply need a fairer funding formula?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes the case clearly for undertaking this review and looking at this properly. We need to look at the starting point and take the approach he highlights to ensure that fair distribution can be made.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Brokenshire: I will give way one last time but then I really must conclude.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): While mindful of the intervention from the Chairman of the Select Committee—of course it is right that we take into account deprivation—let me say that a range of other factors are involved. Rurality and sparsity in a county such as Lincolnshire make it hard to deliver public services, as the Secretary of State will know. He has mentioned rurality, so when he looks at the funding formula, while being mindful of that earlier intervention, will he look at that matter once again?

James Brokenshire: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about rurality, the impact it can have and the cost drivers it can generate. I assure him that we will be analysing it closely as the work continues.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Brokenshire: I must make some progress.

I know that local authorities were also pleased to hear that we plan to distribute £180 million of surplus in the business rates retention levy account in 2018-19, which was generated by strong growth in business rates income, to every authority in England, based on need. But as well as more control, councils want and need to see a clearer link between the allocation of resources and local circumstances.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have tried two or three times to draw the Secretary of State's

attention to serious cuts in Coventry, and the people of Coventry want to know what the benefits are in relation to the £1 billion that he just announced—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The Secretary of State has the right to take as many or as few interventions as he wishes. He is aware that there is pressure on time. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has put in to speak, but he really does have to wait until the Secretary of State wants to give way. I do not like points of order getting in the way of speeches, because I do not think it is fair on others who are waiting to speak.

James Brokenshire: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that a number of Members wish to speak this afternoon. I hope I have been generous in taking interventions, but I am conscious of allowing sufficient time for right hon. and hon. Members to make their points for their individual communities. I did not mean any disrespect to the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), as I know he takes these issues extremely seriously. It was on that basis that I sought to be generous but I need to make progress now.

As well as more control, councils want and need to see a clearer link between the allocation of resources and local circumstances. That is why we are working with them to overhaul a funding formula that is currently far too complicated and badly out of date. We need to look at this afresh and do away with anomalies such as double weighting for urban roads compared with rural roads, which the Labour party was far too comfortable imposing. Let us not forget that local people paid the price for Labour: under the last Labour Government the average band D council tax bill went up by a staggering 109% between 1997 and 2010, costing families, on average, an extra £751 a year. Given that track record, one would think that the Opposition might have learned a lesson or two about excessive tax rises, but no. Labour's manifesto set out plans for a new land tax on family homes, which would punish those with gardens. Labour's garden tax would send tax bills soaring and house prices plummeting, and would pressure families to build over their back gardens. By contrast, our approach has been informed by a strong consensus on the need for fairness, for local authorities and for local taxpayers. It is now critical that everyone takes a pragmatic approach, recognising the trade-offs that are necessary to ensure we get this right and deliver a new and fair formula on time, as agreed.

This important work—on the funding formula and on increased business rates retention—reboots our system of local government, creating the space for communities to re-imagine what they can do and can be in the 21st century, and helps to renew the bonds with communities. This is of the utmost importance as we strive to ensure every part of our society and country benefits from a modern, outward-looking Britain after Brexit. No one is better placed to deliver on that than local authorities. That is why last week I released £56.5 million, to be used across this year and next, to help councils to prepare for EU exit, and it is why we are backing them to deliver every day through this settlement and the extra funding announced in the Budget. In doing so, we are delivering on what they have asked for: a real-terms increase in spending in 2019-20;

support for the vulnerable; a boost for housing, with the removal of the Government cap on how much councils can borrow to build, for quality public services and local economic growth; and help for our high streets. The Labour party may turn its face against this, but it is no less than our councils and communities deserve. I commend the settlement to the House.

5.25 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We expected better from this Secretary of State and wanted to see better from this Government. I thank our dedicated council staff and our local councillors for all political persuasions and none, because, frankly, over the past nine years they have all been hung out to dry by successive Secretaries of State.

This is an Alice "Through the Looking-Glass" settlement. Ministers present a cut as an increase, but back in the real world, what we saw in the provisional settlement, which was reaffirmed last week in the Secretary of State's written statement to the House, is that there is no new money, no new ideas and no recognition of the dire situation facing councils. Between Christmas and last week the Secretary of State had the chance to change tack, but he has just confirmed to the House that the settlement is identical to the provisional settlement that failed so miserably before Christmas.

Local government is at the heart of our local communities. It looks after the most vulnerable in society and makes our local green spaces cleaner and safer, but under this Conservative Government we have seen unprecedented levels of cuts to our local councils. The fact is simple: between 2010 and 2020, local government in England will have lost more than 60p in every £1 that the Government provide to our communities for services.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): We just had a debate on the police settlement grant. Does my hon. Friend agree that local authorities are at the forefront of prevention work, so it is particularly tragic that my local authority, Westminster, has removed all funding from youth services, after-school services and holiday schemes and, like authorities all over the country, lost at least a third of early-intervention funding?

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The fact is that councils are the lynchpin of the provision of proper, cohesive, joined-up services with other agencies, whether housing associations, the police, leisure services or youth services. It is crucial that our councils and councillors are given the resources they need so that we do not cost-shunt from one area of the public sector on to the others. It is self-defeating to cut youth services, early intervention and police budgets at the same time, because we end up in the situation my hon. Friend describes.

Mr Jim Cunningham: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I was rather surprised that the Secretary of State did not give way to me; he is usually quite generous, so I am disappointed.

More importantly, it is vital to the people of Coventry that we represent them. Their budgets—if I can put it that way—through the city council have been cut by well over 50%. That has affected libraries, children's services, care in the community—I could give a litany. It has

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

been a general attack on public services, whether we talk about local authorities, the health service or other services. It is vital that we know the breakdown of the £1 billion pounds that the Secretary of State just announced—I noticed that he tried to avoid that. My hon. Friend is right that central Government are shifting expenditure on to the local council tax payer, rather than facing up to their own responsibilities.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend, who is a doughty champion of the people of the city of Coventry, is absolutely right. What we have seen today from this Secretary of State is smoke and mirrors. He can talk about a spending power increase across local government, but that is predicated on every English local authority increasing council tax by the maximum level possible—an eye-watering, inflation-busting increase. We know that not every local authority can raise sufficient money by council tax alone, which is the reason behind the revenue support grant. A 50% cut to the revenue support grant of my hon. Friend's city of Coventry is a big cut by monetary standards. Coventry's council tax base does not allow the city council to raise anything like enough money to plug that gap.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman talks about the revenue support grant. How can it be right that a person in London gets £437 per year allocated to them from the central Government grant, a person in a metropolitan borough £319, and a person in a county £153? How can that be fair or right?

Andrew Gwynne: I will answer that: a third of the services are more expensive to deliver in urban areas. That is the fact. It is in the Government's own report that was commissioned for the then Department for Communities and Local Government. Some Tories do not get the reality of this, but I imagine that those who represent urban areas probably—silently—do. The fact is that revenue support grant is there because Governments of all political persuasions recognise that not every area is the same. The baseline is not the same. In some urban areas, the council tax base is low.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Gwynne: No, I am answering the hon. Gentleman, if he will do me the courtesy of listening.

Every local area has a different council tax base. I hazard a guess—I do not have the facts in front of me—that a 1% increase in council tax for Tameside Council, which I partly represent, will raise significantly less than a 1% increase in his area's council tax, but the needs of Tameside are as great, if not greater, than some of the needs of his constituents.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)
rose—

Andrew Gwynne: I will give way later if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

According to the Local Government Association, the change in the revenue support grant has left local services today to face a huge funding gap of £3.2 billion. This is

the Tory-led Local Government Association, so I hope that Tweedledum and Tweedledee sitting opposite will listen to this. It includes a £1.5 billion gap in adult social care funding, a £1.1 billion gap in children's services, a £113 million gap in tackling homelessness and a £531 million gap in public health. By 2025, the gap facing local councils will rise to £7.8 billion, which is something that should shame us all.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. On the issue of child poverty, we have high debt rates and nine food banks in Hartlepool. How can my local authority cope with a £6 million funding shortfall and 40% departmental cuts right across the patch?

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is what Government Members really need to get about some of the authorities that we represent—although, to be fair, a number of Conservative Members represent authorities with very similar deprivation statistics to those represented by my hon. Friends.

The fact is that if we want to tackle health inequalities, narrow the gap between the richest and the poorest, and actually do the things that the Conservative Prime Minister said were her main aim and ambition on the first day that she took office, we have to ensure that local authorities have the resources they need.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): When the Conservatives were in government in the early '90s and they had to consign the community charge to the dustbin of history, they brought in the council tax and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. The trouble with the council tax is that it depends on there being a median band D council tax raising power in every part of the country. Just under 70% of the properties in my area are in band A; we cannot raise the revenue locally, so by taking away our revenue support grant, the Government are really crippling councils like mine in Gateshead.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Scandalously, council tax now equates to 7% of the income of a low-income family, compared with just 1% for a higher income family. That is unfair. Some people say that we can merely reform the council tax by adding extra bands to the end. Let me tell my hon. Friend—I imagine his area is very similar to mine—that we can add as many extra bands on the end as we like, but it will not raise a single penny more for my council because we do not have houses that would fall into those bands.

Daniel Kawczynski: The hon. Gentleman has spoken a great deal about pressures on urban areas, but in my constituency in rural Shropshire there are additional costs involved in providing services across a very large, remote, rural area, and we have a lot more senior citizens than the national average. Is he saying that, under a future Labour Government, there will be more money for urban areas rather than rural ones?

Andrew Gwynne: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has fallen into the trap that has been set by his own Ministers. We should not be talking about urban versus rural, or cities versus towns and villages. What is important is not how we cut an ever-diminishing cake differently,

which is the approach of Ministers; we need to grow the cake. Politics is a question of priorities and Labour has set out very clearly how we would put more money into local public services, meaning more money for the hon. Gentleman's council as well as more money for mine.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for making the excellent point that this is not a dichotomy between rural areas, such as that which I represent, and urban areas. We cannot be robbing one area to give to another. The fact that this Government have cut and cut and cut means that costs are increasing in counties such as my county of Derbyshire. Local authorities have overspends on adult care purchased services and on children's services because they have been cutting social services and early help. That is why councils are struggling all over the country.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and she is also right that it should not be about urban versus rural, but that is what the Government have made the situation with their approach to local government finance over the last nine years—this perverse reverse redistribution. The facts speak for themselves, and they should shame each and every one of us in this House.

We have seen a shift away from spending based on need and deprivation. The Secretary of State can shake his head, but nine out of the 10 areas seeing the biggest cuts to spending power per household, in pounds sterling, are all Labour controlled. Between 2010 and 2019, Hackney has seen a spending power cut of £1,406 per household, Newham a cut of £1,302 per household, Tower Hamlets a cut of £1,264 per household, and Knowsley a cut of £1,057.06 per household. It is worth noting that Knowsley is the second most deprived area in the country and has received the fourth biggest cut of any council. Nine of the 10 most deprived councils in the country have seen cuts of almost three times the national average. Blackpool, the most deprived area in England, has seen a spending power cut of £680 per household. Then there is Knowsley, followed by Hull, with a cut of £710; Liverpool, with a cut of £924; and Manchester, the fifth most deprived area, with a cut of £902 per household.

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend is making a most powerful argument. Local authorities like Slough are currently housing 79,000 homeless families in temporary accommodation, including more than 120,000 children. Last year, there was the largest annual increase in children in care since 2010, and councils are now starting 500 child protection investigations every day. Does he not agree that that is a diabolical situation resulting from these harsh ideological cuts?

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I pay tribute to his council for all the hard work that it is doing in very difficult circumstances. Cuts do have consequences, and cuts that are outside the control of the local authority are now presenting themselves as spending problems for town and county halls across England. That is why we are so angry about what this Government are doing.

Kevin Hollinrake *rose—*

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) *rose—*

Andrew Gwynne: I will give way in a little while.

I have talked about the shift of resources out of some of the most deprived communities in England. Yet contrast that with the councils that have seen the smallest cuts in cash terms—or in some cases, increases—over the nine years of Tory austerity. Seven out of the 10 areas seeing the smallest cuts to spending power per household are Conservative-controlled councils. That is very clearly what is going on here. Let me give the Secretary of State and his MPs the facts. The Isles of Scilly have seen a £337 per household increase in spending power, Wokingham a £40 per household increase, Horsham a £16 per household increase, Surrey—the council of the Chancellor—a £13.12 increase, Hart a £9 increase, Uttlesford an £8 increase, Stratford-upon-Avon a £7 increase, and Tonbridge and Malling a £4 increase. It is only when we get to places like Maidstone that we start to see spending power cuts over the past nine years—of just £6.78 per household.

Of the councils that are getting increases, not one of them is a Labour council. It is an unfair funding system peddled by a Secretary of State and Government who are recklessly gambling with our communities.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): It is even worse than that. This ever diminishing cake has now been subject to the Prime Minister—not the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister—offering bribes to people who are going to—*[Interruption.]* This is part of the system, and it can affect any area—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Mr Skinner. Just one second. We cannot use the word “bribes”.

Mr Skinner: This will come out of local government—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. One of us has to sit down, and unfortunately I just need to say this. We have to make our point—I totally agree—and you always make a point very well, but we cannot use the word “bribes”.

Mr Skinner: This money will come out of local government—make no mistake—even though it is a bribe. That is why we on these Benches are not going to take it. We are not going to sully the amount of money going to local authorities that we understand—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Skinner, please.

Mr Skinner: If you don't understand, you shouldn't be in the job.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sorry that we have got to that level. I said that Members cannot use the word “bribes”, because I do not believe—

Mr Skinner: That is what it is.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am explaining that that is not the case.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Communities that need help and assistance after nine years of Tory austerity should not be offered help and assistance in return for getting the withdrawal

[Andrew Gwynne]

agreement through this place; they should get it because it is the right thing to do for those communities. He is right to turn down such offers, as he has done.

If the statistics that I have mentioned were not bad enough, at a time when the Government should be reinvesting in our most deprived communities, helping them and lifting people out of poverty, they propose to cut even further. What we see in this perverse reverse redistribution is another cut to the revenue support grant of £1.3 billion, taking money away from the poorest communities in England. Yes, the Government have announced £1 billion of additional spending in the Budget, and they re-announced it in the provisional settlement and today. But the reality is that the way they propose to distribute that additional money, which does not offset the loss of revenue support grant in absolute terms anyway, is unfair.

For example, the Government are changing the way that the pothole money they announced is to be allocated. Tories who represent urban constituencies should be worried about that, because the Government are moving away from the type, width and usage of a road and merely using a simplified formula based on length of road. That is great for a constituency with lots of country lanes that are used by one tractor a day and 16,000 sheep, but try telling the people who live on potholed dual carriageways in urban areas that they are losing funding by the fiddle and sleight of hand that Ministers are adopting.

Children's services are the biggest single cost pressure facing our local councils. That was one reason why Northamptonshire County Council—it gives me no pleasure to say that it is a Tory council—was the first council to declare bankruptcy not once but twice in the same year. Not only has that caused misery for families and children, but councils have had to squeeze the place-based services that people think they pay their council tax towards to be able to look after children. That is the right thing for councils to do, but the Secretary of State has to understand that £84 million divided by five divided by 20 councils will not resolve the problems facing children's services in England. Adult social care has a massive £1.5 billion funding gap next year. Where is the Green Paper? It has been delayed and delayed. That can have been kicked so far down the road that it is probably on the country lane with 16,000 sheep.

In closing—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Those on the Government Benches can cheer as much as they like, but they are cheering cuts to the poorest communities. I suspect that many Conservative Members have now forgotten why they came into politics. The Prime Minister was right when she entered Downing Street—it should be about narrowing health inequalities. It should be about caring for those who cannot care for themselves. It should be about dignity in old age and looking after our children. I want, and we on the Opposition side of the House want, to improve the lives of people in every part of the country. We have not forgotten how important it is to deliver for local communities when and where they need it most.

Not a day goes by but people claim that politicians are all alike, that we are all the same and that there is no difference between the lot of us. They need to look at this debate today, and by doing so they will see that

there is a difference between the Secretary of State's party and ours. Our party—the Labour party—would never hit the most vulnerable like this, and we have a record to prove it. Politicians are not all the same. Some of us remember why and how we got into politics in the first place. A Labour Government will stand up for local communities. After all, Labour councils are leading the way in standing up for the local services that people rely on. A Labour Government will share power with local areas. We need to make sure that they have a Government who will rebuild this country for the many, and not the few.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I say that we have a lot of speakers to get in? I am going to put in a limit of six minutes, but could people use less than six minutes to try to ensure that those later on get the same time?

5.51 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): Before I make my general comments, may I gently remind the House of the economic mess of 2010 and the financial difficulties that this country was in at that time? Opposition Members seem to forget that.

First, I congratulate the Government on the overall budget increase to local authorities, which I think helps councils to plan for the future and creates some stability for them. We often underestimate the importance of local authorities and the role that they play in providing leadership in their communities, helping to develop localities and, most importantly of all, providing services to their areas. I also welcome the Government's various initiatives on social care, the new homes bonus and—this is of particular importance to me—business rates retention. That is a very important incentive to local authorities to be business-friendly, and I am just sorry that Cumbria is not part of one of the pilot schemes.

I want to touch on some wider issues, one of which is the relationship between central Government, local government and MPs. We often underestimate the importance of such relationships and the great change that can be made when people work together. I would like to put on record my thanks to the Secretary of State, the Minister for Housing and the Minister with responsibility for the northern powerhouse, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), for their positive and proactive approach to dealings with me and my local authorities to improve our region.

These are exciting times for my city of Carlisle and for the region. Traditionally, we have in many respects punched below our weight. We are the regional capital and the only city in the area, yet for many years we appear not quite to have reached our potential. I genuinely believe that that is starting to change. We have had investment from Pirelli, the Edinburgh Woollen Mill, 2 Sisters, Pioneer and McVities—to name some very important companies in our area. That demonstrates that the Government are interested in rebalancing the economy and in the northern powerhouse, which is relevant to Carlisle and beyond.

There is further evidence of such support from central Government, and of the relationship between central Government, local government and MPs. We have an

enterprise zone, where businesses are now expanding and growing. We have the garden village with 10,000 new houses—a real vision for the future for Carlisle—and financial support from the Government is helping local authorities to make appropriate plans for that village. As the Secretary of State is well aware, we have made a housing infrastructure fund application that, if successful, will unlock the garden village. It will be the biggest significant infrastructure investment in Carlisle in a generation, and it will be a huge boost to the region, not just to the city. Of course, there is also the borderlands initiative, which goes beyond Carlisle to south-west Scotland and the rest of Cumbria and Northumbria. That really exciting opportunity for the area demonstrates that a positive relationship between councils, MPs and central Government can bring real benefits to a locality.

I give credit to the Labour leader of the city council in that he has been willing to be proactive, but an awful lot more can be done. We have all-out elections in Carlisle in May. If we achieve what I hope will happen—a Conservative council—I think that we will see even more happening when there is working between a Conservative council, a Conservative MP and a Conservative Government.

My final observation is about the devolution of powers and the reform of local government structures. As Ministers are well aware, Cumbria is in need of reform. We are over-governed and over-represented, and there is a real opportunity for rationalisation and savings. The way forward is unitary, but not with a single authority. Cumbria is too large a geographical area with a small population, so something else needs to be done, but clearly reform is required.

I support the Government's direction of travel on local authorities. It is the right approach and I will support it. My real message today is that with proactive central Government, with a responsive local government and with MPs willing to work with local and national Government, an awful lot can be achieved. I therefore look forward to welcoming Ministers to Carlisle in the near future.

5.55 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I probably agree with most of the points about devolution made by the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson), but I strongly disagreed with his comments about the situation in 2010. It was clear that we had an international financial crisis, and Gordon Brown deserves a great deal of credit for mitigating its consequences on the international stage. That should be put firmly on record.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman is right about the financial crisis, but does he agree that Labour balanced the books in only 10 of its 13 years in power and ran up a collective deficit of £440 billion?

Mr Betts: That is quite a good record. If the hon. Gentleman looks back, he will find that one of the problems was the lack of regulation of financial institutions, but the Conservatives criticised Labour for regulating too strongly throughout that period.

I will try to be charitable to the Government by saying that I can welcome some elements of the spending review, including an extra £650 million for social care. However, that has to be set against the LGA's analysis of a £1 billion deficit in both children's and adult social care, which will rise to £3 billion for each in 2025. I can

welcome the fact that the spending power of councils as a whole will not fall in real terms—there is a 2.8% increase in cash terms—but that is spread differently across various authorities, and is cushioned by increases in council tax. Those increases bring in more money in richer areas, of course, and those are the areas that have received the smallest cuts to their grants since 2010. Those two things do not sit well together.

Sheffield has seen a 50% cut in grants since 2010 and major cuts to services. Social care services for both children and adults overspent by £15 million last year and will do so again this year. This is not a local authority out of financial control. It has not yet used its reserves, but next year, for the first time, it is planning to do so. Of course, that can be done for only a limited number of years. Many authorities across the political spectrum are in the same position.

Care is very important, but there are other services to consider. Sheffield and most authorities have done the right thing by concentrating on care, because they have statutory responsibilities to the elderly, children in care and people with disabilities, but National Audit Office figures for cuts to other services since 2010 show that private sector housing has been cut by 60%, that traffic management and road safety has been cut by 60%, that recreation and sport has been cut by 50%, that libraries have been cut by 30%, and that planning and development has been cut by 50%. Those cuts are hitting communities. In the end, it is not councils that are hit by such cuts; it is communities. It has happened in my city, where libraries are having to be staffed by volunteers, grass-cutting is done less often and private sector housing officers are not sufficient to bring selective licensing on the scale that we would like. There are cuts to funding for road safety, with bus routes scrapped, and children's centres and youth centres closed. That is happening in the constituencies and local authorities of Conservative Members, too. What worries me is that as most people do not have family members in care, they see the other council services: parks, buses, libraries, road maintenance and refuse collection. Those are the services that matter to them, but they are the services that are subject to the biggest cuts of all.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a fabulous speech. I really appreciate what he says about culture and the role of libraries, leisure centres and parks. They are really important for physical and mental health, but people do not appreciate that.

Mr Betts: Absolutely right. We hear people start to say, "What is my council doing for me? What am I getting from it? I'm paying a lot more as council tax rises by 6%, but I'm getting a lot less." We should all worry about the impact on and support for local democracy, and local councils as a whole, if that continues and people think that they are paying money into the system but getting nothing out. There was something very wrong with the announcement of another cut to the public health grant of £80 million in the very week in which the Government promoted their new long-term funding plan for the NHS and said that prevention would be more important in the future. Those two things just do not fit together.

There have been two clear facts since 2010: first, local government has been subject to bigger funding cuts than any other sector of the public realm; and, secondly,

[Mr Betts]

within those cuts to local government, the biggest have been in the poorest areas. Those two facts are absolutely clear. Looking ahead, how can we deal with that? First, there has to be a bigger pot of money for local councils in the spending review. The answer is very simple. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee has welcomed 75% retention of business rates. It also said that that money should not be used to replace public health and other grants. The money needs to be kept in place and used to help to fund the gap in social care and to reverse some cuts to the other services I have just described. That money needs to be kept in local government, not used to mop up other grants that are going to be cancelled.

On the funding review, there is a question of not just the totality of the money, but how it is distributed. I accept that one area's fairness will possibly be another area's unfairness, and we will have different views, but taking deprivation out of the foundation element—taking money away from deprived areas and moving it to others—is very difficult to justify. I say to the Secretary of State that this is a serious exercise. I hope that in the end the Government do not get to a point where they use that mechanism as a way of financially manipulating money into Conservative areas, because that is the suspicion among Labour Members. I accept that this is a difficult and complicated job, but the Government need to be very careful that the process does not become seen as an exercise in financial gerrymandering. That would be very sad for local government, as well as for the people we represent.

There are two challenges for the period ahead. Let us all stand up for local government and ensure that it does better in the next spending review and has a better allocation of resources. Let us then make sure that those resources are fairly delivered. I am sure that we will have a lot more to say about that in the future, but those are the two tests by which I will judge next year's spending review.

6.3 pm

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I have the utmost respect for the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and it was good to hear his comments. I did not agree with everything he said, but there is no doubt that he has a significant level of knowledge on this subject.

I welcome the real-terms increase in funding for local government in this settlement. I want to talk a little about the settlement in that context and then talk about the segue we have between this year's local government finance settlement and a number of different events that are going to take place that will frame the funding for local government as we go to the following year.

There is no doubt that for a number of years it has been a challenging time for local government. Local government has done its share. It has worked extremely hard to do its part to help to sort out the absolute mess left behind by the Labour party in 2010. Many councils have worked extremely hard and coped extremely well in very difficult circumstances. Some have made far better decisions than others. I praise my local authority, Warwickshire County Council, for the sound financial management that it has shown while, at the same time,

significantly increasing the funding going into adult and children's social care. Clearly, it has had to make tough decisions, but it has set priorities and made sure that it is still providing many of its core functions.

That is in stark contrast to one of my district councils—Labour-run Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council—which, quite frankly, has done an absolutely appalling job of dealing with the challenges. It has tried to raise revenue by hiking car parking charges and has lost £500,000 in income. It has overspent on a council depot by £2 million and has purchased a climbing wall, which has so far cost the taxpayer nearly £200,000 and has hardly been used. The council has then proceeded to blame the Government for the financial position that it is in.

I welcome the £17.5 million extra that Warwickshire County Council will get for children's and adult social care and I welcome the significant investment in roads. In Warwickshire, we are starting not just to fill potholes, but to patch roads properly and replace road surfaces, which is important if we are going to get long-term value for money. I am also pleased that the Secretary of State made his case and got the challenge of negative revenue support grant under control. That makes a difference of £300,000 for my Labour district council and it makes North Warwickshire Borough Council, two wards of which are in my constituency, better off to the tune of £100,000.

One area that I am extremely concerned about in my constituency is rough sleeping. Over and above the settlement, I know that a number of pots of funding are being allocated to dealing with the challenge of rough sleepers. I appeal to the Government Front Benchers, as we go through the various stages of funding on that: in Nuneaton, we desperately need to make sure that we have funding, so that we can get people off the streets and get the support around them to keep them off the streets and help them to sustain accommodation.

Various events are coming up, including the fair funding review, the business rates retention pilots and the spending review. Clearly, we do not know the quantum of funding. There is a lot of speculation over that, but we do not know that as yet. However, there is the distribution of funding to consider. Personally, I think that we need to pay deference to deprivation, but based on looking at how we can improve the potential of areas and let them fulfil their true potential, rather than getting into a race about how deprived every area is, and running and talking those areas down. We also need to look at the difference between county funding and funding for metropolitan areas. That needs to be far fairer. We need to make sure that the business rates review seeks to support councils that do the right thing and drives growth and jobs in their areas.

I mention to the Secretary of State that it would be good to see the new settlement taking place over as long a period as possible. The four-year settlement this time has been very helpful. There are also challenges for the upper-tier authorities that have had various social care funding streams over the last few years. It will be interesting to see how that comes into the final decisions that are made through this process.

I also want to mention the new homes bonus. My area has not used that for frontline services, but many have, and we need to be careful and acknowledge that in the new settlement. Finally, there is car parking.

In times when many towns need to reduce car parking charges, we need to be very careful not to put too much importance on car parking in doing the settlement.

I welcome today's settlement. I will support it, and it is a good segue into all the hard work that the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), will do.

6.9 pm

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Liverpool has received yet another poor local government settlement, but that is no surprise; it is a continuation of the Government's austerity policies. Liverpool has high concentrations of deprivation and this settlement simply fails to recognise the city's needs.

Liverpool is now No. 4 on the national list of areas of deprivation, but that is a great improvement on being No. 1, and the praise for the change must go to Mayor Joe Anderson and the councillors in Liverpool who have worked so hard to protect people against a background of continuing cuts. They have worked with the private sector to boost the economy, because that is how to improve things and increase prosperity.

Let us look at what has been happening to local government spending. The Centre for Cities report shows that since 2009-10 Liverpool households have suffered the second deepest real-terms cuts in the country, having lost £816 per resident. Government support has reduced by 63% since 2010.

Government policy is very clear. It is to make the city and other areas more reliant on raising their own income, and Liverpool is involved in a pilot scheme looking at just this policy, but we must remember that raising council tax in Liverpool by 1% produces £1.4 million, while raising it by 1% in Surrey raises £6 million. If we are to have a local government system unduly dependent on areas being able to raise their own finances, areas suffering poverty and deprivation are bound to suffer more. Under the settlement for 2019-20, if Liverpool had a tax base the same as the national average, with the same range of property values, the city would be receiving £102.3 million more to spend on public services. Is that fair? The answer has to be no.

What are the consequences of this long-term policy of reducing Government spending in real terms while need is actually growing? The council has done its best to protect the people of Liverpool and their services—it is an efficient council, it has shown a willingness to innovate, it has done its best to protect services for the under-5s; remarkably, it has protected Sure Start services—but there is now a new threat in the uncertainty around Government funding for maintained nursery schools. Abercromby Nursery School, in common with other such schools across Liverpool and the country, is fighting for funding so that it can continue its vital work and increasing achievement among underachieving pupils, who, at the start of every year, are often in a majority in areas of deprivation.

Liverpool has innovated in raising funding for schools. When the Government stopped funding, Liverpool went to the private sector and raised finance to build seven new schools. This is a council that wants to innovate and work with others. It has protected the arts as best it can, the arts being so vital to Liverpool's economy, but

none of these things can stop the reality of cuts, and neither the council's innovation nor its determination to protect people can stop people suffering.

The council cannot stop destitution. Universal credit is causing massive problems in Liverpool. People are becoming destitute and more people are rough sleeping, although the council is making a valiant effort to address that and has had some success. People are suffering from Government cuts to social care. People in hospital cannot go home because adequate packages cannot be made available. Children need support, but vital preventive work cannot be undertaken as it should be.

The fact that cuts have continued year on year makes things harder. The council can try to protect people—and does to the best of its ability—but consecutive cuts year after year cannot protect the most vulnerable.

What should the Government do now? Looking ahead, they must recognise the needs of areas such as Liverpool which are high in deprivation but low in tax base. They must provide a fair council tax settlement for local services, protecting the poor, widening opportunities, and protecting and promoting the city of Liverpool. That is what the council wants to do and the Government should support it by enabling it to happen.

6.15 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), for whom I have the greatest respect.

I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that councils' core spending power will increase by 2.8%, and that following a real-terms increase they will have £46.6 billion to spend on services for local residents. I know that councillors, officers and staff will greatly appreciate what he said about their working together to provide value for money for residents in recent years.

I also welcome the key principles that lie behind the Government's approach. They include the principle of encouraging growth by providing housing and the business premises that will create jobs, and hence providing funds in response to the needs of local residents. I hope to demonstrate to the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), who will visit Rugby later this week, that our council is doing a brilliant job. The council represented by my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) has been less effective.

In July last year, the all-party parliamentary group for district councils, which I chair, produced a report on district council finances. District councils provide 86 of the 137 essential local services in two-tier areas, and cover 40% of our population and 60% of the country by area. According to evidence that the APPG received from the representatives of 60 district councils who appeared before us during our Select Committee-type inquiry, there was real concern about the possibility that the majority would stop receiving revenue support grant by this year. We are delighted that the Secretary of State and the Minister have recognised the concerns about "negative grant". It was feared that councils would give back to the Treasury more than they would receive from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. District councils throughout the country are greatly reassured to learn that that will not now happen, and we are grateful to the Secretary of State.

[Mark Pawsey]

Our report also asked for no further changes in the new homes bonus baseline rate. The new homes bonus has been a great success during our party's time in government. It has encouraged local authorities to provide new housing, to fund infrastructure, and to compensate communities for the disruption that occurs when development is taking place. I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has acknowledged that and retained the current baseline, although there is a strong case for the removal of that 0.4% level. It is important to recognise that district councils' housing completions have increased by 45% since the introduction of the new homes bonus.

There are a couple of other asks in our report. One, which has already been discussed today, is recognition of the role of councils in prevention. District councils, through their housing and planning authorities, provide services that are critical to the health of communities, such as leisure and recreation facilities and home adaptations, and they also tackle homelessness. I am delighted that my local authority, Rugby Borough Council, has allocated an increased budget for that work, and is working closely with the charity Hope 4 to deal with an issue that was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton.

The local authority representatives from whom I have heard want more freedoms and incentives when it comes to raising revenue, but I should enter a word of caution in that regard. I have heard of too many local authorities that are turning themselves into property investors and property companies, often outbidding commercial organisations in the private sector, and I am worried about the level of expertise. Although it is entirely right that local authorities want to invest in their communities, I am worried that sometimes they are not sufficiently hard-headed.

The business rates retention reform is perfectly sensible. I ran a small business in Rugby between 1982 and 2008. I had always believed that what I paid in business rates went into my local community, but for much of that time, it did not. When I learned that, my question was, "What incentive is there for a local authority to do the right thing for growth and attract businesses?" We have turned that around and, like my hon. Friend Nuneaton, I am therefore disappointed that Warwickshire was not selected as one of the pilots.

We are considering a strong settlement today—it is a step in the right direction. Of course, there is always much more we can do, and I look forward to the Local Government Minister responding to the various points that have been raised in the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We now have to go down to five minutes.

6.21 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey). It is a particular pleasure to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), both of whom came to the House with long and distinguished careers in local government, and indeed having achieved positions of national prominence. We can learn from their experience.

It seems clear from the debate that the Government have a two-pronged approach. The first is cynically to try to divide rural and urban areas. It will not work in my constituency because there are both urban and rural areas in it. The second is the cynical *modus operandi* that I have mentioned previously of slashing support to public services, then blaming local authorities for failing to deliver them, or when they are forced to put up the council tax.

For example, it is slightly off topic, but we are campaigning to bring a second fire engine back to Chester, yet the fire authority's funding will fall to zero next year. Local Conservatives have the nerve to support that campaign, even though their party introduced the cuts.

In the previous debate, hon. Members talked about the increase in knife crime. The Mayor of London is often blamed for a rise in knife crime in London, despite the fact that across the country 20,000 police have been cut. The problem intermeshes with the cuts to local government that we are discussing. Children's services and money to schools have been slashed. It is no wonder that knife crime has increased, but apparently it is all the fault of the Mayor of London and others.

That brings me to the settlement for my council, Cheshire West and Chester. For the last four years, the Labour council, led by Samantha Dixon, has had to deal with a £57 million cut. Since 2010, the cash cut to my local authority has been £330 million. In the next round, which we are discussing, a further £20 million will be cut, despite the fact that that extremely efficient council, which is down to its bare bones, is already running on empty. If the Secretary of State had any courage or sense of responsibility, he would tell us where he thinks those cuts should fall. Should they be to support for vulnerable children, disabled adults, the homeless—homelessness has of course doubled nationally on the Conservatives' watch—or rural bus services? Ministers will then of course attack our council leaders when we are forced to put up council tax.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) pointed out that all the additional spending power is created only from increases in council tax, but the situation is worse than that. The rate support grant is largely being replaced by individual pots for which councils have to bid in a beauty contest: money for potholes; money for rapid rehousing; support for high streets; extra cash for children's services. Councils have to go cap in hand to Ministers every time they want to fund anything, and Ministers can cherry-pick their favourite councils. We all know where that money will go.

The Government are centralising expenditure and taking away local democracy. They have announced extra money for 20 councils to support children's social services. I can make a fair guess that the majority of those councils will be of a particular political complexion, and they will not be Labour. There will be another special deal for Surrey or, as we have heard tonight, for Tory Northamptonshire.

Meanwhile, locally, the Minister's fellow Conservatives in Cheshire West and Chester want to spend more money supporting free parking and on mowing the grass while criticising Labour locally for having to put up the council tax. Those are both worthy aims, but those Conservatives need to do locally what the Conservatives have so far failed to do nationally—namely, to say

which services will be cut to pay for the increased expenditure. If I may, I will briefly cross over the border into Cheshire East, because this has implications for the Minister. Madness still reigns there, with police investigations, corruption allegations and a whole series of chief executives and senior officers being sacked. I say to the Minister that if that were a Labour council, the commissioners would have been called in years ago.

Ministers are driving ahead with plans to keep 100% of business rates, which means that the richer councils will get richer and the poorer areas will be made even poorer. The Conservatives will use that business rate revenue to keep their council tax rises low, then claim political credit because the funding formula has been cut back. Cuts are forcing local authorities and other public services to hunker down and defend the money that they have. In Cheshire West and Chester, we are trying to build local partnerships with voluntary groups and charities, but that is not sustainable for long. At some point, Ministers will have to take responsibility for the dreadful effects that their cuts are having in the real world.

6.25 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson).

I welcome the many positive aspects of the funding settlement, including the assistance given to the elimination of the negative rate support grant and the additional moneys given through the better care fund, which will benefit local authorities such as mine. However, it also highlights the pressing need for us to move swiftly and radically to overhaul local government funding properly. An efficient authority, Bromley will balance its budget this year, but unless we have change, in four years' time we will have a funding gap of between £20 million and £30 million, depending on the assumptions one makes. The current system is not sustainable in the long term, which is why it is critical that we press ahead with the fairer funding review and with a radical approach to the devolution of business rates, as well as with the other initiatives that the Government are looking at in this area. That must include a White Paper on adult social care, to follow the Green Paper that has been promised. It is critical that we have that early, in time for the 2021 finance review.

Joseph Johnson (Orpington) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Robert Neill: Of course I will give way to my borough neighbour.

Joseph Johnson: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is time we had an adjustment to our local authority's baseline, to reflect the fact that it has made enormous efficiencies in order to absorb a 50% real-terms cut over the past four years, and to reward it for being one of the most efficient local authorities in the country?

Robert Neill: I very much agree with my hon. Friend.

I will now deal with the specifics. Bromley has historically been a low-cost authority, and credit must go to the Conservative-led Bromley Council, which has made savings of around £97 million per annum since 2011-12. However, because it has been efficient historically, there

is really no fat left for it to cut, and because of the way the system works at the moment, there is no reward for efficiency. There is no reward in the formula for being a historically low-cost and efficient authority. If anything, perversely, we tend to get penalised for this, and that needs to be put right in the spending review.

We also need to recognise that there are more nuances, even in an outer-London Borough such as Bromley, than people might expect. Deprivation is now moving across London, and the old distinction between inner and outer London does not work any more. Bromley has the fourth lowest level of settlement funding in the whole of London, despite having the sixth highest population. It is the largest borough in terms of geography, and it has the highest proportion of older people, with all the cost pressures that that places on adult social care. It also has the largest road network, but it's funding settlement is the second lowest per head of population.

That does not make sense to the members and officers of Bromley Council, who are working hard to deliver services for our residents. They have a limited ability to make further savings while maintaining statutory services, and the scope for discretionary spend is more and more squeezed. There are pressures not only on adult social care but on the temporary accommodation budgets, not least because the operation of benefit caps in London is pushing people in private rented accommodation out from inner London to the outer-London boroughs such as Bromley. That means that we, in turn, are having to accommodate people out in Kent. This is leading to real difficulties for many London boroughs.

There are also real pressures on children's services and social care. Bromley has behaved magnificently in turning around its social services, which were rated poor two years ago, but are now rated good and outstanding in terms of leadership, with a Minister describing the speed of turnaround as unprecedented. The council achieved that despite funding pressures, but those pressures still exist. More children are diagnosed or recognised as having complex needs that must be dealt with, for example. Again, the current settlement mechanism is too blunt and opaque an instrument to deal with the situation adequately.

We must also consider the full implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. I warmly welcomed the Act, but the truth is that, in practice, not all the costs are being picked up for local authorities such as Bromley, so we need to consider a revised formula. The same goes for the deprivation of liberty social care arrangements, because their costs must also be picked up. Such things can be achieved through a sensible revision of the formula.

Turning to the need for business rates reform, Bromley has gone into the London business rates pool and wants to work collaboratively with its neighbours. However, Bromley wants to become self-sufficient and does not want to be dependent on Government grants in the long term. Its ambitious approach to supporting development in the borough, particularly in the town centre in my constituency, underlines that desire, but it needs a proper slice of devolution as a reward in a way that is not currently available given how the pool operates.

Finally, if we are to give local government genuine flexibility, we must look again at the amount of ring fencing within some of the remaining grants. I would

[Robert Neill]

hope that we could move a situation whereby such a grant as there is simply comes as a block and then the local authority has the flexibility and leeway to move money around based on its priorities. A simple example from Bromley is that the council is unable to move money from the schools block into the higher-need blocks or into special educational needs transport. A suburban borough such as Bromley has larger distances compared with inner-London boroughs and so requires a greater level of flexibility than the formula currently permits.

While welcoming the settlement, which I shall support tonight, I hope that the Minister will take away my specific points and the broader cry for root-and-branch reform of local government funding.

6.32 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who made a thoughtful, reflective contribution to today's debate.

The publication of the latest Centre for Cities report last week confirmed what my constituents in Liverpool already knew: the city has been hit hard by almost a decade of austerity, with massive cuts in central Government funding hitting not only the council but police and fire services. Benefit changes have also hit the poorest communities the hardest. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) has already spoken about what the report says about Liverpool, but I will repeat one of the statistics she quoted because it is so powerful. Since 2010, Liverpool has lost £441 million in Government funding, which equates to a per-resident reduction of £816 a year. That is the largest per capita cut across the whole country. As she said, our directly elected Mayor Joe Anderson and the Labour city council have shown enormous leadership in taking the city through that period despite the cuts, and have been doing their utmost to protect services for some of the most vulnerable communities in our city.

To illustrate all that, the city council spent £222 million in 2010 supporting adults who need help in the community because of age, infirmity or disability. That has now reduced to £152 million despite demand rising by 15%. Such has been the pressure on Liverpool's adult social care budget that the council has had to spend almost its entire reserves simply to support social care spending. We also have some of the highest levels of looked-after children in the country. As we know, those numbers have been going up across the country in recent years. As a consequence, the city council overspent last year on vital services for vulnerable children and young adults by £7 million.

Against that backdrop, and despite the pressures on its funding, the city council recently adopted a radical new approach to delivering social care. It has been able to find an additional £7.7 million investment to employ 160 new staff to cut the case load of children's social workers by half, and I pay tribute to the city council for doing that even in these difficult circumstances. The council says that its new model will reduce the number of children for whom each social worker is responsible, allowing them more time to work with children, young people and families. I pay tribute to the council for that important work.

We had an excellent debate on maintained nursery schools last Thursday, in which I spoke about the two outstanding nursery schools in my constituency—East Prescott Road and Ellergreen. I know this is a matter for the Department for Education and, ultimately, the Treasury, but I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside said about the crucial role played by maintained nursery schools.

I also echo the call from our city council for a royal commission to ensure a fair funding formula for local services. We have heard different points of view in this debate, each of us representing our own constituency. A royal commission could provide an opportunity for this to be looked at in a full, comprehensive and independent manner.

The Government's own figures on core spending power show that, had Liverpool been subjected to the average level of cuts over the past nine years, our budget would be £71 million better off. We have seen Liverpool's spending power per household cut by over £700 during a period in which Surrey has seen its spending power per household increase by £65.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), the shadow Secretary of State, rightly said that the council tax base is crucial in determining what a local authority can actually spend. Liverpool City Council raises an average of £886 per chargeable dwelling. As such, we are in the bottom fifth of local authorities in the country. If we had the average tax base, we would have getting on towards £100 million more in council tax revenue. That is the basic injustice that hits the areas of the country with the greatest levels of poverty and inequality, which is why this settlement is unacceptable.

6.37 pm

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): I welcome most of the local government settlement for 2019-20 and its recognition of the work done by councils to provide hundreds of services to local residents. Given the rapidly expanding council funding gap, which the LGA reports will rise to £8 billion by the middle of the next decade, I urge the Government to use the 2019 spending review to begin clarifying their plans for sustainable funding for local government after March 2020.

Part of the way to achieve that sustainable funding would be to move to unitary councils across England, a change estimated to generate savings of nearly £3 billion, as revealed in a County Councils Network report. Based on an assessment of data across 27 two-tier local authorities in England, replacing them with unitary authorities could save between £2.4 billion and £2.9 billion nationally. Colleagues will know that process is already under way in Northamptonshire.

After 12 years as a district councillor and 10 years as a county councillor, including time as a county council leader, I know the great work that both tiers can do, but my experience has convinced me that unitary is the way forward to promote localism and democratic accountability, as well as efficiency. I take this opportunity to praise many colleagues at both Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council.

Northamptonshire County Council has, to my dismay, become a shorthand for things going wrong, rivalling Venezuela in that regard. The current leadership who have taken on that profound challenge, such as county

council leader Matt Golby, deserve our thanks for their efforts to turn things around ahead of the move to unitary. The Secretary of State's announcement today on Northamptonshire County Council will, I am sure, be welcomed by council colleagues.

Coming back to the local government finance settlement, I welcome the additional £240 million allocated for adult social care, and £410 million for both adult and children's social care, announced in the Budget. Although that is helpful in the short term, adult social care faces a funding gap of £1 billion in 2019-2020. I appreciate the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care giving us April to look forward to by announcing that month—instead of a season, which is progress—for the launch of the much anticipated social care Green Paper, but I need to say to him and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government team, through you, Mr Speaker, that after all these delays it had better be good. It had better be radical, open to fresh and non-statist ideas, and cognisant of not only just how big a challenge but what an opportunity getting adult care right could be. Nothing is more central to effective local government funding, and thereby to MHCLG, than getting this right.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made his point with considerable force and clarity, and it will have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench.

6.40 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Let me start with a couple of facts: there has been a 49.1% reduction in Government core funding to local authorities and a 28.6% real terms reduction in spending power, which means Government funding plus local council tax, since 2010; and there has been a 32% real-terms reduction in spending on non-social care areas. Those are not my figures, but those of the National Audit Office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) mentioned the Centre for Cities report, which shows that those cuts have not been fairly distributed; they have been targeted at northern cities and northern councils. Some of the more affluent areas, such as Wokingham in Surrey, have had no reduction in core spending at all. This Government have used local government funding like a pork barrel, putting it into areas that support the Conservative party and penalising areas that do not. Since 2010, Durham County Council has lost £224 million in its budget, and it is predicted that in the next four years it will have to slash another £39 million. That is being done by a Conservative Government, but I do not want to let the Liberal Democrats off, because they also signed up to these cuts when they were in coalition.

On the ability to raise finance, Durham has a similar problem to that outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby, as 55% of its properties are in band A. The more core funding from national Government is cut, the more Durham County Council's ability to raise funding is limited. In addition, Durham can raise only a limited amount through the retention of business rates compared with what can be raised in Westminster and other places. So the future does not look bright for Durham County Council, a well-run authority, under this Government's proposals. If we look at core spending power per dwelling, which is what

the Government are looking at, we see that the national average is £1,908 whereas the figure for Durham is £1,727 and Surrey's figure is £2,004. Areas of deprivation in Surrey would not even register on any type of social index compared with what we have in Durham, a former industrial area, which just shows us the way in which this Government have used the system to reward their own areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) raised the issue of public health funding. If the Government go forward with the notion of the fair funding formula—that should be getting done under the Trade Descriptions Act—Durham County Council is forecast to lose some £19 million, or 35% of its public health budget. That is happening in some of the most deprived communities anywhere in the country. It is a rural county, but it has deprivation on a par with some inner cities and parts of the former coalfields. How can it be right that under that formula Surrey would gain, and deprived areas such as County Durham would lose? The Government are taking political decisions about where the funding goes. There is this notion among those on the Government Benches that somehow every single council is the same, but I am sorry, they are not. The demands on my local council and councils such as Liverpool in respect of adult social care and looked-after children are a lot more severe than the demands in some of the areas that are getting extra funding.

In her statement on Europe on 10 December, the Prime Minister said:

"It means working across all areas to make this a country that truly works for everyone, and a country where nowhere and nobody is left behind."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2018; Vol. 651, c. 25.]

I am sorry, but the policies of this Government over the past eight years have run counter to the Prime Minister's promise. That just shows how hollow her words are.

6.45 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Earlier this afternoon, in your absence, Mr Speaker, we had a striking contrast in both the style and content of the Secretary of State's presentation on local government financing and the Opposition spokesman's response. On the one hand, we had someone calm and measured who, with his experience as Security Minister and as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, has dealt with real crises, perhaps not least his own cancer. On the other hand, we had the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who was more purple than reddish with indignation as he made his remarks about how his party would never do anything to hurt the people. He said that we must grow the cake. We in Gloucester remember how Labour grew the cake, and he would do well to listen.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Graham: No, let me make this point first.

I remember how Labour grew the cake in Gloucester: by shrinking the economy; by spending furiously on public services while 6,000 of my constituents lost their jobs in business, apprenticeships dried up, and engineering and manufacturing were on the verge of closure, as my Labour predecessor blithely ignored the fact that we

[Richard Graham]

had the second worst-performing secondary school in the country; by churning out youth unemployment; and by closing the King's own post office. We know all about Labour growing the cake, going bankrupt, increasing unemployment—like all Labour Governments—and then complaining about austerity when Britain calls for the Conservatives to sort things out.

Let this House not forget that it was the last Labour-run—

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

Richard Graham: The hon. Gentleman should listen to this. It was the last Labour-run city council in Gloucester that sold the car park for a pound and bought it back for a million. Let us also not forget that the current Leader of the Opposition claimed that 672 Gloucester City Homes tenants had been thrown out, although the actual figure was eight.

We do not need to take any lectures from the Opposition on growing the cake, but does that mean that every Conservative Government get it right? No, of course not. I wish to highlight briefly some of the issues for us in Gloucester. Library research confirms that Gloucester is in fact the worst-affected council, with a year-on-year spending decrease between this year and next of 4.4%. The council's core spending power fell by more than 8% over the past four-year period.

In today's world, we know that all second-tier councils must do as much as they can to generate efficiencies, whether by generating savings from increased productivity, merging their back offices, sharing space with other authorities or scrapping the mayor's car—you name it. That is what every good council should be doing and it is what Gloucester City Council has done. The truth is, though, that as an urban district authority, it is difficult for us to grow and generate new homes bonus, because we have only 5 square miles of land. We are penalised by the deadweight calculation, which is the starting point of the number of homes, and we do not benefit as much as we could from business rate retention, although we are part of the pilot project in Gloucestershire.

The council is a good one. It is well rated by peer group reviews and respected in the city. It is leading on creative physical regeneration, with an award-winning bus station that is much admired in Cardiff and elsewhere, and making real progress on human regeneration by making sure that rough sleepers are helped into housing through the social impact bond and gearing up for a new homelessness hub, both of which are funded by the Government. None the less, the additional costs of dealing with homelessness issues are greater than the extra revenue we were given.

The Minister, who did see Gloucester and Cheltenham councils, at my request and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), has made some pragmatic decisions, but they do not, I am afraid, resolve the financial problems that my city council faces. These include issues such as pension contributions and the business of council fees and charges income. Despite being able to raise our precept, we will not, I am afraid, be able to match the costs if our city expects the delivery of the services that it so values at the moment.

I would love to ask the Minister this: will he have not a full blown review of local government funding, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) called for, but arrange for a senior official to look specifically at our city council and offer advice on whether the system is working for us and fair, and what more we can and should do to raise the revenue to deliver the services that are so valued across our city of Gloucester?

6.50 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Like other Members, I want to remind Ministers what the places that they have cut so savagely actually look like. By next year, Newham will have lost 48% of its grant—£138 million a year. That is a £1,301 cut for every household, which is the second highest cut in the country in what is arguably the second poorest borough in the country.

Conservative Members like to pretend that this is all about population—the number of residents in an area who need council services. How can that be true given that Newham grew by almost a third in the 10 years leading up to 2015? We are already the fourth largest London borough by population, and we are expected to have the second largest population growth in London over the next 22 years as well. We also have the youngest population in the country, with 40% of residents under 25 according to the last census. That obviously massively increases need for children's and youth services, as well as for local authority school services, public health, welfare assistance and more.

The Government seem to think that the only age group that needs council support is pensioners—through social care. It is absolutely true that social care is in crisis, and that affects my constituents in the same way it affects those of every other Member, but young people need much more support as well, and nothing illustrates that better than the fact that nine of my young constituents were murdered between January 2017 and March last year.

A further change that has increased demand for council services is the huge growth in the proportion of my constituents who have to rent privately. Private rentals have doubled—they made up 23% of the total in 2006 and 46% 10 years later—and private rents are simply extortionate. The lower quartile rent on a two-bed over a chicken shop in Newham is now £1,250 a month. Lower quartile earnings are £1,168 a month, so a month's full-time pay will not even cover the rent, let alone luxuries such as food, heating, clothes and so on. It cannot be any wonder then that the council recently found that, when housing costs are included, 67% of Newham's children live in poverty.

Although we do have serious problems locally due to the consequences of right to buy, it is not social housing that has reduced so massively, but owner-occupation. In 2006, owner-occupation represented 47% of local housing but, over 10 years, it has more than halved to just 23%. Homelessness and temporary accommodation are extreme problems in Newham—the situation is the worst in the country. The number of Newham residents in temporary accommodation almost doubled between 2012 and 2017. There are more children in temporary accommodation in the 36 sq km of Newham than there are in the 63,000 sq km of Yorkshire, the south-west, the north-east and the east midlands combined.

This urgent and horrifying crisis is simply awful for the families who have to live with it day by day, but it has also meant fewer people living in Newham for long periods, thereby building up relationships and a sense of community, and far more people feeling constantly insecure. That insecurity in itself has generated yet more need for council services, and I believe that it has contributed to everything from criminal gang activity to mental health crises, and from childhood obesity to elderly loneliness—and even to things like fly-tipping. All these issues have a cost to the council and make it harder for council workers to do their most important jobs for the public.

Can the Government seriously tell me that my constituents have not been harmed by their cuts, and that those cuts have not contributed to the rise in young people being murdered or in fear on my streets? Can they seriously tell me that continuing these cuts over the next year will not deepen that harm? No, they cannot—not honestly. Frankly, the best way that this Government can help my constituents is by getting out of the way.

6.55 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I speak in two capacities: as a Member of Parliament representing a coastal constituency with wards that are among the most deprived in the country; and as chairman of the county all-party parliamentary group, whose role is to ensure that county areas receive sufficient funding to provide good-quality services that meet their residents' needs.

The Government's proposals for 2019-20 address the short-term challenges faced by councils in the area that I represent, and I am supportive of them, but there is also a need to think strategically and look to the long term. Although the Government have recognised the challenges that immediately lie ahead, there is much work to be done as we look to the future. Yes, the settlement provides councils such as Suffolk County Council and Waveney District Council with breathing space and vital short-term resources. The Government have recognised the immediate challenges that such areas face and have made resources available. The £180 million from the levy account that is being returned to local government is much needed and welcome.

This is the final year of a four-year settlement upon which the Government embarked in 2015. It has provided councils with some financial certainty, but it has also required them to drive through efficiency savings that, in many respects, have been a really tough challenge. There is now very little, if any, fat left on the bone. Although this settlement contains vital short-term support, it does not address the medium-term financial pressures that councils face, and nor does it provide long-term certainty. The uncertainty beyond 2020 is creating significant financial risks for councils in county areas. A failure to provide a significant uplift in funding for them from 2020 onwards will challenge the long-term financial viability of the services that they provide.

It is vital that local government is provided with a long-term sustainable solution. This should encourage autonomy, incentivise growth and provide sufficient money for adult social care and children's services, both of which are under real pressure. The fair funding formula is critical to securing this solution. The present system of funding is outdated, unfair and opaque.

Moreover, county areas receive the lowest amount of funding per head from Government grants and retained business rates—£153 per person compared with £225 for unitaries, £319 for metropolitan boroughs and £437 for inner London wards. This is notwithstanding the fact that it is more expensive to provide services in rural areas, that there is an increasingly disproportionate elderly population in counties and that, as the county APPG's recent report on social mobility highlighted, there is a real problem of social mobility in coastal areas and county areas, where young people are missing out on opportunities that are available so readily elsewhere in the country.

In the short term, the settlement just about keeps the house wind and watertight, but in the longer term, we require underpinning, a radical overhaul and additional investment. I believe that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Local Government understand the challenges that such areas face. I recognise the various demands from Members that they will have to balance, but I do believe that county areas have been taken for granted and ignored for too long, so I urge the Minister to put that unfairness right through the fair funding review and the comprehensive spending review.

6.59 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The past few years have seen the deliberate and systematic destruction of local government. It is local services delivered by local councils that most people see from day to day. From bin collections to park maintenance, from library services to food safety, from highway repairs to care services, these services matter—they are a core part of our local democracy and what people experience from government. With the excuse of austerity, this Tory Government have deliberately stripped out the ability of communities to shape their local areas. Most services are now being contracted out to private companies, and the oversight of good local services is deliberately fragmented and complex.

The biggest cuts to local government are still to come and still to be felt. Councils have emptied their reserves, cut services to the bone and shed the maximum number of council staff. The consequence of all this is poor local services—a tatty public realm, non-existent youth services and unmaintained parks. Worse than that, it is homeless people on the streets, low-quality care for the elderly and limited provision for vulnerable children, especially those with mental health problems. The Government offer nothing new for children's social care, which has seen a £1 billion shortfall.

In my constituency, 82% of Bath and North East Somerset Council's budget is spent on adult and children's social care. This leaves the remaining 18% to fund everything else, from waste collection to road maintenance, library services, the arts, public realm improvements and community outreach services. These services are an absolute shadow of their former selves, becoming more and more squeezed under the pressure of a growing responsibility for social care. Bath and North East Somerset Council cut 15% of its total staff last year and still has another £12 million of cuts to make to meet central Government targets. We have heard today about inequalities. I acknowledge that Bath is one of the better local councils, so I absolutely understand what councils have to face in areas that are even less well off than Bath.

[Wera Hobhouse]

What is the Liberal Democrat answer to this? It is properly funded local government. We have been talking about the revenue support grant and how it provides some fair funding across the board. The Conservative Government currently plan to completely abolish the revenue support grant, which has distributed resources fairly from richer to poorer areas, and replace it with a system where councils can substantially increase council tax and retain the business rates that they collect. These proposals are highly divisive and will starkly increase inequalities across the country. Liberal Democrats are totally committed to the fair distribution of money across all areas of the UK for the provision of good local services. Wherever people live, there should not be a postcode lottery for local services. We will replace business rates with land value taxation, which will help to protect our high streets for the long term.

Liberal Democrats propose additional higher council tax bands so that everybody, including people in high-value properties, makes a fair contribution to the public purse. I understand the argument that just adding council tax bands will not make the substantial difference, so I confirm that the revenue support grant, as one of the fairer ways of providing fair council funding, is the absolute bottom line. There must also be, after 30 years, a revaluation of property values to correctly establish the correct council tax band for every property. While we still have council tax in the mix, it has to be fair.

Finally, I will touch on devolution and democracy. It is not only local government finance that is being cut to the bone by this Government—they are also taking every opportunity that arises to weaken local democratic accountability. Every structural change in local government proposed in the past few years has been to cut out the democratic levels and to have fewer elected councillors making local decisions.

The Tory agenda is clear: weaken local government, cut its budgets to the bone, remove the checks and balances of local democracy, and pave the way for large private sector providers answering to Whitehall. Liberal Democrats have a completely different vision for local government: properly funded and properly democratic, taking decisions about local services, delivering them locally and being locally accountable. This funding settlement is woefully inadequate and I will vote against it.

7.4 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): The funding challenges facing East Sussex County Council are well documented. It has had to make £129 million of savings since 2010 and has cut services to the core as a result. Most of the difficulty is due to the demographic challenges that the county council faces. It has the highest number of 85-year-olds in the country, and a quarter of the population are over 65, which puts huge pressure on adult social services. We heard earlier that most councils are spending money on their children's services. In the budget for next year, East Sussex proposes to spend £171 million on adult social care and just £77 million on school services, because it is having to push the funding to where the greatest need is.

Over the weekend, I met the chief executive of East Sussex County Council and the leader of West Sussex County Council. They both have high praise for the

Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak). He has met them, listened to them and understands their problems, but they still face difficulties. They have the historical issue of being rural authorities with 50% less funding per head of population than urban areas, and we cannot continue like that. Many Members have mentioned the fair funding formula. It cannot come soon enough for areas such as East Sussex. I know that the Minister has had discussions with the council. When this four-year funding settlement is over, the council needs certainty, so that it can plan services.

Despite the revenue support grant dropping, East Sussex County Council has received extra funding from the Government. It has been lucky enough to be included in the business rates pilot, which has generated £1.6 million for it. It has secured £4 million of extra funding for adult social care, £2 million extra for services this winter, £4 million extra for potholes and £1.1 million for special educational needs. While not part of the revenue support grant, all those pots of money are making a real difference to communities in my constituency. I welcome that, but we need it to be ongoing, not in yearly one-off settlements. I urge the Minister to look at population projections in the fair funding review, because we do not want to be pitting old against young and asking who needs the funding most. It has to be done on a fairer basis.

While East Sussex County Council does need more funding, I am disappointed when councils just top-slice and cut services when funding is a struggle. I have the privilege of having the county town in my constituency of Lewes, and it is like a Monopoly board of local government infrastructure. None of it is joined up or shared. We have the beautiful town hall in Lewes town, which the town council shares and is well used by the community. Two minutes down the road, we have Southover House, which is for the district council and which no one else uses. A further five-minute walk down the road is the county hall building, which is the sole preserve of the county council. We have Sussex police headquarters another five-minute walk from that, which is overstretched and does not have enough space for the police, but the police and crime commissioner has her own headquarters another five minutes down the road from that. We then have the beautiful Lewes House building, which is completely underused but owned by the district council. It cannot be right that councils are not making the best use of the resources they have when they are struggling.

I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) in urging councils to become unitary authorities. I would force them into that, because this is not the best use of resources. That would not only save £2.9 million across the country but enable better services. Our county council recently introduced fees for using the tips for tyres and rubble, which has dramatically increased fly-tipping, and the district council then has to pick up the tab for that. These are not joined-up services. This is not just about saving money; it is about a better service for local residents.

I will support the Government tonight, but I urge the Minister to devise an innovation fund. If the Government cannot force councils to become unitary authorities, they must incentivise them to do so, because they are not making the best use of their resources.

7.9 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I want to start by associating myself with the remarks of the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), in what I thought was a brilliant exposition of the injustice at the heart of this statement this afternoon. Be in no doubt: this statement today is a basic question of injustice and unfair deserts. It shows this Government's wilful determination not to do anything about tackling the injustices that now scar this country, including communities such as mine in Birmingham. If they did want to tackle them, at the heart of this statement would be a bold determination to make sure that we were investing most in those communities that need it most. Instead, as the shadow Secretary of State has set out with such brilliance, we have exactly the opposite.

Many of us on this side of the House came into politics for a simple reason: because we wanted to tackle the basic, fundamental injustice that the postcode in which people are born defines their possibilities in life. That is why I gave up a career in business to serve what is this country's most income-deprived constituency, where four generations of my family have lived and worked.

Nine years into this Government's austerity, those injustices are now looming larger than ever. This Government have given us a slower recovery than after the great depression. What that means in Birmingham is that it is harder to earn a good life than ever before. The employment rate in our city is now lower than it was before the great depression. In some parts of the west midlands today, people are now earning 9% less than they did in 2008. The ladder in life is harder to get on to because apprenticeship numbers in the west midlands have fallen by a third. That is 10,000 fewer apprentices in our region over the last year.

How can it be just for a child born in Ladywood to live eight years less than a child born in Sutton Coldfield? How can it be right that a kid born in Alum Rock has a third less chance of going to university than a kid born in Solihull? How can it be right that someone born in Bordesley Green has a one in five chance of being overcrowded, even if their parents or siblings are disabled? How can it be just that someone born in Birmingham this year has a four in 10 chance of being born in poverty? These injustices are wrong.

These inequalities demand an answer, not the proposals from the Secretary of State this afternoon. This Government were able to rustle up £1 billion for their friends in the Democratic Unionist party in the space of days. In Birmingham, we have taken the biggest cuts in local government history—£690 million to date, £85 million still to come and £46 million to come out of our budget this year. That is a total of nearly three quarters of a billion pounds. The bad news is that it could be worse because we face £161 million of pressures over the next two to three years. That is why I say to the Secretary of State today, on behalf of all the Labour MPs in Birmingham: this battering of our city has to stop and it has to stop now.

Yesterday morning, I met the friends of Kane Walker, the young man who died on the pavements of Birmingham a week or two ago. They could not stop for long because they were rushing to hospital to see a friend, homeless too, who had been bitten in the face by rats and they

feared sepsis—the sepsis that they think killed Kane Walker just a week or two ago. But Kane Walker was not alone: one homeless person a week now dies in the west midlands, sometimes in medieval conditions. This, in the fifth richest economy on earth, is a moral scandal, and this statement this afternoon has done nothing to reverse it.

This Secretary of State takes the issues of Birmingham so seriously that, when its entire number of Labour Members of Parliament wrote to him demanding an urgent meeting last November, he cleared his diary immediately to offer us some time five months later—in March. I know how little this Government care for Britain's second city, and I know it will take a Labour Government to bring justice back to our city.

7.14 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's remarks. This is of course the fourth year of a longer term framework for local government funding, and the key element is the need for a fairer funding formula. We also need to deal with some of the underlying pressures for local authorities, particularly the time bomb that is adult social care. An extra £10 billion of funding for adult social care to 2020, including £650 million committed by the 2018 Budget, will go a long way to help in the short term. In the longer term, we need the fairer funding formula underpinned by the business rates retention pilots. I am delighted to see that North Yorkshire County Council has been entrusted with one of those pilots.

The fairer funding review and the spending review that comes with it are vital. If fairer funding is simply a redistribution of money—moving money from one local authority to another—it will be difficult for some authorities. We must learn the lessons of the fairer funding review in education, and fairer funding must come with extra money in the pot generally, to make it possible for some local authorities to manage as we redress the balance and make things fairer.

The present situation is unfair. Nine out of the 10 best funded authorities per capita per year are in London; they have about £1,000 spending power per person a year. In North Yorkshire we have £770 per person a year, despite the fact that a much larger proportion of that £770 is made up of council tax. We are contributing more but getting less in services. As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) pointed out, central Government grants to local authorities to inner-London councils are £437 per person per year, for metropolitan boroughs they are £319, for unitaries they are £225 and for counties £153. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) cannot talk about unfairness and avoid those figures. We must move to a fairer funding settlement.

I pay tribute to my neighbour, the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), who has looked at this issue and tried to simplify the system. Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication, as da Vinci said many years ago. My hon. Friend is right to try to simplify this and make it fairer. We must take on board many of the comments that have been made to make sure that the funding formula is fairer in the future.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

Adult social care is putting more pressure on my constituency than any other issue and we need to take a more strategic approach to its funding. The Select Committees on Housing, Communities and Local Government and on Health and Social Care had a long joint inquiry on this and came up with a simple recommendation—to emulate the German system of social insurance, which involves a social care premium. It is a simple, scalable and sustainable solution. It is a small amount that everybody pays—everybody pays something so nobody has to pay everything. That is the key to it. It was introduced in Germany in 1995 to replace a system of local government funding, and it has been incredibly successful. It was a unanimous recommendation of those cross-party Select Committees.

The key element of the system is not the small amount people pay in, but how they get the money out. If someone is defined as in need of social care—a young adult or someone in later life—they can take it in the form of local authority provision, third-party provision or as a cash settlement every month which can be paid to a neighbour or loved one, be it daughter, son, nephew or whatever. It also helps to strengthen the social fabric by making sure that people are looked after by those who love them most and understand their needs the most. It is something that we should adopt, and I hope it will be in the Green Paper that is expected shortly.

7.19 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), a fellow North Yorkshire colleague. He made some powerful and thoughtful points, in particular on the disparity of funding between the north and the south. I enjoyed his contribution very much.

This is the second time today that I have had to stand up in this Chamber to fight against the unfair and disproportionate funding that is leaving my constituents behind. The funding formula is leaving them at the bottom of the table. Areas that are more deprived, as we have heard from so many Members across the Chamber, are not getting the funding and support they need. There is clearly unfairness in the funding system. It is vital that we make that point today. The Government have to look at it again.

Redcar and Cleveland Council has lost £90 million since 2010. That is 35% of our funding. How on earth can a council be expected to continue to provide the level of service it wants to provide for its residents, particularly in areas like mine with high deprivation and high child poverty, when it has lost 35% of its funding? Residents are seeing and feeling the impact. As many colleagues have said today, we have seen a huge increase in the crisis of social care for adults and for those with disabilities. There are huge challenges around mental health support, particularly for young people, and there has been a rise in the number of children being taken into care. The situation is just not sustainable. Something has to give. The Government must look again.

In Redcar and Cleveland, we have lost 1,100 jobs in the past nine years. We have faced not just the tragedy of those individual job losses, but the knock-on effect of spending power being taken out of the community.

On top of other job losses, that is just not acceptable. In 2010, I worked for a local government think-tank. The big pressure around the cuts was the argument that said, “Councils have reserves. They can dip into their reserves and the cuts will hardly affect them.” Redcar and Cleveland has already had to spend £14 million of its reserves on trying to balance the books. There is nothing left. The cuts are going to the bone.

On top of that, Redcar and Cleveland lost business rates in the region of £10 million when we lost our steelworks. This is simply not acceptable. I have spoken to Ministers about the unfair system where Redcar and Cleveland was asked to pay £2.6 million for business rates relating to an industrial property that was revaluated that never even crossed its desk. It is not acceptable that Redcar and Cleveland has had to pay for business rates it never actually saw.

One in four children in Redcar and Cleveland are living in poverty. One in 10 four and five-year-olds are classified as obese, and that doubles by the age of 10 to 11. Currently 300 children—one in 10—are looked after. That has risen 35% since April 2017—a 35% rise in just two years.

I thank Sue Jeffrey and the Labour team in Redcar and Cleveland for their excellent work. They have done a superb job of dealing with the implications of the devastating cuts, protecting people on the frontline and supporting the most vulnerable people in our communities. They have kept our five leisure centres and all our libraries open. They have bust a gut to look after the poor and the needy. They are doing a superb job with both arms tied behind their backs.

Councils are at breaking point and this settlement gives the people of Redcar and Cleveland nothing. When people are already having to pay more council tax—an unfair tax—they are paying twice for services that are being cut to the bone. That cannot continue.

Mr Speaker: Four-minute speeches are now preferable—much more preferable.

7.23 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley).

I rise to put on record my thanks to the Minister and the Department for the rise in core spending power in my constituency, and to highlight the urgent need to finish the funding review, as I think every single colleague has said. The sector needs clarity and resolution by October so that it can plan for the long term. We see that acutely in my constituency. Redditch is just down the road from Birmingham. Opposition Members have spoken about the unfairness of funding in urban areas. Households in Birmingham receive 27% more than households in my constituency, yet the deprivation needs are comparable on any indicator. The areas that some Opposition Members are speaking about are starting from a much higher base. That has to be taken into account in any calculations about fairness.

Yesterday, I met Councillor Simon Geraghty, the leader of Worcestershire County Council. He specifically wanted me to thank the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), for listening to him on the specific issues facing

his council. It has had challenging and tough times, yet due to sensible and prudent management it is due to pass a budget. It will make savings and efficiencies, while being able to keep all the libraries open. I also recognise the hard work that it has put in, working with the district councils and Councillor Matt Dormer, to put together a unique bid that has gone into the business rates retention pilot in our area. That will deliver up to £4.9 million of additional funding, which can be spent on addressing some of the acute social care needs in Worcestershire, which is another area with an ageing population.

Local services are so important to my residents. I am sure I am not the only Member who, when I go door-knocking, finds that I get blamed for everything to do with local services as well as, of course, the national issues that consume us, such as Brexit. Often, local residents do not make any distinction. They just think that we are responsible for all of it, and indeed we are. That is why I am delighted that the hard work and the lobbying that we put in across Worcestershire has resulted in a reasonably good settlement for Worcestershire, which I welcome.

I will finish my remarks by touching on the town centre, which is of paramount importance to my constituents. Redditch is a new town. We are proud of our heritage. We want to cherish the beautiful areas that we have in our town centre, and yet, after eight years of Labour being in control of our district council, nothing has been done about that. The stark fact—shameful, I think—is that in eight years in control of Redditch Borough Council, Labour did not build a single home for social rent. We are already starting to do that, having taken control last year. I support that and want that work to go further.

My local council leader, Councillor Matt Dormer, is pulling together funding pots from the local enterprise partnership, the county council and various different places, including local government. Investment will be going into our town centre for the first time. We look forward to having those conversations and building a bright future for our town centres, which have been so long neglected under the Labour party in local government. We want to make a thriving and vibrant local economy, where people can feel free to start a business, invest and bring more revenue into our town, and where people can work and play and be proud, as they already are, to raise their families. I thank the Minister very much and I will vote for the settlement this evening.

7.26 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): In Derbyshire, we have seen a 60% reduction in our revenue support grant since 2010. Instead, we end up with short-term pots of funding. We have a Conservative county council that says it cannot spend its pothole money because it was given too late in the year. It has a better care fund that is £8 million underspent, in spite of huge cuts being made to our health services, including our voluntary services, in Derbyshire. Yesterday, the county council refused to refer that to the Secretary of State or to cover those cuts, which will make such a difference to our communities.

In the less than two years that I have been in this place, I have seen cuts to our libraries in Derbyshire—almost half the libraries have been transferred to community management, with no grant, and the rest of them have reduced hours—and our Sunday bus services have been cut,

so now at the weekend, the Peak District is overrun with cars. In our schools, one of the biggest issues that I see in my casework is children with special needs being deprived of the support they need. Parents have been battling against schools and schools have been battling against the local authority year on year. We have seen educational psychologists cut yet again, even though they are crucial to diagnosing autism and special needs. When parents have been able to get the support they need to take the county council to a tribunal, the county council has lost 39 out of 40 recent cases. However, parents are still struggling on to support their children, who are not getting the help that they need.

It is only going to get worse for families. In spite of rising numbers of children on child protection orders—up by over a quarter in two years—the number of children in care in Derbyshire has risen by 9% in nine months. However, the county council has just put forward its response to the consultation: it is going to cut two thirds of its early help staff—293 of the 400-odd staff will be cut. Its responsibility for supporting families will be transferred to schools, which are already struggling. Those with no at-risk children—largely in better-off areas—will be fine, but those in areas where children desperately need support will not be.

Our children's centres have been cut and most of them closed while youth services are being abolished. In adult social care, contracts for care at home are constantly being whittled away and private providers are at their wit's end. Areas of my constituency simply will not bid for care packages because they cannot balance the books. As a result, more elderly people are stuck in hospital desperate to come home. Careworkers are being transferred from two to three shifts, but they cannot continue on that basis.

Care homes are having their funding frozen and community alarm services are being cut for four fifths of those who use them. Learning disability services, respite breaks, and now a consultation on day centres—the cuts are endless, and they hit the most vulnerable, who are the people the Government claim to protect. In just 18 months, 2,700 people have been referred to court for collection of council tax, and 7% of households have been lumbered with court costs and bailiff fees. The Government are hitting the poorest, and we are all paying more.

7.30 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George). She described the challenges in Derbyshire much as I would describe those in East Sussex.

I want to thank all my district and county councillors, and indeed all my parish and town councillors, for their work. I spent eight years as a district councillor—I stood down the day I entered this place—and I think it essential that local government be well represented on both sides of the House. I also thank the ministerial team for listening to the lobbying and the concerns raised by me and my colleagues from East Sussex, which is to receive an extra 2.5%. We are also in the business rates retention pilot, which will mean a great deal to us.

We have a big challenge in East Sussex, although, in a way, it is a wonderful challenge. Some 28% of my constituents are over 65; the national average is 17%. A lot of people move to East Sussex to retire—for its

[Huw Merriman]

great quality of life—but the difficulty is that they tend to downsize and live in smaller houses, meaning that they require social care but do not pay as much council tax as people in counties such as Surrey.

If we are to reform social care, we must ask ourselves whether we want a state system, meaning that there is no postcode lottery as everything is funded equally through the NHS, or whether we go for more radical reform. In East Sussex, we cannot carry on as we are, going to Ministers each year and asking for more. They usually give more, for which I am grateful, but it feels hand to mouth to many of our councillors, who want longer-term certainty.

Social care has gone from a third of East Sussex County Council's budget to 75%. We are not fixing holes in the road, because we are fixing people—or doing our best to. That should be our priority, but we need more if we are to be a success. We know that nationally, social care funding will need an additional £12 billion by 2030. If we continue as we are without reform, there will be a £6 billion hole. I hope that everyone in this place agrees that we will need more money and more reform.

In the last 20 years, we have had 12 Government papers, from both Labour and Conservative Governments, and five independent commissions, but we still have not had the reform we need. Surely it is in the gift of this place, where there is no real Government majority, for MPs to work together cross-party to deliver. We must have no more calling reform a death tax, as the Conservative party did, and no more calling it a dementia tax, as the Opposition did. We must work together now to find a solution. I am willing to do that, and I hope that others are as well.

I want to look at countries that have introduced reform. In Japan, where there was no state funding for social care until 2000—when it was recognised that there was a problem—over-40s pay an additional amount in their pay packets, but of course they started with a blank page. It is to Germany that we should look, however, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) rightly said. Its plan, introduced in 1994—he says 1995—was delivered with political consensus and has been a great success. People in work pay half, employers pay the other half, and the retired pay the full amount, which brings in the element of inter-generational fairness. The contribution rate is 2.5% of wages, payable to a ceiling, with those without children paying more. To take out £283 per month, or a maximum of £1,784, changes lives. The system has been reformed, too, as impairments have developed. It used to be based more on physical need; now it is based more on dementia and the mental side.

Long-term care is a social risk that requires social protection. Surely we can all come together and make that happen.

7.34 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am delighted by the success of Stoke-on-Trent's pooled bid for 75% business rates retention. Increased rates retention fits the city's ambition to be a prominent and notable success story of the Government's localism

agenda, and will enable that ambition to be realised. Stoke-on-Trent is on the up, and the city council has set out a compelling strategic vision to keep it that way, working closely with local partners across Staffordshire. Challenges remain, but after decades of decline under Labour there is huge local support for the growing prosperity of our proud city and an appetite for locally driven change, with local business and employment opportunities being given the boost that they need.

People wanted to see improved living standards, and since the Government took office in 2015, local Conservatives, in coalition with independents, have indeed delivered positive change. We have upped the ambition for the city, making close-run, enthusiastically supported bids for the title of city of culture and for a Channel 4 hub. We have a heritage zone in Longton, money from the transforming cities fund to improve local transport, and the Ceramic Valley enterprise zone.

Fully realising the city's ambition requires local people of all ages to gain directly, and be seen to gain directly, from the implementation of pro-business, pro-development policies. Getting more out of what we put in is a fundamental requirement for improved ambition and productivity in the Potteries and in Staffordshire more generally. We are determined to share the proceeds of local growth locally, generating the levels of support that we need to continue our ambitions for redevelopment and greater prosperity for our city. The hard work done by the council in recent years has seen Stoke-on-Trent recognised in independent assessments as one of the best places in the United Kingdom in which to start a new enterprise.

Local authorities have a vital role in making high streets and towns places where people want to be. Rates retention is an important reform because it ensures that authorities have a direct financial incentive to improve the sense of place and sense of destination, encourages more people to live in town centres such as Longton and Fenton, and encourages more small businesses to move into spaces that are currently vacant. Initiatives such as the future high streets fund are essential additions. We must incentivise property owners to convert their empty buildings so that they can serve new and creative uses. I certainly hope that our bid for that funding will be successful.

Brownfield land is a significant issue in Stoke-on-Trent, a legacy of our past industrial decline. I was pleased to meet my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and representatives of Homes England recently to discuss some of the challenges involved. Decontaminating land to make it fit for house building can prove highly expensive. Much of it consists of smaller urban sites, and larger house builders are unwilling to take them on. The challenges are often left with smaller developers, who frequently struggle to swallow the high risk.

A focus on local business growth is particularly important in cities like Stoke-on-Trent, because the residential council tax base is low. The reality of our housing offer locally means that council tax alone will never allow us to keep pace with the growing and necessary demands on the public purse from, for instance, social care. What we are doing locally is seeking alternative ways of generating revenue to help to fund services. That will make us more self-sufficient, unlike Labour's approach, about which we heard earlier. It would only saddle our constituents with more borrowing and more taxes, which we cannot afford.

7.38 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): We have not heard a great deal today. We expected, perhaps, a rabbit to be pulled out of a hat. Word had it that the Prime Minister had a few quid to give out, but we have not seen much of that today. It could have been used in a morally just way: it could have been sent to the areas that have suffered the biggest cuts although they also suffer the most significant deprivation. Those areas have been targeted by the Government, as has been set out today in the many excellent speeches made by Labour Members in particular.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) said that people now questioned why they were paying council tax at all, given that the neighbourhood services that they received were being reduced. My hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) made the same points about the human cost of removing vital public services. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) outlined the very real community impact of austerity and the Government's targeting of our communities. Through to my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Anna Turley) and for High Peak (Ruth George), we heard story after story of the human and community cost of austerity.

What shift did we get from the Government? Absolutely none. Why? This has not happened by accident, and the Government will not suddenly wake up and realise that they have made a horrible mistake. The policy has been deliberate and targeted from day one. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said:

"In England, cuts have been much larger for poorer, more grant-dependent councils than their richer neighbours."

Why?

"This pattern arose directly from the way central Government allocated grants."

That was deliberate and targeted and it has not stopped today. Despite our calls and our outlining the real human cost, the policy continues.

Mr Jim Cunningham: If the Government were serious about helping women and bringing an end to austerity, they could have funded local authorities to give free bus passes to the women they robbed of their pensions. Surely they could have done something like that.

Jim McMahon: The Government have been very good at shifting money from those who need it most to areas that will secure the support of their Back Benchers. How many times today have we heard Conservative Back Benchers praising their Front Benchers and thanking them for giving in to their lobbying? So much back patting has gone on as Government Members congratulate each other on taking food off the tables of the poorest in society to shift funding to the richest.

We have heard time and again from Conservative Members how much more expensive services are in rural areas. There is no doubt that some services are more expensive to deliver in rural areas by unit cost. However, let us look at the evidence. In 2014, the Government

commissioned a report that examined every single service that local authorities deliver throughout England. It showed that it is true that some, but only 15%, of services are more expensive in rural areas. In urban areas, 31% of services are more expensive, and whether areas are urban or rural has no bearing on the delivery of 50% of services. The evidence therefore shows that services are more expensive to deliver in urban areas. That is because the deprivation is ingrained and generational. It is tied to the local economies, and councils are there to try to keep it all together.

When our communities have asked for hope and direction, what have they been given? Not even warm words or an acknowledgement of the human cost. Now more than a million older people do not get the social care they would have got in 2010. Children who are at risk of violence and abuse are not given the protection they need, because the Government have walked away and said that it is nothing to do with them. It is everything to do with them. When other Departments were fighting their corner, where was the Ministry? When austerity first struck, local government was hit hardest. We have lost 800,000 members of staff from local government. We have the lowest number of staff since comparable records began, yet the central Government workforce is the largest since comparable records began. Local government has taken more of a hit than any other Department. Within local government, Labour-controlled areas have taken the hit, and that is politically motivated.

The Government had the chance to put this right today. They have failed to be fair and just, and failed the people we come into this place to serve. Shame on the lot of you.

7.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): It is a pleasure to close the debate. I start by joining my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), in paying tribute to all the committed people who work in local government and deliver for their communities every single day. We are all grateful to them for their hard work and dedication. I thank all hon. Members for their passionate speeches today, particularly those who brought their personal experience of local government to the Chamber—our debates are the richer for that. Although I may not agree with the content of Labour Members' speeches, I respect the passion with which they represent their local communities.

As a northern MP, I feel that the north is lucky to have, in my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson), a champion for the northern powerhouse. He is committed to pushing the Government on rebalancing the economy and working constructively with them. That sentiment was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), who spoke well about the importance of economic regeneration in his constituency and what the Government are doing to support his residents as they look to a brighter future.

My hon. Friends the Members for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) and for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) made excellent speeches about the need for all Members and all local authorities to think about how we can serve our constituents better and at cheaper cost every

[*Rishi Sunak*]

single day. We should always strive for ways to achieve that, given that the taxes that fund our public services are paid through their hard work and efforts. My hon. Friends the Members for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) and for Waveney (Peter Aldous) do a great job in this Chamber of representing their district council and county council respectively, and I thank them for all their engagement with me and the Department over the few months in which I have had this job. I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby that the Secretary of State is well aware of the excessive activity of a few councils with respect to borrowing for commercialisation, and this is something that the Department is actively looking at as we speak to the Treasury.

Many Conservative Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), for Gloucester (Richard Graham), for Lewes, for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Waveney, for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), made powerful and compelling cases for a root-and-branch review of how we distribute money in local government today. We heard about the specific issues that councils face on the ground that our current funding formula simply does not capture. I pay tribute to their work in bringing this to my attention and that of officials. They mentioned issues such as the rapidly changing demographics that are driving up demand for adult social care. These are the kinds of things that a new formula fit for the 21st century should absolutely cover, and I look forward to working with all of them as we develop a funding formula that is right for every part of this country.

My hon. Friends the Members for Northampton South, for Thirsk and Malton and for Bexhill and Battle spoke of the absolute importance of getting adult social care right. I know that my colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care are committed to doing exactly that, and I agree that the solutions should be radical, not statist. I hope that they will include consideration of the excellent work of the Select Committee.

Three themes have run through the speeches that I have heard in the debate, and they are the three things that everyone agrees that our local councils do: first, they support the most vulnerable in our society; secondly, they drive economic growth in their areas; and, thirdly, they build strong communities. I am proud to say that this Government are backing them to do all three. It is local authorities whose hands are the first to reach out to those who fall on hard times, and I am delighted that this settlement provides them with a real-terms increase in financial resources to support that vital work.

Councils told us that the most acute pressure that they faced was in adult and children's social care, so this Government responded with £650 million in incremental funding in the Budget. Councils told us that they wanted to do more to support people with disabilities, so this Government responded with an extra £55 million to make vital home adaptations. Rural councils highlighted their particular challenges, so this Government responded by maintaining the rural services grant at record levels. But Conservative Members measure success not by how much money we spend, but by how many lives we are changing, so we are supporting local authorities to

innovate and improve to ensure that we are careful with taxpayers' hard-earned money and that people are getting the best possible services.

In children's care, where there is a huge variation in performance, we are investing £84 million to spread best practice from Leeds, Hertfordshire and North Yorkshire across the country so that children everywhere will benefit from best-in-class practice. In technology, we recently launched an innovation fund to support councils in embracing the digital revolution. Working with the Local Government Association, we are developing a tool to help councils to benchmark, analyse and drive performance. Across local government, whenever there are opportunities to improve lives, save money and transform services, this Government will be relentless in pursuing them.

The Government understand that the only sustainable way to pay for our public services is to create the economic growth that will fund them. Let us not forget the vital role that councils play in creating prosperity for their communities. Rather than being reliant on central Government handouts, local authorities should be empowered and rewarded for their entrepreneurship. I am pleased to say that our business rates retention scheme does exactly that, and local authorities are expected to retain almost £2.5 billion of business rates growth this year. Across the nation, from Yorkshire to Southampton, our 15 new business rates retention pilots demonstrate this Government's commitment to backing councils' ambitions for their local economies. We all know that the enemy of that growth is the higher taxes that the Labour party would inflict on our residents.

Local authorities are key to strengthening our communities. Every single day, they ensure that people are proud of the places in which they live. Those communities must start with the houses that people call home, so this Government are backing local authorities to fulfil those people's aspirations. The new homes bonus part of the settlement has awarded councils almost £8 billion since it started for 1.5 million additional homes that they have brought forward, each one providing incentive and rewards for those councils that are trying to ensure that every one of their residents can fulfil the dream of homeownership.

However, local authorities told us that they want more. They want greater flexibility to build more of their own homes, so this Government listened and lifted the housing revenue account borrowing cap. Strong communities also need vibrant high streets, so this Government are trusting local councils with a £675 million fund to transform and revitalise our town centres. Finally, when it comes to our communities, the only holes that I want to be pouring money down are the ones on our local roads, so this Government were pleased to ensure that councils have £420 million to fill potholes for our motorists. From homes to roads to high streets, this Government are backing local authorities to create communities where everyone can thrive.

We have heard a lot about deprivation today, and there was an accusation that this Government are somehow trying to massage the numbers. When we put together the new funding formula, we listened to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee report that was published at the end of 2017, which made a compelling case for reducing the number of indicators to fund local government without sacrificing accuracy.

That is exactly what our funding formula does. Deprivation accounts for less than 4% of the variation in spend for universal services—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I need to hear what the Minister has to say. I am sure that he is nearly at the end.

Rishi Sunak: We heard a lot about Liverpool and a lot about Surrey. Members of this House should know that households in Liverpool have £400 more to spend on local services than households in Surrey. Only a third of spending in Liverpool is financed by council tax versus almost 85% in Surrey. This funding formula is accurate and based on the facts.

In conclusion, I will continue to listen to local councils to learn from their expertise and to champion their cause across Whitehall. I tell them that their voice is heard loud and clear and that they will be supported by this Government. I commend the settlement to the House.

Question put.

The House proceeded to Division.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I remind the House that the motion is subject to double-majority voting: of the whole House and of Members representing constituencies in England

The House having divided: Ayes 298, Noes 240.

Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England: Ayes 270, Noes 208.

Division No. 322]

[7.54 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James

Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel

Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, 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
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
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
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
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
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
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
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 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
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 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, 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
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 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
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Iain Stewart and
Wendy Morton

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard

Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim

Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Philip
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 George, Ruth
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan

Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mark Tami*)
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel

Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes

Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Wilson, Phil
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2019–20 (HC 1916), which was laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.

8.12 pm

More than three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the motion, the Deputy Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Order, 31 January).

Resolved,

That the Report on Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Alternative Notional Amounts) (England) 2019–20 (HC 1917), which was laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.—(*James Brokenshire.*)

Resolved,

That the Report on Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Principles) (England) 2019–20 (HC 1918), which was laid before this House on 29 January, be approved.—(*James Brokenshire.*)

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 4 to 11 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

INCOME TAX

That the draft Devolved Income Tax Rates (Consequential Amendments) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 10 December 2018, be approved.

DATA PROTECTION

That the draft Data Protection (Charges and Information) (Amendment) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 17 December 2018, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (BUILDING AND BUILDINGS)

That the draft Construction Products (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 18 December 2018, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS)

That the draft Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 19 December 2018, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Solvency 2 and Insurance (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 8 January, be approved.

That the draft Insurance Distribution (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 19 December 2018, be approved.

That the draft Financial Conglomerates and Other Financial Groups (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 17 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (COMPANIES)

That the draft Companies, Limited Liability Partnerships and Partnerships (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 10 January, be approved.—(*Jeremy Quin.*)

Question agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): There are a large number of petitions to be presented and I hope that it will be of assistance to the House if I set out how we shall proceed. Once the first petition relating to the future of maintained nursery schools has been read to the House with its prayer, subsequent petitions on the same topic should not be read out in full. Members should give a brief description of the number and the location of petitioners and state that the petition is in the same terms. Members presenting more than one petition should present them together. When Lucy Powell has presented her petition, she should proceed to the Table and hand her first petition to the Clerk, who will read out the title in the usual way. For subsequent petitions, Members should proceed directly to the petitions bag at the back of the Chair. I shall call the next Member immediately after the previous Member has finished speaking. At the expiry of half an hour, no further petitions may be presented orally, but they may be placed in the petitions bag, and I will record them as formally presented. I now call Lucy Powell to present her petition.

PETITIONS

The future of maintained nursery schools

8.14 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present petitions on behalf of nursery schools across England, and will be joined by many colleagues. I thank them and nurseries across the country for their campaigning work.

[Lucy Powell]

Petitions presented today are on behalf of thousands of parents, teachers, governors and local people who value and use these maintained nursery schools. The petitioners raise concerns about the future viability of maintained nursery schools. One third of their funding is due to end next April—that is the next academic year. Without continued supplementary funding or a long-term solution to sustainable funding, many nurseries could close, and many are already taking staffing and place decisions for next year.

These nurseries are the jewel in the crown of our education system, boosting social mobility and eliminating the development gap between poorer pupils and their peers' pre-school. Some 98% are outstanding or good and two thirds are in the most deprived areas of the country. Warm words are not enough from Ministers; we now need action.

The first petition states:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons to urge the Government to take action to ensure nursery schools are financially sustainable for the future.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Triangle, maintained nursery school in Lambeth,

Declares that we are concerned about the future of maintained nursery schools in England after March 2020 as no guarantee has been given by the Government that adequate funding will continue when supplementary funding ends.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons to urge the Government to take action to ensure nursery schools are financially sustainable for the future.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002370]

The other petitions are:

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Walton Lane maintained nursery school in Nelson, Lancashire.

[P002371]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of College Green Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Brent.

[P002372]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Bognor Regis maintained nursery school in West Sussex.

[P002373]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Oxclose Community Nursery School a maintained nursery school in Washington, Sunderland.

[P002374]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Kingswood maintained nursery school in Watford, Hertfordshire.

[P002375]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Maidenhead Nursery School in Windsor and Maidenhead.

[P002376]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Kenilworth Nursery School in Kenilworth.

[P002377]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Maytree maintained nursery school in Lambeth.

[P002378]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Holmewood maintained nursery school in Lambeth.

[P002379]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of The Lawns maintained nursery school in Windsor.

[P002380]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Hedon Nursery School in East Riding of Yorkshire.

[P002381]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Grosvenor maintained nursery school in Bolton.

[P002382]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Usworth Colliery maintained nursery school in Washington Tyne and Wear.

[P002383]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Beverley Manor Nursery school in East Riding of Yorkshire.

[P002384]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Northfleet Nursery in Gravesend.

[P002385]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of West Heath Nursery in Birmingham.

[P002386]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Wyndham Park maintained nursery school in Grantham.

[P002387]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Hollywood Park maintained nursery school in Stockport.

[P002388]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Lanterns, maintained nursery school in Winchester, Hampshire.

[P002389]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Cookham, maintained nursery school in Cookham.

[P002390]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Douglas Valley Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Wigan.

[P002391]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Chichester, maintained nursery school in West Sussex.

[P002392]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Pennywell Early Years Centre, maintained nursery school in Sunderland.

[P002393]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Hylton Red House Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Sunderland.

[P002394]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Filton Avenue, maintained nursery school in Bristol.

[P002395]

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I would like to present three petitions in the same terms, on behalf of 1,107 residents of the Chipping Barnet constituency, concerning St Margaret's Nursery School, Hampden Way Nursery School and the Barnet Early Years Alliance. I also highlight a petition in the same terms concerning Moss Hall Nursery School that is being submitted this evening by my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer).

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Hampden Way Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Barnet.

[P002353]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff of St Margaret's Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Barnet.

[P002354]

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of BEYA - Brookhill Nursery, maintained nursery school in Barnet.

[P002355]

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), from the parents, carers, staff and governors of the wonderful Hillview Nursery School in Britain's best constituency, Harrow West. Almost 100 people have signed the petition.

The petition of parents, carers, staff and governors of Hillview Nursery maintained nursery school in Harrow.

[P002312]

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I would like to present petitions from parents, carers and staff at Windsor Nursery School and Phoenix Nursery School—both in Wolverhampton South East—in the same terms as those presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell).

The petition of parents, carers, staff and governors of Windsor maintained nursery school in Wolverhampton.

[P002314]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Phoenix maintained nursery schools in Wolverhampton.

[P002321]

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): I would like to present a petition on behalf of Ditton Nursery School and Warrington Road Nursery School, which has been signed by parents, carers and staff at those schools. I do so on the same basis as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell).

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Ditton/Warrington Road maintained nursery schools in Halton.

[P002313]

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I would like to present a petition—signed by parents from Somerset Nursery School, along with teachers and governors—in the same terms.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Somerset nursery school maintained nursery schools in Wandsworth, London.

[P002315]

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I rise to present petitions in the same terms about the future of maintained nursery schools. I have received over 1,600 signatures from these nurseries.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Cippenham maintained nursery school in Slough.

[P002316]

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Baylis Court Nursery School maintained nursery schools in Slough.

[P002317]

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Lea Nursery School maintained nursery school in Slough.

[P002318]

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Chalvey Nursery School maintained Nursery School in Slough.

[P002327]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors and supporters of Slough centre nursery maintained nursery school in Slough Berkshire.

[P002344]

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I rise to present petitions in the same terms from the wonderful St Werburgh's Park Nursery School; the wonderful Redcliffe Nursery School and children's centre in Redcliffe; and the wonderful St Philip's Marsh Nursery School, Barton Hill children's centre and Cashmore early years centre, also in Bristol.

The petition of the Parents, Carers, Staff and Governors of Redcliffe Children's Centre maintained nursery school in Bristol.

[P002319]

The petition of the Parents, Carers, Staff and Governors of St Philip's Marsh Nursery School (and Cashmore Early Years Centre/Barton Hill Children's Centre) maintained nursery school in Bristol.

[P002320]

The petition of the Parents, Carers, Staff and Governors of St Werburgh's Park maintained nursery school in Bristol.

[P002322]

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of four remarkable nursery schools in Birmingham, Erdington: Castle Vale, Featherstone, Marsh Hill, and Osborne. It is signed by 1,500 people.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Featherstone maintained nursery school in Erdington, Birmingham and Marsh Mill nursery school, Osborne nursery school and Castle Vale nursery school in Birmingham.

[P002324]

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I rise to present petitions on behalf of three outstanding nursery schools in Reading East: Caversham, Newbridge, and Blagdon.

The petition of the parents, careers, staff and governors of Caversham maintained nursery school in Reading.

[P002325]

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present the petition from 85 parents, carers and staff of the much-valued Abercromby Nursery School in Liverpool. It is vital that adequate funding is provided for this facility, which has enriched so many young lives.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Abercromby Nursery School maintained Nursery School in Liverpool.

[P002328]

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of six outstanding nursery schools of Burnley.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Whitegate Nursery School, Padiham.

[P002329]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Ightenhill maintained nursery school in Burnley.

[P002340]

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Basnett Street Nursery School maintained nursery school in Burnley.

[P002342]

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Rockwood maintained nursery school in Burnley, Lancashire.

[P002343]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Rosegrove Nursery School maintained nursery school in Burnley.

[P002345]

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Reedley Hallows maintained nursery school in Burnley, Lancashire.

[P002346]

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I would like to present a petition on behalf of parents, carers and staff of the fantastic Bedworth Heath and Atherstone maintained nursery schools in the same terms. It has 89 signatures.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Atherstone maintained nursery school in Atherstone, Warwickshire.

[P002351]

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of 116 constituents in support of the excellent Stockingford Nursery School in Nuneaton.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Stockingford Nursery maintained nursery school in Nuneaton.

[P002326]

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I present five petitions in the same terms on behalf of many, many thousands of residents—parents, guardians, staff and communities of nursery schools in Cambridgeshire.

The petition of the parents, carers staff, governors and local community of Homerton Early Years Centre maintained nursery school in Cambridgeshire.

[P002330]

The petition of the parents, carers staff, governors and local community of Colleges Nursery School maintained nursery school in Cambridgeshire.

[P002332]

The petition of the parents, carers staff and governors of Brunswick maintained nursery school in Cambridgeshire.

[P002333]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Histon Early Years Centre maintained nursery school in Histon, Cambridgeshire.

[P002334]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff, governors and local community of The Fields Children Centre maintained nursery school in Cambridgeshire.

[P002335]

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of the parents, carers and staff of the outstanding Hindley Nursery School in the constituency of Makerfield. There are 125 signatures.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Hindley Nursery School maintained nursery school in Makerfield.

[P002339]

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition in the same terms from parents, carers, staff and governors of the brilliant Lillian de Lissa Nursery School in Birmingham, Edgbaston.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Lillian de Lissa maintained nursery school in Birmingham.

[P002348]

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I rise to present two petitions in the same terms signed by over 400 people on behalf of Highters Heath Nursery School in Billesley and Allens Croft Nursery School in Brandwood in my constituency.

The petition of the parents, careers, staff and governors of Allens Croft maintained nursery school in King Heath Birmingham.

[P002341]

The petition of the parents, careers, staff and governors of Highters Heath maintained nursery school in Warstock, Birmingham.

[P002347]

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) for all the work that she has done on this. I rise to present a petition in the same terms as everybody else for the outstanding Lee Royd Nursery School in my constituency, in south Accrington.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Lee Royd Nursery School maintained nursery school in Accrington.

[P002349]

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): In the same terms, I present a petition on behalf of parents, carers and supporters of Victoria Park Nursery School in Newbury and Hungerford Nursery School in Hungerford, both maintained nursery schools, in the same terms as others.

The petition of the parents, careers, staff and governors of Victoria Park and Hungerford Nursery School maintained nursery school in West Berkshire.

[P002338]

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I rise to present in the same terms a petition on behalf of our one remaining maintained nursery school in my constituency, the wonderful Sunny Brow Nursery School. It has been signed by 238 constituents.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Sunny Brow maintained nursery school in Middleton.

[P002350]

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I rise to present petitions in the same terms as my hon. Friends from parents, carers, staff and governors of three highly valued nursery schools in my constituency: Nell Gwynn Nursery School, Ann Bernard Nursery School,

and The Grove children and family centre. They are all hugely valued by the over 279 people who have signed the petition.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff, governors and our local community contacts of The Grove Children and Family Centre which is a maintained nursery school in Southwark.

[P002363]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Nell Gwynn Nursery, maintained nursery school in Southwark.

[P002364]

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I rise to present petitions in the same terms and on behalf of 211 constituents for the excellent Warwick Nursery School and 174 constituents for the equally superb Whitnash Nursery School.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Whitnash maintained Nursery School in Leamington Spa.

[P002365]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Warwick Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Warwick.

[P002366]

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am Spartacus, and I rise to present a petition in the same terms, signed by 170 parents, carers, staff and governors of the outstanding Boundstone maintained nursery school in Lancing in my constituency.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Boundstone maintained Nursery school in Lancing, West Sussex.

[P002367]

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): I would like to present four petitions in the same terms, on behalf of parents, carers and staff at Hetton-le-Hole Nursery School, Hetton Lyons Nursery School, Houghton Community Nursery School and Mill Hill Nursery School in Houghton and Sunderland South.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Hetton Lyons maintained nursery school in Sunderland.

[P002357]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Mill Hill maintained nursery school in Doxford Park, Sunderland.

[P002358]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Houghton Community maintained nursery school in Houghton-le-Spring, Sunderland.

[P002359]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Hetton-le-Hole maintained nursery school in Sunderland.

[P002360]

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I would like to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of the wonderful Clyde Nursery School and the wonderful Chelwood Nursery School in my constituency, which have collected well over 200 signatures between them.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Clyde Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Lewisham.

[P002362]

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of parents, staff, governors and supporters of the exemplary and only stand-alone maintained nursery school in the Borough of Gateshead: Bensham Grove Community Nursery School.

The petition of the parents of Bensham Grove Community maintained nursery school in Gateshead.

[P002361]

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of St Giles maintained nursery school in Lincoln—an amazing, priceless school that supports families in so many different ways. I dare not begin to think how Lincoln would manage without it.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of St Giles maintained nursery school in Lincoln.

[P002356]

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present six petitions in the same terms, three from my constituency—Chapel Street, Hart Hill and Rothesay—and, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), Gill Blowers, Grasmere and Pastures Way nursery schools.

The petition of the parents, carers and staff of Chapel Street, Gill Blowers, Grasmere, Hart Hill, Pastures Way and Rothesay maintained nursery schools in Luton.

[P002352]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Rothesay maintained nursery school in Luton.

[P002408]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Chapel Street maintained nursery school in Luton.

[P002417]

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of 131 parents, carers, staff and governors of the exceptional Tanglewood Nursery School in Chelmsford, in God's own county of Essex.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Tanglewood maintained nursery school in Chelmsford.

[P002400]

Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab): I rise to present petitions in the same terms on behalf of two nursery schools in my constituency that are both doing a fantastic job in very difficult conditions: Lord Street Nursery School and Harrington Nursery School.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Harrington Nursery School, maintained nursery school in Derby City.

[P002368]

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Lord Street Community Nursery, maintained nursery school in Derby South.

[P002369]

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition in the same terms from the excellent Grandpont Nursery School in Oxford.

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Grandpont, maintained nursery school in Oxford.

[P002396]

Children's Social Care: Rotherham

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Iain Stewart.)

8.27 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I am grateful for the chance to hold this debate because I need the Minister to hear about and understand the unique situation facing Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council with regard to children's services. The debate is also timely, as we have just debated the local government finance report.

I am sure the Minister agrees that there is no more important topic to be debated than the safeguarding of children and securing them a positive future. Local authorities up and down the country are struggling to fund their children's social care services in the light of cuts since 2010, and Rotherham is no different. In real terms, the funding for Rotherham's budget since 2013-14 has been reduced by 74%—a cut of more than £62 million. The Government have told councils such as Rotherham that they are making "significant additional resources" available to support children's social care, but that funding is primarily for innovation and does not redress the shortfall in core funding affecting so many local authorities.

The depletion in available resources has been compounded by a rising demand for children's social care services. Rotherham council has experienced a dramatic rise in demand since 2015. There has been a significant increase in the number of children in receipt of statutory social work intervention at all levels—children in need, child protection and children in care. Nationally, the number of child protection inquiries has increased by 158% in 10 years, from 77,000 in 2007-08 to 198,000 in 2017-18.

Like other authorities across the country, Rotherham has experienced a significant increase in demand. In Rotherham, as of December 2018, the number of children on a child protection plan was 562, and the number of children in need was 1,447. In Rotherham, the number of children in care has risen from 407 children in March 2015 to 634 in December 2018, well above the national average increase. Rotherham has experienced the third highest increase in numbers in 2017-18 out of 152 local authorities in England. Let us remember that the average annual cost of care, based on placement cost alone, for a looked-after child in Rotherham is £54,000 per child.

A significant contribution to this dramatic increase is the impact of Operation Stovewood, the National Crime Agency investigation into past child sexual exploitation in Rotherham by grooming gangs. The investigation is unique, and it is the largest operation the NCA has ever carried out.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): My hon. Friend will remember that in May last year I stood up at Prime Minister's Question Time and asked the Prime Minister about further funding bid for Fusion, which had only 30% of the original funding. This bid is to help to support the survivors of CSE and to pursue convictions against the perpetrators. Is it her understanding, as it is mine, that no further Fusion project money has gone into Rotherham?

Sarah Champion: Sadly, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right. This was a multi-agency hub for survivors, and the council argued in the strongest terms the need for such multi-agency working, as did the National Crime Agency, but no, the money has not been forthcoming.

Operation Stovewood has placed unprecedented and unbudgeted additional pressures on the authority. The council estimates the investigation is currently costing an additional £4.3 million per year, which is estimated to increase to £7 million next year, yet only £500,000 per annum of additional money has been forthcoming. The decades of sexual abuse in Rotherham and other towns have been a great shame on this nation. If there had been an earthquake affecting the lives of 1,400 children in Rotherham, we would have got emergency funding from the Government to help with their recovery. However, with no such money forthcoming for child abuse, we are largely leaving victims and survivors to get on with the recovery themselves.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I first put on the record our thanks to the hon. Lady for all that she does in this sector? It is a very difficult sector to work in—it is very difficult to put forward the stories she puts forward—but she does it admirably well. I think this House is indebted to her, and in particular her constituents should be very proud to have her as their MP.

Does the hon. Lady not agree that social services throughout the United Kingdom are teetering on the brink of collapse? While we are debating this issue in this Chamber, there are children throughout the United Kingdom right now who are sitting in neglected homes, with no one to turn to and no hope as they slip through the net. Does she not believe that it is past time that we secured—we look to the Minister very gently and very honestly as we say this—the additional funding and training to enable the system to handle the vast volume of children who need someone to advocate for them as they scream in silence?

Sarah Champion: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words, and I completely agree with the points he makes. We are storing up a national disaster if we do not support these children, ideally with early intervention, or with whatever help they need throughout their lives. I ask the Minister: please will he agree to invest additional resources in supporting looked-after children and care leavers—yes, in Rotherham, but also across the country—so that they can get the proper support they need to repair their lives?

Rotherham council is doing the very best it can. Ofsted gave Rotherham high praise in its 2018 inspection report, which I would like to quote. It said:

"Improved identification of risk and continued focus on uncovering and tackling complex abuse have led to increased demands on social care. A recent increase in the numbers of children looked after has placed additional demands on placements. Some of this increase is due to improvements in identifying risk, and to the local authority's complex abuse work."

It went on to say that the council had plans in place to address the demand:

"They are not complacent in the approach they take in order to better understand, continue to identify, and address the large-scale serious abuse suffered by children and young people. Managers, leaders and partners are diligent in their ongoing efforts to expose both current and historic exploitation. This is seen in the number of successful prosecutions and ongoing court trials of perpetrators."

Support to encourage children and young people who have suffered abuse helps them to feel safe enough to disclose their experiences and continues to develop. This includes services for those who are now adults. The stringent efforts of the local authority and partners to confront large-scale exploitation and abuse will continue to have its challenges, as victims continue to be identified."

I agree with the Ofsted report.

The council has committed to implementing successful evidence-based programmes and has invested nearly £1 million of its own funding in innovative programmes alone. Recent analysis found that its expenditure on children's social care has increased 90% between 2010 and 2016, compared with an average of 30% for other English local authorities. But the flip side of providing the level of care needed is the amount of extra funding for children's social care services that the council has had to find to meet escalating demand. The council increased the children's services budget by £20 million in 2016-17, but as demand continues to increase further, Rotherham borough council forecasts an overall £16 million overspend for children and young people's services for the current financial year. That leaves the council yet again in the position of having to find even more funding from its own resources, and it is further increasing the children's social care budget in 2019-20 by a net £7 million, making a total annual investment of £27 million over and above the 2015-16 budget.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady not only on this debate but on the enormous amount of work that she has done in this area. Does she agree that the most expensive thing is getting it wrong? That has been borne out in Rotherham and in other high-profile cases. The fear is that the money now going in to mop up the problems after getting it wrong—the intensive care for sexual-predator victims historically—is now taking up all the resources, so that there is a shortage of resources for the preventive work needed to make sure that children do not get into such dangers in the future. It is a false economy to take our eye off that ball while mopping up the problems of the past.

Sarah Champion: The hon. Gentleman is right: it is short-term and does not address the underlying problems that the early intervention of good social work can do to prevent such escalation and the costs associated with it—not only the financial costs, but the costs to the individual.

With the exception of £3.4 million of one-off support from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in 2015-16 and the £500,000 of annual funding provided for Stovewood, the council has had to fund these increased costs by making savings on other services and prioritising resources for children's services. The additional funding announced for social care in the autumn Budget and earlier today is insufficient to support the extraordinary levels of demand on councils across the country.

The Chancellor's recent announcement of an £85 million fund to assist councils with rising numbers of children in care is welcome, but the Department for Education has indicated that this money is likely to go to local authorities that Ofsted deems to be requiring improvement. Rotherham, which has worked so hard to improve itself, now has a service deemed good. Because of its success, it is being punished and is unlikely to get Government

support. That simply is not fair. The current funding system rewards failure, not levels of need. Will the Minister clarify if any of the £85 million will go to councils which have good or outstanding Ofsted ratings? If not, will he justify the rationale for denying support to those councils, regardless of the number of children they have in care?

Rotherham council has worked so hard to make its service a success, even in the light of drastic cuts, but how long can it and other councils be expected to maintain standards in such a difficult climate? Rotherham council has studied the reasons behind the rise in numbers of children in receipt of social work services, and in particular the numbers of children in care. It has found that when early intervention is not available or not properly co-ordinated, children do not receive the right intervention at the right time. Consequently, concerns have then escalated to the point where children have been taken into care, which is costly to the state and devastating to the child.

As funding has dried up, councils have found themselves in a double bind. Required under statute to deliver services to children most at risk of harm and children in care, resources have been concentrated to the extent that the Local Government Association finds that 73% of children's social care funding is now spent in just those areas. Of course, providing funding for the most vulnerable is the right thing to do. However, the reduction has driven a reduction in council spending on universal services such as Sure Start and early help, which so often provide the light-touch early intervention that can identify concerns and support families before crisis point is reached. I therefore beseech the Minister to recognise the value in children's care services and recognise that every child in this country deserves an opportunity to thrive, and that that takes persistent sustained and ambitious intervention from Government to achieve. Councils will be £3 billion short by 2025 if they maintain current service levels. Will the Minister agree today to ask the Chancellor to meet this shortfall in the spending review?

I am also concerned that there is insufficient support for teenagers and young adults as they transition out of social care, often without the support of parents or carers. In Rotherham, girls who were sexually abused as children have previously fallen through the gaps as they reach the age of maturity and statutory support falls away. Despite exploitation continuing beyond their 18th birthday, society turns its back and instead blames the victim and accuses them of making damaging lifestyle choices, rather than seeing them as vulnerable people in need of support.

Support for 16 and 17-year-olds and care leavers must be improved. Children's Society research has unsurprisingly found that vulnerabilities in childhood can intensify into early adulthood if left unchecked. The Department for Education's own research shows that children receiving statutory support from children's services do less well at school and are the most likely group to end up NEET—not in education, employment or training—in early adulthood. Will the Minister therefore commit to reviewing the support available for 16 and 17-year-old children in need as they make the difficult move into adulthood?

The Minister knows that excellent social work practice occurs in local authorities across the country on a daily basis. Families receive a service that helps them to get

[Sarah Champion]

their lives back on the right track: dads get support to quit drinking, mums get the mental health treatment required, parents re-enter work, and children get to school on time. If MPs query what the extra money I am requesting is actually needed for, then I beg them to visit their local children's social care teams and listen to what social workers say.

More resources result in a less stretched service and more time for professionals to spend with families providing the support they need at the earliest possible moment. More resources result in that little bit extra in the social worker's budget: a pram for the destitute mum; a burger for a teenager running away from home; or a taxi to get dad across town for his mental health assessment. Why is that important? Because social workers want and need to give every opportunity they can to keep children at home with their families.

In November last year, the UN rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights concluded that poverty in the UK has been a political choice. Well, the Government have before them another political choice: whether to fund services that protect vulnerable children from harm and provide high-quality care for children in the state system, or to choose to ignore the crisis and pretend that their funding for innovation and transformation is anything more than a drop in the ocean. Let us not be in any doubt: this is also a political choice. Will the Minister please make the right choice tonight and commit to provide the core funding that Rotherham so desperately needs?

8.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) on securing this important debate. We have heard interventions from the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) about her work in this area. I whole-heartedly agree that nothing is more important than the work we do to ensure that vulnerable children are able to live safe and happy lives and achieve their potential wherever they live and whatever their background or circumstance.

I congratulate Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council on how hard it has worked to turn around its children's services, with the instrumental support of our commissioners, including Mary Ney and Patricia Bradwell. I was delighted when Rotherham's children's services were rated "good" by Ofsted last March, following three years of intervention by my Department and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address systemic failings. That is a real credit to Ian Thomas and Sharon Kemp, and to the local politicians who have worked so closely with them. It is good to see the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) on the Opposition Front Bench. He, the right hon. Member for Rother Valley and the hon. Member for Rotherham have spent many hours working with their local politicians and leaders to deliver that turnaround. They have shown that when there is buy-in from leaders locally, both politically and at officer class, real change can be achieved. This was not intervention for intervention's sake, but to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable children and families in our society.

As I hope we all agree, we welcome the further £410 million in 2019-20 for local authorities to invest in adult and children's social care services, which was announced in the autumn Budget. That is on top of the more than £200 billion until 2020 that was made available in the 2015 spending review for councils to deliver local services, including children's services. Of that, Rotherham is currently forecast to have a core spending power of £206 million in 2019-20—an increase of 1.6% on last year.

I recognise that Rotherham and other local authorities are delivering in a very challenging environment—it would be foolish to claim otherwise—and that they have had to make difficult choices as they work to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. I assure the House that my Department is continuing to work closely with the sector to build the strongest evidence base for long-term children's services funding as part of the spending review. We are also working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to inform a review of relative needs and resources to make sure that at future Government funding settlements, the money gets to where it is needed most.

On top of that core funding, my Department has agreed to provide an additional £2 million to Rotherham over the four years to 2021, recognising the additional pressures from the increase in children's social care referrals from Operation Stovewood. That is in addition to the nearly £750,000 that we gave in 2015-16 to 2016-17 to alleviate the immediate pressures on services. My Department also remains committed, along with the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and NHS England, to continuing to work with Rotherham and South Yorkshire police to assess the demand on local services as a result of Operation Stovewood. As set out in the Government's victims strategy, we want to support even more victims to speak up by giving them the certainty that they will be understood, protected and supported through their journey, regardless of their circumstances or background and whether or not they report the crime.

We all agree that the failings that led to the child sexual exploitation that took place in Rotherham must never, never happen again, either in Rotherham or elsewhere. The Secretary of State and I are united in making it our priority to do everything that we can to prevent that. That is why my Department is funding the child sexual exploitation response unit to provide independent support to local areas and will be funding a new £2 million child exploitation service, which is launching later this year. That is on top of over £2 million of funding for two innovation programme projects. The hon. Member for Rotherham referred to them as drops in the ocean, but they are innovative programmes to test new models of safeguarding children. That includes the Lighthouse project, based in Camden, which is providing a complete range of services for victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation and their families, under one roof.

We know that many of the children and young people who were victims of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham are now facing, or have already faced, the difficult transition to adulthood, about which the hon. Lady is rightly concerned. The Government are committed to ensuring that they and all other vulnerable children are ready for adult life, avoiding cliff edges in support. That is why we have extended the offer of support from local

authorities to all care leavers up to the age of 25, and why our reforms to support special educational needs also now extend from nought to 25.

By revising it last year, we strengthened the statutory guidance, "Working together to safeguard children", to make clear the importance of transitions, and it now states clearly the expectation that a local authority should plan for transitions in advance for children on child in need plans and child protection plans, including, specifically, where children are likely to move between children's and adult services.

I turn to the hon. Lady's comments about early help, which we know plays an important role in promoting safe and stable families. Early help is about intervening early with the right families at the right time and in the right way. The statutory guidance is clear that in doing that, local areas should have in place a comprehensive range of effective and evidence-based services to address assessed needs early.

Across Government, we are doing that by tackling the problems that cause children to be in need. That includes better supporting those with alcohol-dependent parents, landmark legislation for those affected by domestic abuse, investment in early years education and support for children and young people's mental health. The Government have also committed £920 million to the troubled families programme to achieve significant and sustained improvement for up to 400,000 families with multiple, high-cost problems by 2020. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham said, the cost of non-intervention and failure is much higher. Rotherham has been allocated £5.5 million from 2015 to 2020 and has already received over £3 million of that funding.

In making sure that the right families receive the right support at the right time, investment in innovation is key and must not be underestimated. The hon. Member for Rotherham is critical of that investment, but I would argue that it is right that core social care funding be supplemented by that support for local authorities to manage rising demand and costs through adopting and adapting the best new practices.

Sarah Champion: To be clear, I am not critical of innovation—it is great—but it should come on top of core funding, not instead of it. The Minister mentioned the £500,000 a year for four years. That will fund 10 looked-after children placements. We have over 600 in Rotherham. Will he please just tell me whether he is going to give us additional funding? We are on our knees in Rotherham and begging him for support.

Nadhim Zahawi: I attempted earlier to explain our plan for the spending review, but I hope the hon. Lady will understand that I cannot pre-empt a spending review from the Dispatch Box.

The sector, my Department, the Ministry of Justice and the new What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, funded by my Department, are all looking to understand better what makes a difference in supporting children to stay with their families safely and preventing them from reaching this crisis point. Strong decision making is critical to ensuring that children are removed from their families only as a last resort.

As I highlighted earlier, promising signs are emerging from our £270 million investment in the children's social care innovation, partners in practice and improvement programmes. For example, an integrated edge-of-care service, No Wrong Door, in north Yorkshire, has delivered extraordinary results, with 86% of young people staying out of care and getting greater stability and improved educational and employment outcomes. All of this is strengthening families and protecting children.

We continue to learn from what achieves the best outcomes for children and families and to support local authorities to adopt and adapt the programmes that successfully intervene to prevent problems from escalating. The hon. Lady mentioned the £84 million investment over the next five years to build on learning from the most promising innovation programmes and projects, such as that in north Yorkshire, and to improve social work practice and decision making. In up to 20 local authorities, this new strengthening families and protecting children programme will support more children to stay safe at home with their families, where that is in their best interests. The hon. Lady asked how the funds would be allocated. We are working with the sector to determine how best to do that, looking particularly at authorities that are struggling to meet challenges caused by rising pressures.

The practice of staff locally—from the leadership of directors of children's services to the decision making of social workers—is also paramount in ensuring that the right children are given the right support at the right time. We are undertaking a programme of reforms to ensure that there is a highly capable, highly skilled workforce making good decisions about what is best for children and families. That includes a significant investment in training and development to meet clear professional standards for social workers. We have also established a new specialist social work regulator, Social Work England, and we are rolling out a national assessment and accreditation system. I am pleased that we are discussing Rotherham's participation in the second phase of our voluntary roll-out of the programme.

Alongside our existing programme for aspiring practice leaders and new practice supervisors, we are working with the sector to establish a strategy to support current and future leaders. As I have said before, this is about realising our aim to establish a consistently stronger, more confident profession, making better assessments of children's safety and welfare and equipped with the skills to deliver lasting change for families.

Let me end by echoing the hon. Lady's thanks to social workers and all those who work so hard to support vulnerable families and children every day. I have seen their passion and dedication at first hand. For example, last year, during my visit to Brighton, I spent the day with two social workers, Ruth and Jen, who were an absolute credit to the profession. As I said at the beginning of my speech, we have a shared ambition to ensure that the most vulnerable children have the safety and stability that they need in order to achieve their potential.

Question put and agreed to.

8.56 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 5 February 2019

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

GWR and Network Performance

9.30 am

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Great Western Rail (GWR) delays and performance across the network.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for generously accepting my application for this urgently needed debate on the Great Western rail franchise, and the many colleagues from across the House who supported it. It is good to see so many colleagues from across the network in the Chamber; they will represent the concerns of passengers from across the network and the difficulties that they face. It is clear that the deteriorating GWR service affects many hon. Members and their constituents.

I also thank those who shared their stories and frustrations about GWR's failures on the RailUK Forums and the Great Western passengers forum, and my constituents who did so on Facebook and Twitter. I thank the Parliamentary Digital Service for its outreach work in support of this debate, and the House of Commons Library and my office for helping to compile a list of some of those concerns.

Carmel, who commented on one of the forums, summed up the situation:

"Terrible customer experience with travel and website use. Cannot rely on the train service to get me to work on time despite my rail fare going up year on year. Cancelled trains, delayed trains, high cost...Hopeless and frustrating journeys day after day. Poor Wifi, ridiculous paper filling out to get a refund on tickets. Makes life very stressful for commuters."

Those are some of the issues that I will touch on.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the way he is leading this very important debate. On that point, my constituents who have contacted me say they want to use the train service more often and not drive to work, but they cannot, due to the issues that my hon. Friend identifies—particularly those relating to reliability. Does he agree that that is simply not acceptable any more?

Stephen Doughty: Absolutely. I concur with that point. It is a great tragedy that the service problems are turning many potential rail users on to the roads. We do not want that to happen, particularly in the south Wales corridor.

As the Library helpfully summarised for Members in the debate briefing, Great Western Railway is currently run by FirstGroup under a direct award that is due to expire in March 2019. The Department for Transport decided to exercise its option to extend the direct award until April 2020, and we understand that it plans to negotiate another direct award for two years until April 2022. It took that questionable decision despite the fact

that, as the Library outlined, Great Western's performance has seriously deteriorated of late. That is reflected in the declining levels of passenger satisfaction on its part of the network. The autumn 2018 national rail passenger survey revealed that passenger satisfaction was just 78%, and had declined from 84% when the survey was conducted three years earlier. Even more shockingly, only two thirds of GWR passengers were satisfied with the reliability of trains, and only 40% were satisfied with the way GWR handled delays.

The Great Western route is unusual in that it is hugely wide geographically. It stretches right along the historical south Wales and west country main line, famously developed by Brunel, and serves the M4 corridor and the commuter lines into the Thames valley. Crucially, it also goes down to the south-west, Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire. It is a lifeline for many communities. People rely on it for commuting between those regions and travelling to and from London.

There have been substantial problems on the network for the past few years, a variety of which have hit the headlines. The bulk relate to the delayed and altered electrification programmes, the responsibility for which lies with the DfT and Network Rail, and to the introduction of the new trains. Surprisingly, the Department extended the franchise without adequate consultation or consideration. The problems include serious delays, poor service, delays in processing compensation claims and other concerns about performance include catering issues, failures relating to reservations and the management of rail replacement services at crucial periods.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): On the point about new trains, does my hon. Friend find it staggering that the trains that have been commissioned for use on the line are in some cases worse than the old 125s, which were introduced in the 1970s? People cannot even walk the entire length of the trains that have been bought, so they can be stuck at one end of the train with no catering services. Even if there is a perfectly adequate trolley on the train, it may not be able to get to them because the train is split into two units.

Stephen Doughty: Indeed. In fact, I had that experience myself on the last Great Western train that I took. There was hot water in only half of the train—there was no hot water in the toilets or for the catering services. The staff simply shrugged their shoulders and said, "We see this problem all the time."

I met Hitachi yesterday to discuss some of those concerns. I have to say that it has been very frank and forthcoming about the issues it has experienced with engineering the new trains. Unfortunately, that is what happens if a new fleet is rushed into service without adequate testing and operation time, and without redundancy and additional rolling stock. Great Western's old HST fleet was sold off to Scotland before enough of the new trains were ready and functioning. That is why many of the problems have happened.

I am disappointed that, despite the many meetings that Members from both sides of the House have had with Great Western management, a blame culture seems to have developed among GWR, Network Rail, the Department for Transport and in some cases the developer of the new rolling stock, Hitachi. As I said, Hitachi has been frank and honest about the problems it has faced

[Stephen Doughty]

and what it is doing to deal with them, but the net result for passengers is poor service. I am sorry to say that the managing director of GWR, Mark Hopwood appears out of touch in relation to some of the problems, and unwilling or unable to get a grip on the litany of failure over the past few years.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my frustration that, despite the litany of complaints about service, GWR's franchise keeps getting renewed? The Government do not seem remotely interested in performance and passenger satisfaction levels.

Stephen Doughty: I completely agree with my constituency neighbour. The reality is that the service was underperforming and declining, and yet GWR was given an extension, and could be given another one. Most passengers would find that extraordinary.

Our railways are a vital public service for all our constituents. I want to cover the price hikes, the delays, the new rolling stock, compensation and the electrification problems. Trains are increasingly overcrowded. Many constituents have contacted me and have even sent pictures of the overcrowding on Great Western services, particularly on the London-Reading leg, where the service is very disappointing.

Research released this week by Transport Focus, using results from the national rail passenger survey, which focused on 1,458 GWR passengers, shows that overall satisfaction has gone down and sits at a poor 78%. Only 49% of the group felt that the GWR services provided value for money. Meanwhile, season tickets prices continue to skyrocket. They have gone up by 20% since 2010, and some tickets have gone up by 30%. More fare increases were announced at the start of this year. It is good to see the Chair of the Transport Committee in the Chamber. She made that very clear in her comments in November. She said:

"After the year passengers have had, any increase in rail fares is going to be unwelcome. But 3.1 per cent—the largest increase we've seen since January 2013—represents a real kick in the teeth."

That is what my constituents and others who have posted comments on the forums are telling me.

One of my constituents, Mark, spoke about the Cardiff-Portsmouth service, specifically through Trowbridge and Fareham. He said that, until December, he was able to book in advance and get a return for about £20, but since the new year the same journey, departing and arriving at the same time, has almost doubled in price, and yet the service is poorer. His words say it all: the trains are "always packed" and "often delayed".

Others have shared similar experiences. Azriel said that GWR's prices were "outrageous", and that trains were always "very full", and echoed other comments that point to the frustration that many of us have about the south Wales corridor and the fact that the electrification, which has been delayed and complicated, will stop in Cardiff. It will not even go to Swansea, as was promised.

Jo Stevens: My hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way. A standard return rail ticket to London from my constituency, Cardiff Central, costs £242. For the same price, passengers could fly from our Welsh

Labour Government-owned Cardiff airport to Barcelona and back three times, and they would still have change for a taxi home. Is it any wonder that my constituents are giving up on using GWR? Does my hon. Friend agree with them?

Stephen Doughty: I completely agree with them. My hon. Friend's constituency neighbours mine; they are either side of Cardiff Central station. If someone goes out the front, they end up in my hon. Friend's constituency, and if they go out the back, they end up in my constituency. I hear the same stories all the time. Many people have told me that they are turning to driving, instead of using trains. They have called train travel on GWR trains "unbearable" and "awful". One said:

"Since the new rolling stock was introduced on long distance services, I have driven long-distance more as the new trains are (for me and my partner) unbearable."

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very compelling case on behalf of his constituents. When the Minister replies, he will no doubt say that the Government are investing record amounts in our rail network, and of course he is right, but the problem is that, due to the fragmented nature of our system and the lack of co-ordination, that investment is not leading to the improved services that passengers expect. They understandably feel very angry about having to pay higher fares when they are not seeing an improvement in service. Until that is fixed, there will not be the trust in the rail industry that we want.

Stephen Doughty: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, who chairs the Transport Committee. Later in my speech, I will come to some of my own views on that, which have been known for a long time. We should have a co-operative, publicly owned service, and a different model for our railways in which we bring the different parts of the system together.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Since 2010, Wales has received 1.6% of investment for 5% of the population and 11% of the railway network. Over a longer period, it has been only 1%. That is fatal under-investment in Wales. There has not been a lot of investment and we need more.

Stephen Doughty: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. What a contrast with the new investment announced by the Welsh Labour Government for the services for which they are responsible. The new Transport for Wales services have recently encountered many difficulties, but I am absolutely convinced that with new rolling stock, the new services will be hugely improved. The Welsh Government are investing in those services.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way; he is making a well-informed speech to represent his constituents, as he always does.

On the Welsh Government's investment, does he agree that it is ironic that over a number of years we have seen little to no investment in stations—including in my constituency, in Pencoed, Tondur and Maesteg—yet that remains the responsibility of the UK Government? If it were not for the Welsh Government finding avenues to bring about station improvements, we would see very limited changes. The Welsh Secretary says, "I want to

extend the line all the way beyond Carmarthen,” yet the Department for Transport does not invest in the infrastructure to achieve what is supposedly his grand design for rail infrastructure in Wales.

Stephen Doughty: Indeed; aspects of the process, including which services are covered and where the investment goes, can be confusing for passengers and for our constituents.

I will come back to train delays and cancellations, which are one of the primary concerns that my constituents contact me about. Claire told me,

“At least I’ve been able to take my booked trains this year. Last year 50% of the trains on which I’d booked a seat were cancelled.”

LZ said,

“Appalling, over-priced service. For nearly 2 months in October and November 2018 I travelled between Frome and Bristol 4 times a week...and it was ON TIME just 3 times! The carriages are dirty, too cold in the winter and in the summer trains were cancelled for being too hot.”

The House of Commons Library briefing that I mentioned absolutely confirms that performance has seriously deteriorated. It says that in the last four quarters, fewer than 85% of GWR services have arrived at their final destination within five minutes of their scheduled arrival time.

Research by Which?—interestingly, it just opened a support office in my constituency—ranked GWR 20th out of 30 UK train companies for commuter rail services, with an overall customer score of just 47%. It received just two stars for punctuality and value for money, which are both critical aspects of train travel. When ranked for leisure rail services, GWR also ranked 20th out of 30, and achieved a slightly higher—although not very good—customer score of 56%.

The latest statistics from GWR’s own website, for 9 December to 5 January, show that only 90.7% of trains were punctual within their five minutes on-time allowance—below GWR’s own target for punctuality. That is extraordinary. The reasons for those delays—based on my investigations and conversations with different stakeholders—appear to be a series of problems, including delays and overruns of electrification works; staff shortages and aspects of staff training, to which inadequate time is dedicated; failures of new rolling stock, with the DfT introducing new trains without an adequate testing period; and delays in delivery while old stock was transferred early to Scotland, which left no contingency.

There is also another series of issues to do with communication and confusion among the different parts of this convoluted system, between which a blame game has developed. GWR will blame Network Rail and the Department for Transport; Hitachi will blame the Department and GWR; Network Rail will say, “It’s not us, guv, it’s the GWR franchise owners and the Department for Transport.” That is simply not good enough. In a tweet, the Welsh Labour leader of Newport City Council said to me that the high fares, such as a £200 return from Newport to London, are

“outrageous, especially when you have to stand all the way to Swindon on the return journey.”

She also mentioned the delays and cancellations.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way—he is being extremely generous with his time. His point about customers’ and constituents’ frustration about the delays is an important

one. In my patch in the west midlands, where GWR also operates, those frustrations are often driven by a lack of staff. That causes frustration to the extent that, when they have a choice, some of my constituents drive up to 45 minutes to use an alternative railway line. Does he agree that that does that not make sense for my constituents and is disturbing for them, and does not make sense for the company either?

Stephen Doughty: Indeed—nor does it make sense for the environment and reducing carbon emission, which we all know is crucial. I feel quite sorry for the GWR staff at times, because they do an incredible job and work very hard. When speaking off the record, they are often just as frustrated about the lack of training and support that they are given. They often have to deal with complex problems, such as failures of the new rolling stock, when they have not been given adequate support to do so.

I will mention some of those particular problems. On the new trains, there have been door failures. We get frequent complaints about the seats, which are supposedly ergonomically designed but are some of the most uncomfortable seats someone could ever sit on. As for catering, we were told that they were going to get rid of the buffet cars on the London to Cardiff services, but that was not what passengers wanted. Often, a trolley with no hot water comes through, and it will only go through half of the train—that is if it can get through the train because, of course, if the train is overcrowded, it cannot. There have been issues with train safety systems failing, with the reservations system simply not working, as well as generator problems caused by the fact that bi-modal diesel and electric trains are running more on diesel because of delays to electrification. As a result, the engines sooted up and failure rates rose.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman share my frustration about the announcement—one sometimes hears it over the tannoy—that there is not a train crew available to drive the train? Does he share my concern that there seems to be a lack of planning, as well as potential skimping on preparing sufficient resources to crew the trains?

Stephen Doughty: Indeed; I have experienced that, particularly with services departing from Paddington, which should be one of the easiest places to have train crews available, as well as relief train crews if there is a problem.

As a result of all that, GWR has had the third largest increase in complaints rates in the country—behind Northern and Grand Central—with complaints rising in the last quarter. Like Grand Central, a reason for the increased volume of complaints is the quality of the train, as well as delays and cancellations.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): My hon. Friend has not yet mentioned the problems faced by people with disabilities and mobility issues when travelling on trains. I was at a recent meeting with a group of people who were mostly wheelchair users or had other mobility issues, and they have problems with ramps not arriving, the wheelchair space being blocked, and not being able to get through the train because it is so packed. Does he share those concerns?

Stephen Doughty: I certainly do—I have seen aspects of that with my own eyes. People with disabilities and, interestingly, people with bicycles who want to travel with them on board, complain about the lack of access on such services. We are supposed to be making the railways as accessible as possible to people, whether they cycle in, use wheelchairs or have other mobility issues. We are simply not doing well enough.

Claiming compensation is another serious issue. Which? research from last year revealed that train companies, including GWR, were providing misleading advice to passengers about their rights by making blanket statements that they were not liable for consequential losses. Hon. Members may be aware that Great Western currently offers only delay repay 30 to London Thames Valley route customers. Other passengers are eligible for delay repay 60. I have been delayed for 40 to 50 minutes many times, but was not eligible for any compensation. The number of people choosing to pursue a claim is relatively low in comparison to the number of people eligible. That is partly due to the failures of the compensation system, which is very complex to navigate. According to Which?, only 51% of people said that they would know how to find information about claiming compensation. Clearly, there is a gap.

One figure reveals all: how can it possibly be acceptable that GWR has had to pay out £22.6 million in compensation for delays between 2015 and 2017? That raises a very serious question for the Minister about whether the franchise should be extended or renewed in any way.

We have also seen problems with electrification, and the National Audit Office made a critical report about that—how it had been managed, the overall cost increases and delivery delays. I accept that that is not GWR's fault; it is an issue for the Department for Transport and for Network Rail. Again, however, the seeming lack of communication at various points between GWR, the train manufacturers, the DFT and Network Rail has resulted in more problems, with trains having to operate in a way that they were not designed for and needing expensive overhauls and modifications to cope, let alone the huge disappointment about the cancellation of electrification to Swansea and other locations across the network.

Station management has been touched on, in particular at Paddington, and although Cardiff Central, where we see confusion, is managed by Transport for Wales, a lot of GWR services go through it. Other issues include accessibility of toilets, for disabled customers in particular, or toilet facilities not even being available; ticket barriers not working; the failure of rail replacement services, notably over Christmas, with no co-ordination of buses and trains, and many people being delayed even further; and of course the provision of information to passengers.

My view of what is to blame has been clear for many years. It is the separation of track from trains brought about by privatisation, the fragmentation of network and franchises, and the consistent lack of political leadership and oversight—epitomised in extremis by the current Transport Secretary, I am sorry to say. It is time to take back control of our railways and to return them to public ownership or, even better, in my view as a Co-operative MP, to move them to a public co-operative or mutual model, in some combination that brings

together the best of a passenger or consumer and staff-led service, where everyone has a stake, and fragmentation in the system is simply reduced.

Many commentators and experts have written important works on how to run our railways in future. Back in 2011, Christian Wolmar did a report for the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association, and in 2012 an ASLEF and Co-operative party report by Professor Paul Salveson looked at issues in Wales. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), have made clear their support for a "people's railway", which would deal with many of the issues.

I have three simple questions which I hope that the Minister will address in his response. What are the DFT doing to hold GWR to its franchise commitments, and does he agree that the issues raised today are unacceptable? What justification did his Department have for extending the franchise, and is he considering further extensions? Why has the DFT set such unrealistic targets for the new rolling stock, and does his Department take responsibility for any delays?

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Seven Back Benchers wish to speak, which gives about six minutes each. That is a guideline, rather than set a time limit.

9.52 am

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for securing this much needed debate on Great Western Railway. It allows me to talk about performance and delay problems in south-east Wales, including cross-border ones, and the service to Cardiff. One of the issues that I receive most correspondence on, in particular now the Severn bridge tolls have gone, is the poor quality of cross-border GWR services between Newport, Severn Tunnel Junction and Bristol.

Over recent years, the railway network in our area of south-east Wales has been plagued by chronic overcrowding and unreliable services, which have simply not adapted to growing demand. It is worth emphasising that over the past two decades, Severn Tunnel Junction alone has experienced a staggering 297% increase in station entries and exits, which will only keep growing. More people are moving to our area to commute to Bristol—we have some of the fastest-rising house prices in the UK—and it is estimated that the station's catchment area will include more than 65,000 within the next decade.

In the past year, passengers on key commuter services between Bristol and Severn Tunnel Junction have endured regular incidents of short-forming, cancellations and delays, compounded of course by the unprecedented level of engineering works on the network in 2018. Statistics from GWR show that weekday closures were up by 66% on 2017, and weekend and overnight work up by 145%. Clearly, work to repair, modernise and improve the tracks and the service offered to passengers is welcome, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth said, there is little good feeling among passengers that what they are getting is good value for money for the increasing costs of their commutes, especially compared with many other areas in Europe.

Since 2010, the cost of a season ticket between Newport and Bristol Temple Meads has risen by 38%, and between Newport and Cardiff by an eye-watering 45%. No wonder commuters are feeling fed up. As my hon. Friend said, that is reflected in the most recent Transport Focus rail passenger satisfaction survey, which showed overall satisfaction with GWR services at its lowest level in more than four years. The survey also showed that between 2017 and 2018, passenger satisfaction with GWR's punctuality and reliability fell by 4%, and passenger satisfaction with levels of crowding fell by 6%.

I have expressed concerns about overcrowding and reliability directly to the managing director of GWR, and he has met constituents. I am grateful that he has been attentive to the problems. He has stated frankly that services were not good enough in 2018 and that customers had every right to feel frustrated. He assures me that we can expect some tangible improvements this year, given that the programme of training for drivers on new or improved rolling stock is nearing completion, and given progress on the switch to a newer fleet of local trains.

Over the next few months, however, GWR is still due to be working with a transitioning fleet of trains, which limits flexibility and has the potential to lead to delays. It is therefore important for the operator to redouble its efforts to ensure that any disruption to passengers is minimised. Communication with passengers is key—it is key for people to know what is going on over the next few months.

Locally, I am pleased that the peak Cardiff to Portsmouth GWR services, which are used by commuters to Bristol boarding at Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction, will be permanently upgraded to five carriages by the end of year. That is long overdue, and the sooner in 2019 that change can be delivered the better. The service has been nicknamed the “Sardine Express”. People have been left on platforms and told to travel in toilets, people have fainted, and people have suffered many other incidents of chronic overcrowding just trying to get to work. I understand that GWR is also working on plans to increase morning and evening peak services between Cardiff and London Paddington. That is much needed, and we need further details soon.

It is important that we see what time savings are possible from the trains and electrified lines once they are in place, although it would be far preferable for us to have a proper electrified line from London to Swansea. The Government's decision to cancel the full electrification of the main line remains a strategic blunder, and an unforgivable snub to the people of south Wales.

While I am on the subject of where the UK Government have failed our Welsh train lines, I look forward to the Williams rail review addressing UK rail investment in Wales. As many hon. Members have said, despite Network Rail's routes in Wales accounting for 11% of the route length, 11% of the stations and 20% of the level crossings in England and Wales, since 2011 an average of only about 2% of money spent on network enhancements in England and Wales has been spent in Wales. We should have received far more than that.

To conclude, the promise of improved services in 2019 is welcome, but we will continue to hold GWR and the Government to account on cross-border rail services. My constituents have endured a poor quality of service for far too long. Ultimately, the best way to keep fares

down and to ensure that services are run in the interests of passengers rather than profit is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth said, to bring our railways back into public ownership.

9.58 am

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I am glad to be able to speak in this debate. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part, Mr Betts. In this place, we often speak about things that we do not have personal experience of. However, as the MP for Penzance, the furthest south-west part of the country, I can claim that I have experience when it comes to railways, and Great Western Railway in particular, because I live so far away.

I want my tone to be positive, but it is true that I have seen delays. One time, about 12 Conservative MPs took about 12 hours to get just from Devon to London, missing several votes. That could have been dealt with better by Great Western Railway. However, that was some time ago, and we have not seen a repeat lately. It is also true that far too often the washbasins have no water, which is important for basic hygiene, let alone anything else. Furthermore, the refund experience for delays has not been good enough. From speaking to Great Western Railway, I understand that it gave that job to another company, but it did not go so well. I believe it has been improved.

It is very easy to complain; if we use trains a lot, we can always find reason to moan about something. Obviously, we want value for money, but the truth is that on our rail network, not just in the south-west but across the country, there has been enormous growth in passenger numbers. Since 2010, in Cornwall and the south-west, the number has grown far more than anyone ever expected. There are infrastructure problems right the way down the south-west, but the figures provided by the Library show that there are only 79 complaints for every 100,000 journeys. I represent about 100,000 people across my constituency. I would be quite glad to receive just 79 complaints. I imagine many other industries and sectors have a higher rate of complaints.

Many comments were made about price. It is a fair point that people who pay the maximum to go down to Cornwall spend huge amounts of money. However, when I came up on Monday, my advance single was just £19. That will please those who look closely at my expenses. I want to take a more positive tone, but that may change, because from 17 February, as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) knows, there will be major disruption on the network because of Network Rail's tunnel improvements. I am not yet sure how I will get here.

I want to talk briefly about my constituents right at the end of the line in Penzance, who have seen 36 brand-new inter-city express trains. That is over and above what the Government ordered. Many of them are specifically to service the route in Devon and Cornwall. I do not recognise many of the concerns raised today about those trains. I do not hear from constituents the complaints about the new trains that have been expressed in the debate. Far from selling all its old rolling stock, Great Western Railway has retained 11 trains purely to serve the Cornish economy and is beginning a half-hourly service. In the near future, passengers will be able to go a platform anywhere in Cornwall and get a train within

[Derek Thomas]

half an hour. That is a significant connectivity improvement for those living in the very rural south-west part of the country.

Great Western Railway has worked with councils and others to invest more than £22 million in a train care centre in Penzance—a massive piece of infrastructure. Often, Cornwall is a poor cousin when it comes to big schemes such as that, so we are delighted to have new skilled jobs, apprenticeship opportunities and huge investment in the heart of Penzance. The sleeper carriages have been completely refurbished. Those who use the sleeper will see a dramatic improvement from the carriages that served for many decades to the plush new carriages. I am not sure whether they are four or five star, but they are certainly very comfortable. I recommend that the Minister and others come right down to Penzance; people are reluctant to do so, but the sleeper service is excellent.

Great Western Railway is expanding depots at Exeter and elsewhere to allow for the half-hourly service. There are positive things to be said about what is happening on our rail network right down to Penzance. If someone were to drive down to Penzance today, they would find a whole load of roadworks in St Erth, which is the last major junction before Penzance. I do not want to discourage anyone from going on holiday, but they should take the train. The roadworks are happening because of the huge investment in the station, which will boost our economy and tourism. People will be able to get to the train station, park their car and get on the railway to go to all corners of the network—Penzance, St Ives and elsewhere. That is a real boost for tourism and a real opportunity to provide much-needed improvements to infrastructure. There was more investment in infrastructure last year than in any year since Brunel built the railway. It is no surprise that there will be some disruption to our journeys. I am confident that there will be better performance, better trains, better capacity and a better timetable.

We are getting to the five-year anniversary of when the railway washed into the sea at Dawlish. Those images are permanently fixed in the minds of those of us who live down there and were cut off for several weeks. People around the world saw the intense damage to that section of the railway. There is no way that Great Western Railway can be held responsible for the delays in getting a solution. The solution has not yet been absolutely confirmed, and I take the opportunity to say to the Minister that we must make progress. We will not be forgiven if there is another catastrophe such as that, with no progress to improve that part of the infrastructure.

There has been major transformation and increased demand, and we should expect teething and growing pains. Mr Betts, I wonder whether you could give me some advice. When our children grow, they go through teething, which can be a very stressful process for them and their parents. They then develop into puberty, which again can be a stressful and difficult process. Is it your suggestion that we hand our children over to the state, or that we continue to work with them and enable them to grow, flourish and make the contribution to society that we want them to? As Great Western grows and develops and the network improves, and we go through growing and teething pains, I suggest that we

stick with the commitment to improve infrastructure, to support our industry and to get the services we deserve in the far south-west.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): All the advice I can give is for Members to stick to six minutes.

10.6 am

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing this debate. Great Western needs to answer questions not just on the Welsh lines, but on the service to the far south-west. It was good to hear from the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) about Great Western's service to the far south-west, but I am afraid I am not drinking the Kool-Aid in the way that he is. We need huge improvements.

Today marks five years since Dawlish was washed away. We all remember the hanging Peruvian rope bridge images. Five years on, there have been soundbites aplenty, and we have had press releases and promises coming out of our ears. If we could lay those press releases next to each other to form a railway, we would have the best train line in the world, but we cannot; we need the money. I really hoped that there would have been a funding announcement to coincide with the five-year anniversary, to show that Ministers get it. Instead, we seem to have half-cancelled visits, planning applications submitted without the funding to go along with them and a lack of understanding about when the money will come.

The far south-west needs and wants its fair share of rail funding. The programme for which Network Rail has submitted a planning application seems to be a good step forward, which would improve not only Great Western services but CrossCountry services that use that piece of track. We need the Minister or the Secretary of State to announce the money. They do not need to come to Devon to do that; they could make their announcement in Whitehall, or the Minister could make it today. All we need is confirmation that the money will come. To date, we have not had that, and the lack of funding for our train line grates on people in the far south-west.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): The hon. Gentleman mentioned half-cancelled visits in reference to me. I know there was a media story about that yesterday. I have never been scheduled to visit Devon; I am afraid that that is just incorrect. I am very happy to ensure he does not inadvertently mislead the House.

Luke Pollard: I thank the Minister for doing so. If he has not planned to visit, I encourage him to do so, so that he can see the problems we are having at Dawlish.

Andrew Jones: Did the hon. Gentleman just tell me not to bother visiting, but say in the next sentence that I should visit? I look forward to a visit, but I ask that he be consistent.

Luke Pollard: I think the Minister is confused. I would like him to visit, and to reach into his pockets and give us the funding we deserve. I would like the Government of which he is a part not to have spent five years presiding over promises of jam tomorrow, but no funding. I am happy to have this back and forth, but people in the far south-west just want a train line that works, so that Great Western and CrossCountry services will not be cut off.

Five years on, the situation is not good enough, and we need that announcement today. If the Secretary of State visits the west country in two weeks' time—I hope he does—I hope he will realise that he should have made that announcement months if not years ago, so that we would not be in the situation we are in today.

The anger that people in the far south-west feel is similar to that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth. Yesterday I asked people on Facebook, and they told me about their decisions to drive from the far south-west to Bristol or London because it is cheaper and faster. People mentioned problems with accessing trains as a result of the high cost, which people on disability living allowance cannot afford. I agree with my hon. Friend that the staff who work for Great Western Railway do a good job, but they are let down by a system that does not give them the focus they need.

Some things, however, have changed. On timetable changes, the half-hourly GWR service from Plymouth to Cornwall was supposed to start in December last year, but because of the timetabling chaos presided over by the Government, it has been delayed until December this year. Can the Minister reassure us that that service will start in December this year, and that passengers will not have to wait any longer for it?

I am grateful that we have new trains in the far south-west. They are a different model from those used in the service to Wales, and I would like the Minister to inject an element of transparency into any problems with the new trains along the Dawlish sea wall. I hope that the new trains will not encounter the same problems as the Voyagers do on the CrossCountry service, but if they do encounter problems, the best thing that the Minister and Great Western Railway can do is to be transparent and open about those problems rather than hiding them away. We need honesty in the far south-west about our funding and services. I agree with the hon. Member for St Ives that the sleeper service is better than it was, but we need that level of improvement right across our network.

The key point about the train service in the west country concerns whether someone can afford to get a train. The high price of train tickets is deeply disturbing, especially in Plymouth, which has a low-wage economy. Not everyone can afford the cost of train tickets to London, Bristol or other parts of the network. We need a train service that is resilient and has a long-term investment plan. This is not just about people getting the train. For us in Plymouth a decent, fast and resilient train service is totemic to our identity as a region. It tells a story about whether our region is open for business, and about whether Ministers will put their money where their mouth is and fund that train line properly. I hope that when he concludes the debate, the Minister will announce that there will be money. I fear

that we will get more promises of jam tomorrow with no funding announcement, but I hope the Minister will prove me wrong.

10.12 am

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The train line between Cheltenham and London is critical—I have likened it in the past to an artery, because it is responsible for nourishing so much of Cheltenham's prosperity. That has never been truer than it is today, because Cheltenham has exciting prospects with things such as the cyber-park, which will allow start-up businesses in that crucial sector to grow and develop, and will bring prosperity and opportunity to people from all walks of life. However, there is no doubt that the service provided by Great Western Railway is not at the level we need it to be.

Last summer we had a really concerning situation because, as I said to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), there were insufficient train crews. When I raised the issue with GWR, it said, "Well, some people are training and so on", and although that was terribly interesting, it was not a satisfactory explanation. To be fair, GWR recognises that it needs to improve, but even if it does I have a lingering concern about one crucial factor: the cost. Even for somewhere such as Cheltenham, which has a higher per capita income than the national average, the cost of a walk-up ticket is completely prohibitive. Again, it is not a complete answer to say that people must book in advance. If we want an agile economy in which people need to get on a train and go to London, it is not appropriate to say simply that that option is effectively not available to people because of the cost.

What is so invidious is that the cost per mile from Cheltenham to London is so much higher than in other parts of the country. The reasons for that seem opaque and are lost in the mists of time; they are linked to the structure that prevailed at the time of British Rail. That has got to change, particularly because although the cost per mile from Cheltenham is so much higher than it is elsewhere, the speed is slower. For example, a train journey from Exeter to London—200 miles—is quicker than one from Cheltenham to London, which is less than half the distance.

It is important to place this issue in a wider context, because it has not been all bad. GWR has been responsible for significant investment in Cheltenham Spa station, and we look forward to the opening of the car park in due course, with more than 80 additional spaces and an improved forecourt. The Swindon to Kemble line has been redoubled, and we look forward to sub-two-hour trains to London later this year. Those important service improvements cannot come soon enough, however, because the risk is of a modal shift away from trains as my constituents decide that instead of getting on a train at Cheltenham they will drive to Swindon, Kingham, Kemble or elsewhere—the point about pollution and so on has already been made.

Where does that lead us in terms of public policy? The drumbeat for renationalisation is growing louder—one can hear that from those on the Opposition Benches—but I respectfully counsel against it, because it is not the solution that a lot of people hope it might be. First, it would be extremely expensive to renationalise the railways, and that would mean taking precious resources away

[Alex Chalk]

from other sectors. Secondly, my real concern is that were the railways to be nationalised, if it came to a bidding war between the NHS and railways, the NHS would win. If it came to a bidding war between schools and railways, schools would win. If it came to a bidding war with any other precious public service, railways would be likely to come off second best.

I am just about old enough to remember the state of British Rail. It was atrocious: old, dirty, clunky rolling stock, and unspeakably awful food. Although I have some sympathy with the idea of renationalisation—there can be limits to privatisation, particularly when dealing with public goods that have a natural monopoly—we should be careful what we wish for.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman makes interesting points about public spending. Does he agree that the current Government are already making a significant investment in High Speed 2? Surely, any Government would balance their investments and spending on a number of different projects. In addition, the current franchise system is hugely costly and is using large amounts of public money very badly.

Alex Chalk: It is true that the system uses public money, but it comes down to how much public money, and what is the proper balance. I simply make the point that although it is easy in the abstract to suggest that if the railways come into public ownership, fares will come down and quality will go up, I suspect that is unlikely in reality. If I am looking for additional funding for my local oncology centre, compared with more rolling stock, I think I know which one I and many colleagues would prioritise.

If train operating companies want to enjoy public support—they do not enjoy enough public support because they are the author of their own misfortune in many circumstances—they must raise their game in two particulars. First, they must be more reliable, and secondly they must be more competitive in their pricing structure. Otherwise, the people of Cheltenham, who I represent, will feel that they are getting a raw deal. Public services must be for the people, and GWR needs to raise its game.

10.18 am

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing this debate and giving us the opportunity to speak on behalf of our constituents. Every delayed journey has a personal story, whether that is a missed connection for a holiday, or being late for a crucial job interview or hospital appointment. For all the promises we have been given, as we have heard, the figures remain poor.

I wish to talk about the increase in delays and the level of compensation offered to GWR customers, compared with those of other train operators. First, however, I will touch on the promised electrification. The delays and disruption to our current service have been significantly affected by the failings and mismanagement of the electrification programme by the Government and Network Rail. The electrification

programme offered much in the south-west. We were promised increased capacity, improved reliability and a better passenger experience, but it was so poorly managed that costs rose by £1.2 billion in 2015 alone. I was on the Public Accounts Committee at the time, and our report into electrification called the situation “staggering and unacceptable”.

I recall the decision, in 2016, to defer the electrification project for the key sections between Bath Spa, Bristol Parkway and Bristol Temple Meads. At one evidence-taking sitting of the Committee I asked Department for Transport leaders whether they had looked at the devastating effects that that would have on the local economy around Bristol South. I was told by the then permanent secretary that the impact would not be “perceptible”. That attitude reinforces the need for more local control over decisions that affect the city’s infrastructure. They should not be left to civil servants in Whitehall with no understanding of local economic needs.

To add insult to injury, the complete mess that was made of the electrification project in our area was spun as a positive thing for passengers. We were told that the pausing of the programme meant that it would be possible instead to embark on customer improvements and to offer passengers benefits that newer trains with more capacity would provide, without the requirement for “costly and disruptive” electrification works. We were promised sleek new Hitachi trains, with more seats, more leg room and better wi-fi. Views differ about the trains. Personally, I quite like the seats. However, the catering is totally pot luck, and the split trains make boarding a nightmare. As to the quiet carriage—there is no indication that it is one. We certainly do not feel that the quality of the experience has improved. The issue remains. The Government made promises to us about electrification and investment in the infrastructure of our city, which is a net contributor to the Exchequer, and which is struggling with air pollution and would like the promises fulfilled.

Despite the lofty promises of 2016, the statistics today speak for themselves. Problems are on the rise, as has been set out in the very good Library briefing for the debate. Most critically, in each quarter of 2017-18 the proportion of trains cancelled or significantly late was greater than in the previous quarter—a trend that accounts for the decline in passenger satisfaction across the network. I understand that GWR’s response has been that improvements to the service have caused short-term disruption, but I expect we would all like to know how long the short term can go on. My constituents have suffered long enough at the hands of the chaos between the Department for Transport, Network Rail and Great Western Railway.

That brings me on to the issue of compensation. There is gross inequality in the amount of compensation being offered to passengers by the different rail operators across the country. The extent of the anomaly was first brought to my attention in July by a constituent who was suffering perpetual delays in her daily commute, with all the negative knock-on effects that that can bring. I wrote to the Secretary of State and argued that it cannot be fair that some train operating companies offer refunds for delays of over 15 minutes, whereas others offer them for delays of over 30 minutes—including, bizarrely, GWR on its Thames valley route. However, GWR does not offer refunds on 30-minute delays on

the route serving my constituents. I also highlighted the discrepancy between the levels of refund paid by GWR for 60-minute delays. On local routes serving Bristol it is 50%, and yet on high-speed trains it is 100%. I urged the Secretary of State to seek amendments to the national rail conditions of travel, to reflect best practice in the industry, and to define 15 minutes as the new criterion for being late.

Three months later, the then Rail Minister replied and explained that the national rail conditions of travel was a national standard, setting out minimum standards, and that most train operating companies offered more than the minimum required. That is not an awful lot of good to my constituents. The reply also set out details of the Government's delay repay scheme, which compensates passengers for significant delays and cancellations based on the fare paid, with 50% for delays of 30 to 59 minutes and 100% for delays of over 60 minutes. I am pleased about the new scheme, but, as the Library briefing highlights, previous initiatives have shown that it can take many years to bring about such changes. Based on previous initiatives, the Library estimates that the new version of the scheme would not be rolled out until the mid to late 2020s. That means years more injustice for my constituents who suffer poor service that is unacceptable. However, I try to remain hopeful. The letter informed me that the Department has requested GWR to implement the scheme before the current contract expires. The managing director of GWR also told me that the operator is engaged in discussions with the Department and that it would like to introduce the scheme, although it has not yet been finalised. That was some three months ago.

I want to ask the Minister today what the outcome of those discussions was. Will he confirm that GWR will indeed introduce the delay repay scheme in 2019, as previously indicated, so that I can reassure my constituents and they will no longer be caught in the bad-tempered arguments now going on between the train operator, the track operator, and the Government?

10.24 am

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Briefly, we are, in the first instance, talking about problems with the trains. On the new trains there are problems with the toilets. When someone washes their hands in the sink, water goes all over the floor, and in fact water starts to seep out of the back of the toilet; that is to do with the way they are manufactured. There are fewer toilets and some carriages do not have them. I do not mean to be preoccupied with toilets, but some trains have arrived at Bristol without any carriage with a toilet.

There are issues with wi-fi not working, and with plug sockets between the seats. I found myself in a situation where there was a sleeping woman in the neighbouring seat, and fiddling around to plug a device in can be slightly embarrassing. There is no buffet car and the buffet trolley cannot get down. There are problems of cost, punctuality and cancelled trains. There were eight carriages in the old trains, and now there are two lots of five. Sometimes one of the fives is cancelled at short notice, so that people who have booked particular seats are affected. Families cannot sit together and people with disabilities have to stand up. Those are appalling standards for customers.

As to more strategic issues, as I mentioned earlier, Wales has 5% of the population, about 1.5% of the investment and 11% of the track, so we have been grotesquely underfunded. Since 2011 we have had about £198 million and we should have had £600 million. Electrification to Swansea was cancelled—that was another £700 million; and Network Rail cancelled a further £1 billion. The chronic under-investment has meant that standards simply are not up to scratch. The service to Swansea from Paddington is often only hourly, and it takes three hours. On High Speed 2, people will be able to get to Manchester within an hour. I could compare the Leeds and Manchester area with the Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea area—which is 3 million people. We get two trains per hour on the Bristol to Cardiff bit, and fewer to Swansea, as I have said. In the Leeds and Manchester area there are six trains per hour, and of course an investment of £3 billion is being made in the trans-Pennine upgrade—on top of the £52 billion for HS2. We are grotesquely underfunded, and our economy suffers massively.

Trains run at 125 mph in England, but when they get to Wales their speed goes down to 60, 70 or 80 mph, because we have not had the investment in the track. That is not a western powerhouse, but more of a 19th century infrastructure. After years of under-investment it is time for change and investment. What we do not need is the Secretary of State for Wales coming along with his penny-farthing idea of an extra little Swansea Parkway station, hoping that he can pat us on the head and give us a Brexit bung so that we will vote the right way.

We need investment in a Swansea metro, strategic infrastructure and connectivity between the Bristol conurbation, Cardiff and Swansea, so that we can grow a regional hub for the future. I hope that some of the leadership for that can be taken by Transport for Wales—the UK Government obviously have other things to think about—and that with the right money and the right governance we will get the right result. As we approach the appalling disaster of Brexit, we need investment in our infrastructure now, to give us a fighting chance of building prosperity in south Wales. That requires investment, planning and UK money, and it requires the Welsh Government to be given the steering wheel.

10.28 am

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. A number of excellent points have been made with which I want to associate myself, particularly in the speeches of my hon. Friends who represent seats in south Wales—there were several, so I will not mention them all by name—and of my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for Bristol South (Karin Smyth).

Obviously, fast and efficient rail services are hugely important to commuters and businesses in my area. Reading has more inward commuters from other parts of Berkshire and nearby areas than people commuting to London. The railway is a crucial part of the economic infrastructure across the Thames valley towards Bristol and, indeed, to south Wales. The importance of the growth strategy for south Wales and towards nearby parts of England has just been described by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies).

[*Matt Rodda*]

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) enjoyed sitting in the seats in the new Great Western trains. I rarely get a seat. This morning was a typical example; I was standing up all the way from Reading, which was manageable but certainly not ideal. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West is absolutely right about the quality of the trains. Although it is good to see new investment—we obviously want that—there has been quite serious mismanagement of it. The internal fitting of the new trains leaves a lot to be desired. The lack of a buffet car, the issues with toilets and a number of other practical issues seriously affect people. That can begin to wear down those who are commuting every day, and is deeply frustrating for many people, not least thousands of my constituents.

As if on cue, I was delayed by 10 minutes this morning and last night I had to put up with half an hour of chaotic mismanagement by First Great Western, which was perfectly timed for this debate, as though it was waiting to help us make our point.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this issue. There has been an average 3% fare rise on First Great Western services since the start of the year, with similar hikes throughout the UK, but at the same time there are talks of a reduced service. Does he agree that at some stage this House and this Minister must underline in a real and meaningful way that the profit margin is not the final consideration? The No. 1 consideration is that the service is viable, that a service is provided to those who need it most and, if the service is not there, that there is compensation. Those three things are necessary and must be in place before we go forward.

Matt Rodda: The hon. Gentleman draws on several points that I and colleagues are due to make or have made.

I come back to the issue of delays and quite how frustrating they are for daily commuters in towns like Reading and Slough, in addition to the sensible points made earlier. It is deeply frustrating to have to deal with delays on a daily basis. It has a huge impact on family life and on people's desire to work in London or to commute into Reading, Slough, Swindon or other business centres along the line. I am sure that applies to the other towns and cities represented here today. It is a deeply frustrating daily occurrence for hundreds and thousands of people in this region, which is a crucial part of our railway network.

I have a series of questions for the Minister about the performance of GWR and the Department for Transport. I will address both infrastructure investment and the management of the railway. First and foremost, why on earth did the Government delay electrification along this line? We have heard about the benefits that south Wales would have had if it had been properly managed. We have also had delays to our rail services because of the lengthening of the roll-out of electrification. The installation of the gantries was hugely delayed and on a number of the local lines that feed out from Reading, such as the lines to Basingstoke, Southampton, Oxford and Gatwick, we do not have that level of investment. Commuters using those lines, including many of my

constituents and others in neighbouring constituencies, are suffering and would like to see more electrification, not less. It is a huge issue.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has put his finger on that very important point. In Bath, where we suffer from massive air pollution, electrification has been stopped. That should certainly be a priority, particularly looking at air pollution. Why has the electrification through Bath not continued?

Matt Rodda: The hon. Lady makes an excellent point about pollution. There are three aspects of pollution that are deeply challenging in my area. The first is air pollution from soot and nitrous oxide. The second is the effect on global warming. Electrifying the railways should be the low-hanging fruit in tackling global warming, as it is obviously going to take carbon out of the atmosphere. It is a huge disappointment to many people that the Government have not seen it as a key priority.

The third point, which may affect colleagues in other urban centres, is that as part of the botched electrification, the train maintenance depot in Reading was moved. I believe that that has happened in other areas. We now have diesel locomotives, which should have been taken out of service, revving their engines at 5 o'clock in the morning outside terraced houses in Reading, because the maintenance depot was moved as part of the works. That is completely unacceptable and there is an ongoing legal dispute between Reading Borough Council and First Great Western, so I will not go into further detail. Noise pollution is a substantial additional problem as well as air pollution and carbon dioxide pollution, which all seriously affect towns and cities along the line and the lives of people who live near the railway.

My second question for the Minister, which is also blunt, is, why has First Great Western's franchise been repeatedly extended, given all the poor performance issues? I hope that as a new Minister, he will investigate that.

Time is pressing, but I would like to point out that I disagree with the Government's policy of large increases in season ticket prices. That has a direct impact on people in my constituency and along the line, as we heard earlier. I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that commuters are already having their salaries squeezed. Many residents in Reading and Woodley commute to London, or to nearby towns. They live in an area with high house prices and rocketing private rental prices, and at the same time their season tickets are going up by very large sums. That means that families, couples and single people are facing large cuts to their disposable income, which has a significant impact on their ability to enjoy life, especially family life. The Minister should address that and rethink this problem.

The railway is a vital public service that could—and should—be run much better. Investment is a key driver for jobs and growth in the Thames valley and along the whole railway corridor. However, as we have heard, there is a clear contrast between the poor performance of the current Government and a much more sensible long-term strategy. Colleagues have mentioned the importance of bringing the railway back into public ownership.

I will highlight that contrast in three simple points. I have mentioned the Government's poor management of electrification, and that areas such as Reading, Wales

and others have suffered severely. There are other aspects of mismanagement, including the cost to passengers of high fares and delays. In contrast, the Labour Government paid for the vast majority of the rebuilding of Reading station, which is a huge asset to our town and to travellers up and down the network. An incoming Labour Government would invest in electrification, and, most importantly, bring the railways back into public ownership. I believe that that would dramatically improve the quality of life for rail travellers and for businesses that are reliant on the railways.

In my opinion, rail is a vital public service, and the evidence clearly shows that. It brings economic benefit to our region. Given that the Minister is new in this post, I ask him to rethink the Government's policy and to look again at the dogma and failed economic views that have led to mismanagement, to the chaos of the franchising system, and to the lack of investment in capital infrastructure.

10.37 am

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair, Mr Betts, for yet another crucial debate about our railways.

Over the last few months it feels like I have been taking a tour of our nation, as I have felt the pain of passengers who have been badly let down by the way in which our rail service has been run. We have seen cases of incompetence in governance under the Secretary of State, how the whole franchise system is broken, and the cost of that failure to passengers. We have also heard loud and clear the cry for one integrated rail service, in public ownership. It will be a new model of public ownership—unlike the myths peddled by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk)—that moves the debate forward into a new era of rail. I say to the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) that it is 25 years since the Railway Act 1993, so it is clear that the broken model has gone through its growing pains and that it is time for change.

The model that we are promoting will address many of the issues and concerns that hon. Members have raised in the debate, not least those raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), when she talked about the cross-border issues that are hampering the connectivity that we need. We are ambitious, but we are real; we are radical, but we will work within the parameters of the possible. Yet again, I put on record my thanks to the industry, individual experts, the travelling public, trade unions and staff, for their engagement in building a plan for a modern integrated transport system, with rail at its heart.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) opened the debate eloquently, not only speaking powerfully on behalf of his constituents, but advocating innovatively for reform. I know the Welsh Government have sought to bring about reform of the railways in Wales, but they have had their hands tied by the centralist approach of our Government and the Secretary of State for Transport himself. Perhaps that was most noticeable, as we have heard today, when the Secretary of State, without consideration for improving connectivity, reliability and economic opportunity for people in Wales, with the stroke of a pen cancelled the rail electrification programme beyond Cardiff. That shameful act denied some of the poorest parts of the UK the economic opportunity to reach their full potential.

I would like the Minister to explain to me how the cost of the electrification upgrade ran out of control. The project was costed at £1 billion when the work was first identified under a Labour Government for the full 216 miles of the route; the cost rose to £1.7 billion in 2014, to £2.8 billion under the Hendy review, and now to a staggering £5.58 billion. The cost ran away with itself under the coalition and Tory Governments. I further ask why, when the economic chances of passengers in Wales and of Wales itself were cut, the Welsh Government were not able to access the £700,000 to invest in improvements to their public transport system. That would have been an obvious response, especially given the under-investment in transport in Wales, which my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) highlighted.

Instead of moving things forward, the Secretary of State announced that passengers beyond Cardiff would need to travel not on the new electric trains—we have heard about the multitude of problems with those—but on bi-modes. We have heard even more scandal about how the bi-modes just do not work. Those trains will still bellow out dirty diesel; they are heavier, more expensive to run and more demanding on the infrastructure. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) highlighted, there have been further problems with the new rolling stock. We have certainly heard that it has not addressed the real issues of congestion; we heard about the “Sardine Express”, and other hon. Members such as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) have highlighted how hard it is to get a seat on the trains.

Sadly, that is what we have come to expect from the Secretary of State. Thank goodness we have creative and forthright Members of Parliament such as my hon. Friends, who truly speak up for our whole population in Wales and the south-west on these matters and have put forward, yet again, a real case for urgency in bringing forward the transition to a modern railway system.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is making some strong points. Would she agree that the innovation shown by the Welsh Government is in stark contrast to the DfT? For example, in my constituency, they are working with a local business partnership involving Investec, Nigel and Andrew Roberts and others to develop a new St Mellons Parkway station in the east of the constituency, which is currently under-served by rail stations. That is an innovative approach, with Government working with the private sector to see that development go ahead.

Rachael Maskell: What the Welsh Government have been able to demonstrate is that rail is not an entity in itself, but is fully integrated into the economy and connected with other transport routes. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing that point into the debate.

The most powerful arguments I have heard in this debate have come from the voices of passengers, which hon. Members have reflected. We have heard their pain and their stories of woe. The fact that passengers across this line are paying 20% more but getting a worse service is frankly unacceptable.

We have heard about innovations that are needed to upgrade stations and making them safe. My hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) and for Bristol

[*Rachael Maskell*]

East (Kerry McCarthy) both highlighted how disabled people need a proper service, not only at stations, but on the trains themselves, which has not been delivered even with the new rolling stock. There is a catalogue of problems that must be resolved. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) gave the most powerful of speeches in making the case that, five years on from seeing the railway at Dawlish washed into the sea, the Government have yet to drive forward a programme to protect the whole of that vital south-west economy. We must see peninsula rail moving forward at pace now to protect the economy there.

Of course, we have the route itself, which is crying out for focus and proper governance. We have heard how the delay repay 15 system has not been introduced in an expedient way, yet this is a line that has had three direct awards, which will shortly total nine years, when it only had a franchise for seven years. Surely the Government can set the terms to protect the interests of passengers, but they have failed to do so. I would like more accountability from the Minister when he responds on why they keep issuing direct awards, which clearly shows that the franchise system is completely broken and does not enable the state to demonstrate that it can run the railways far more efficiently.

Alex Chalk: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rachael Maskell: I will not, because of time. As frustrations have grown, we have seen satisfaction plummet; we have heard how vexed and unsatisfied passengers are with the poor service on that line.

It was last year's timetable fiasco that really brought all those issues into focus. Staff themselves, as some hon. Members have highlighted today, have been professional and incredibly patient in their dealings with the public, and have received a quantum of abuse in trying to keep people safe through this time. It is not their fault, after all, that the Secretary of State meddled in the planned timetabling process by changing his mind over the projects he was cutting. It is not their fault that the private companies could not get their act together to have the trains delivered and up and running on time, with proper testing of the system. It was the Secretary of State who failed to hold the companies to account. It is not the staff's fault that Network Rail, which is accountable to—guess who?—the Secretary of State, failed to deliver the infrastructure on time.

Derek Thomas: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Rachael Maskell: I do not have time, I am afraid.

The Secretary of State, who treats this vital public service as if it were his own personal train set, is culpable for the pain experienced by customers. It demonstrates the weakness of this Prime Minister that he is still in post. Those who have sought recompense for their loss have clearly seen an inequitable response in terms of the compensation they can access; we have heard today that half of passengers do not even know how to access the compensation system, and that the network itself has paid out £22.6 million in compensation over a period of just two years.

This Government, as my hon. Friends have highlighted, have made promises to passengers time and again, and have let them down badly. Let us get Britain moving again, as our Labour Government will when we come to power. We have a plan; we just need the power.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport

(Andrew Jones): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I will start by thanking everybody who has contributed to the debate, and congratulating the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing it in the first place. Many issues have been raised, and I will try to address as many as I can in the short time allowed, so I must press on fast.

The question has been asked, "Are the Government investing in railways?" The answer is yes, of course; we are investing a record amount to deliver more reliable, more comfortable and safer journeys for our rail network. Alongside our investment in infrastructure, we have delivered new, more reliable trains on the Great Western main line. There has been a change, however, in the way we approach investment in the next funding period. In the past, we focused very much on enhancements, but we are now focusing more of our £48 billion budget on reliability, and particularly on repairing and replacing the worn-out parts of our network to increase reliability and punctuality.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Minister give way?

Andrew Jones: Oh, crikey—go on. I am always generous about giving way.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister mentioned reliability; I sat with Hitachi, the manufacturers of the new trains on the Great Western service yesterday, and they took me through their own reliability stats, which they admit have not been good, particularly with the introduction of the new trains. Basic things were missed, such as fitting them with filters to deal with pollen and seeds in summer, which meant record breakdown levels last year, during the hottest summer on record since the 1970s. Surely there was some problem with the commissioning of those trains in the first place?

Andrew Jones: With interventions that long we will really have to scamper. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's argument. New rolling stock often brings with it some kind of teething period, as we have seen throughout the history of our rail network, but the bottom line is that we are seeing new trains deliver a better service.

The modernisation of the Great Western main line will improve more than 100 million passenger journeys each year and will stimulate economic growth from London, through the Thames valley, certainly through Cheltenham, to the Cotswolds, the west country and south Wales. I fully recognise how vital this service is in not only connecting people but driving the economy.

I also recognise that GWR's performance last year was not good enough and fell well short of passenger expectations. As a result, GWR worked with partners across the industry and put in place a performance improvement plan, which, although there is of course still more to do, has seen GWR move from delivering 72% of trains between south Wales and Paddington on time six months ago to more than 90% today.

The December timetable change was successfully introduced. The industry significantly reduced planned timetable changes to minimise the risk of severe disruption, which has served to stabilise services and to improve timetable efficiency. In the future, we will stage timetable changes, rather than having one big-bang approach.

I am clear that I expect GWR to do everything it can to minimise cancellations and other disruptions to services. It agreed to and implemented a contractual performance improvement plan, which includes a wide variety of activities across the whole franchise area to improve performance for passengers, including matters under the control of Network Rail.

Nigel Huddleston: The Minister is right that there is nothing MPs like more than a bit of railway or GWR-bashing every now and again. However, we need to acknowledge some of the positives. My patch will have a new station, the Worcestershire Parkway station, which will be of huge benefit to my constituents. I just need to make sure that the trains run through it on time.

Andrew Jones: Well done for getting that one on the record.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): Talking about new stations, will the Minister meet me, colleagues and staff from GWR and Network Rail to talk about a new station in Grove in my constituency, which could be part of a network of two or three stations connecting Oxford and Bristol? As more houses are built in the south-east and south-west, local connectivity, alongside inter-city connectivity, is vital.

Andrew Jones: I most happily agree to meet my right hon. Friend.

Questions were raised earlier about how the industry is held to account. The answer is through the Office of Rail and Road, the industry regulator, which holds Network Rail to account for its performance and takes enforcement action in the event of unacceptable performance. The Government will hold franchise holders to account when things go wrong by enforcing their franchise agreements, with contraventions dealt with under the terms of those agreements and in accordance with the Department's general management compliance process. Evidence of that can be seen in the recent action taken against Govia Thameslink Railway.

Passenger satisfaction is obviously critical and will remain an absolute focus for me as an incoming Minister. Colleagues raised questions about the governance of the area, and I am pleased to see that Network Rail has joined forces with the regional train companies, GWR and Heathrow Express, to create a new joint supervisory board to drive improvements. This is the latest stage of the companies' commitment to working closer together to improve the passenger experience.

Investment in transport infrastructure has been a long-standing problem across the UK. We have not invested enough in our transport infrastructure over decades, which applies to Governments of all colours. However, I do not think that that accusation can be made against this Government. We are investing £48 billion in our rail network in the next control period.

Geraint Davies: Will the Minister give way?

Andrew Jones: I am running out of time. There will also be more electrification works in this period. The electrification to Newbury and to Bristol Parkway was introduced this year, and we are working to complete the electrification to Cardiff later this year. When all that is complete, we will see benefits including journey time improvements of 15 minutes, which is a significant change.

Fares were mentioned. I remind colleagues that we are in the sixth year of capping regulated fares in line with inflation. We have introduced a railcard for 16 and 17-year-olds, and the industry has introduced a railcard for 26 to 30-year-olds, so basically everybody under 30 will be able to access discounted rail fares. It might also be worth reminding Opposition Members that, in its last year in office, the Labour party gave passengers a 10% fare increase, and that, where Labour now has the capacity to run the railways, through the devolved Administrations, we have also seen fares increase in line with inflation. I gently say to those colleagues that they have been saying one thing but doing another.

Perhaps it is worth further reminding colleagues how many miles of the Great Western main line Labour electrified when it was in office—zero. How much new inter-city rolling stock did Labour introduce when in office? Absolute zero. I understand the comments from Opposition Members, but it feels rather like the arsonists complaining about the amount of time it has taken the fire brigade to arrive.

Matt Rodda: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Andrew Jones: No; we are out of time.

Several colleagues raised delay repay 15, which will be standard in all new franchise agreements. We are also working very hard to make mid-term contract changes to existing franchises, and we are very close to getting that agreed. I will keep colleagues informed of the progress.

We are about to run out of time. I thank everybody who has taken part in the debate. We have covered a wide range of issues, although I am quite sure that we have not been able to cover every single point. I recognise the work taking place at Dawlish, to which we have committed £15 million, and I look forward to going down there. Protecting that line is a national priority, and we will continue to invest in it and to develop solutions to improve its resilience.

I look forward to seeing many areas of the route transformed by December this year, with the new services and new trains that I mentioned. We will continue to introduce improvements during the franchise continuation period. I hope that 2019 brings a further improved service for our constituents and others served by this franchise who are constituents of Members who were not able to be with us today. I assure everybody that the Government are working hard to ensure that the rail industry delivers the service that our constituents rightly expect.

10.57 am

Stephen Doughty: I thank the Minister for his comments. I very much appreciate the number of colleagues from constituencies across the Great Western network who

[Stephen Doughty]

have come to take part, including those from the other side of the House. They made their points with eloquence and seriousness on behalf of their constituents. I am deeply disappointed that the Minister chose to respond in the tone and with the lack of detail that he did. These are serious issues, and it is simply not good enough to gloss over them with a bunch of statistics, warm words and rhetoric. Passengers deserve better.

There is clear evidence that the services are not good enough. GWR admits that they are not good enough, the independent assessors admit they are not good enough and the House of Commons Library shows that they are not good enough. Reliability is not increasing, and is actually getting worse in some cases. Overall passenger journey satisfaction on GWR services is going down, not up. It is frankly time that the Government, the Secretary of State and this Minister got a grip and took some interest in what is actually going on at GWR, rather than simply glossing over the circumstances, and responded to the serious points that have been raised. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is chuntering from a sedentary position. The reality is that he has not answered a single question put to him today by Members from across the House and has not engaged with the issues in a serious way, instead simply glossing over them with statistics. He has not answered the serious concerns that have been put. This is very disappointing from the Minister and his Department, but it is what we have come to expect.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Great Western Rail (GWR) delays and performance across the network.

BBC Commissioning

11 am

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered independent accountability of the BBC commissioning process.

I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, and to have this Minister replying to the debate, as she has done on previous occasions. I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight the lack of transparency at the BBC. There are major concerns about BBC Northern Ireland's use of public money. I am unaware of the situation in other regions, but if other regions operate on a similar basis to that which I will outline in the next few minutes, there is a problem on a national scale.

I will focus on transparency in Northern Ireland, because BBC NI has not done so. The BBC's key aim is "to inform, educate and entertain audiences with programmes and services of high quality, originality and value."

Yes, there are many programmes in which the BBC's mission is adhered to, but when it comes to the financing and contracting of those programmes, there is a lack of transparency that should not be the case. The programmes are made only as a result of the outdated licence fee, which our constituents are forced to pay if they receive television services. That is public money, but, after many protracted discussions, meetings and correspondence, the brick wall remains—although it can and will be broken down.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. It is one that he has been involved with for a long time, and today's debate in Westminster Hall is his opportunity to highlight it. Does he agree that the growing number of people who refuse to pay for a TV licence, understanding that that means that they will not be able to watch any BBC programme, either live or on catch-up, indicates that although people are happy to pay £50 a month for Sky or Virgin services, they are not prepared to give the BBC £12 a month? Does he agree that that disenfranchisement is not to do with the cost of the licence, but to do with the nature of programming, with many people grossly unhappy with the BBC bias, which has become the norm but remains unacceptable? Does he further agree that independent regulation is only the first step needed if there is to be any salvation whatever for the BBC?

Mr Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The compulsory nature of the licence fee has been raised on previous occasions, and I am glad that he has raised it again today.

Troubling questions remain on the issue of independent accountability. Independent media companies in Northern Ireland have approached me. They are concerned that they do not get a fair deal because of the lack of transparency. I intend to go into that in a little detail, Mr Betts.

I first raised concerns about the BBC Northern Ireland commissioning process back in November 2016—two years and four months ago—when I asked a series of questions of the BBC. Some hon. Members will recall

that I raised similar matters in the House in September 2017; I was forced down this route after BBC Northern Ireland kept stonewalling.

Initially, I raised the question of how contracts were awarded. I raised that with senior BBC management and with some who were BBC presenters and had benefited from contracts. Answers were not forthcoming. As a result of the lack of accountability and openness, I took the matter to the office of the BBC director-general, Lord Tony Hall, in April 2018, my questions still not having had satisfactory responses. My concern then focused on a single contract that I was aware of relating to a company called Third Street Studios. There are three points to ponder in relation to Third Street Studios. First, the contract was awarded to a company that did not exist at the time of broadcast, the contract having already been paid. Secondly, this particular company has repeatedly received contracts worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. Thirdly—this is the irony—the company had no office and the postal address on its website took anyone who investigated to a taxi rank in Belfast city centre. The lack of independent accountability for these significant sums is staggering.

By August 2018, I still was not getting answers. I then went to the National Audit Office here in London to try to obtain satisfaction about taxpayers' money, those who were, if I can put it like this, on the inside track in the BBC and how they did not account for their expenditure. I met the National Audit Office, and the meeting was good and constructive. The National Audit Office was then helpful in writing to me to confirm that although it does not normally investigate this type of contractual expenditure, an investigation would be opened up into a number of areas concerning the BBC Northern Ireland commissioning process. I want to concentrate on this for a few moments, just to show the significance of it. This is the first time, to my knowledge, that the National Audit Office of the United Kingdom has found grounds to investigate BBC Northern Ireland on a contract of this nature. "Unprecedented" would be an appropriate word to describe this.

Let us just remember the guidelines that the BBC operates under. I will quote them briefly. On "Editorial Integrity and Independence", the statement is as follows:

"The BBC is independent of outside interests and arrangements that could undermine our editorial integrity. Our audiences should be confident that our decisions are not influenced by outside interests, political or commercial pressures, or any personal interests."

On "Fairness", the BBC states:

"Our output will be based on fairness, openness, honesty and straight dealing."

On "Transparency", it states:

"We will be transparent about the nature and provenance of the content we offer online. Where appropriate, we will identify who has created it and will use labelling to help online users make informed decisions about the suitability of content for themselves and their children."

Lastly, on "Accountability", it states:

"We are accountable to our audiences and will deal fairly and openly with them. Their continuing trust in the BBC is a crucial part of our relationship with them. We will be open in acknowledging mistakes when they are made and encourage a culture of willingness to learn from them."

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): Given that last year I was the only Labour MP to join with most members of the Democratic Unionist party in defending press freedom

when there was the chance of a state-appointed press regulator, will the hon. Gentleman recognise that investigations such as that into the renewable heat incentive by BBC Northern Ireland are in the long tradition of fearless investigative journalism by both the BBC and UTV that has served Northern Ireland well during the last 50 years, in both good times and bad?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I unequivocally agree with that. The only addendum I would make is that the BBC is not exempt from scrutiny itself—that is the point.

It is an appalling reflection on BBC Northern Ireland's management that a Member of Parliament who has taken a keen interest in these issues both in Parliament and outside has had to take the steps that I have over many months to escalate concerns to the National Audit Office.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): May I support the case that the hon. Gentleman is making? When we did the BBC charter review, we were keen to get independent regulation of the BBC through Ofcom and to open up the BBC's books to the National Audit Office, which it resisted. The BBC can be opaque and not transparent. That said, does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that it does not advance the argument for accountability and transparency simply to accuse the BBC, as some hon. Members have done, of bias? I think it tries very hard to present a balanced picture.

Mr Campbell: I accept the right hon. Gentleman's point, but I invite him to look at more of the BBC's content. Perhaps then he will reflect on his view. I am sure we will have another debate on that in the coming months.

I will now move on to the specific example I have raised. Third Street Studios has a director who is also a prominent BBC Northern Ireland presenter: Mr Stephen Nolan. The BBC claims that Mr Nolan's company is an average, independent production company. That is patent nonsense. Mr Nolan quite regularly advertises the television programmes made by his company on his BBC radio show, which is part of his £450,000-a-year job, funded by the licence fee. This is a clear and unfair advantage over other independent production companies, which cannot promote their programmes in the same way.

If an independent production company gets a contract from the BBC, it has to go away, make the programme, supply it to the BBC and hope that the quality of the production will shine through. However, in this instance, as I have outlined, someone who works in the BBC—who has the inside track and knows how it works—can get a contract and then advertise on the BBC for his so-called independent production company, which won the contract from the BBC. That is clearly an unfair advantage.

Since the BBC is effectively funded through the public purse, it must adhere to the same standards as are demanded in other areas of public life. The contract was from 2014—five years ago. I have been asking questions about it for two years, and yet I still do not know basic details about the contract, which we all pay for through the licence fee. The public have paid for it, and therefore they have the right to know the details of how it was awarded and how the expenditure was accounted for. At the moment, we do not know the answers. Why should a contract that was awarded five

[Mr Gregory Campbell]

years ago remain secret? Why not publish all documentation relevant to that series, after five years have passed, unless there is something to hide? That is why the National Audit Office is digging—digging deep, I hope—into the BBC.

The irony is that BBC Northern Ireland programmes continue to investigate the use of public money by Government, as outlined by the hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan), and they are quite right to do that. No one should misunderstand the nature of this debate. The BBC and others are right to conduct such investigations, but we are equally right to hold it to the standard that it holds others to. The BBC is not, and must not be, exempt.

As many will know, the concerns that I and others have do not just stretch to the process of commissioning programmes. I have long campaigned for maximum transparency in relation to pay. We now know that there exists a gender pay gap, but it took a decade for the BBC to come to the point of publishing the salaries of presenters who earned more than £150,000 per year. Does the BBC hope that if it strings people along on the issue of commissioning contracts, the pay issue might disappear? Does the BBC think that just as it dragged its feet on transparency around salaries, it can drag its feet on this? The BBC must think again. It seems to feel as though it can pose questions, but it does not have to answer them; apparently, answering questions is only for the little people. The BBC must—and will—answer these questions.

The National Audit Office sent me a letter dated 30 January 2019. Coincidentally, that was the day after this debate was announced; I will leave people to draw their own conclusions. In that letter, the NAO said, “the BBC centrally decided to carry out a targeted review of the commissioning process in BBC Northern Ireland.”

The NAO added:

“We are currently reviewing information collected as part of this review and are following up with some specific questions.”

The National Audit Office has confirmed that it will provide answers by the end of February to the questions that were originally asked of the BBC in 2016. In trying to protect and defend those involved, the BBC has further undermined trust in the organisation.

I look forward to the completion of the National Audit Office investigation. I understand that the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will visit Northern Ireland next month, as he said in his answer to my parliamentary question last week, and I hope he will take the opportunity to get questions answered by the BBC in Northern Ireland. In the past, the Minister has been responsive and helpful in answering questions. I hope that she will deal with this issue in any discussions that she may have with the BBC in the run-up to the mid-term charter review, which will take place in the next two years.

I hope that my worst fears are not confirmed, but the information I have gleaned to date does not fill me with hope, and neither do all the stonewalling, all the delaying or all the attempts to avoid answering questions. I hope the National Audit Office will get to the truth of these matters. If there are serious questions to answer about the lack of transparency not just in BBC Northern

Ireland, but across the nation as a whole, it will be a national scandal and there will have to be serious consequences for the entire BBC hierarchy.

11.16 am

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) on securing this debate on the accountability of the BBC and its commissioning activity. I value his long-standing knowledge, interest and work in this important area.

Before I address the important issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, I want to speak briefly about the importance of the BBC as a collaborative partner in the UK’s vibrant creative industries. The BBC is one of the UK’s most admired institutions across the world, and I am very proud of the example it sets as a world-leading public service broadcaster. The BBC has provided some of the most memorable moments across television, radio and online services in recent times. From “Planet Earth” to “Les Misérables”, and the “Today” programme to “Killing Eve”, the BBC is at the centre of conversations in homes and workplaces across the country. All of those moments—and those programmes—depend on the BBC working in partnership with a diverse range of organisations across the creative economy. We have seen examples of how these partnerships deliver high quality and distinctive programming.

Such dynamic and innovative collaboration is crucial to the BBC’s success and must be embedded into the BBC’s everyday work with a broad spectrum of independent producers. After all, some of the highest quality and most popular BBC programmes come from those independent producers. Where would we have been, for example, without the excellent “Bodyguard” on our screens last year, or—one of my personal favourites—“Line of Duty”? Both of these excellent programmes were produced by Jed Mercurio and World Productions. They are just two of the brilliant programmes brought to us by independent producers in partnership with the BBC each year.

The BBC is rightly independent of Government, and it is the BBC Trust’s responsibility to ensure that the BBC delivers on its commissioning obligations. It would therefore not be right for Government to intervene in these matters, but later in my speech I will come back to the influence that we can have.

Collaboration was a key theme of the last BBC charter review. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) on his role, when he was a Minister of State in my Department, in securing the new BBC charter review and the important remit now given to Ofcom, which he mentioned in his intervention. It is vital that the new charter requires—as it does now—the BBC to work collaboratively to support the wider sector as a creative partner, using its unique position in the creative industries to deliver the best possible public value.

The charter also requires the BBC to open up content production over time to allow non-BBC producers to compete for BBC projects and further stimulate the independent production market. By the end of the charter in 2027, 100% of BBC television and 60% of BBC radio will be fully open to competition, which will

bring a diverse range of stories to the BBC. However, we recognise that how commissioning decisions are made is crucial, which is why we have also required the BBC to commission programmes in a fair, reasonable, non-discriminatory and transparent way.

I listened with interest to the case raised by the hon. Member for East Londonderry, which has caused me some disquiet. I was not aware of that matter until this debate. He has raised important issues and he deserves answers, which I trust he will get from the National Audit Office in due course. He will no doubt raise those issues with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on his visit to Northern Ireland next month.

I expect the BBC to be one of the best partners to work with in the UK. We have established the new framework to ensure that BBC content comes from a range of voices that represents the diverse communities of the UK nations and regions. I am pleased to see the BBC taking action to deliver on those important goals. It has set out a clear commissioning process framework and code of practice that govern the commissioning of TV content from independent producers.

The BBC is also making strides towards full competition for its content. Indeed, I am aware that it recently achieved the first of its requirements to open up 40% of drama, entertainment, comedy and factual production to competition. They are important areas, and I expect the BBC to take its charter obligations seriously, given that it has a unique position in the sector and is the recipient of substantial licence fee income. *[Interruption.]* As hon. Members remind me from a sedentary position, that is vital. When we hold the BBC to account, we should never forget that that is public money.

It is also important that, when the BBC gets things wrong, it takes swift action to resolve those issues. To support that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage reminded us, the Government established Ofcom as the strong independent regulator to hold the BBC to account on its duties and responsibilities and to ensure that it does not have an adverse impact on fair and effective competition. If hon. Members are interested,

Ofcom delivered a report at the end of last year that found that the BBC is complying with all the priorities set for it in the process. It is Ofcom's responsibility to ensure that the BBC delivers on the requirements, and that it does so in the spirit of openness and transparency that we embedded in the charter.

Ofcom recently consulted on whether further regulation might be required to ensure that the BBC fulfils its commissioning requirements. The hon. Member for East Londonderry is nodding—perhaps he had the opportunity to make his views known during that process. I gather that Ofcom will publish the report shortly, at least by way of a statement, and I look forward to receiving it with added interest owing to this debate.

The BBC's charter obligations, together with Ofcom's regulatory responsibilities, ensure that the BBC is held to the highest standards and delivers the best outcomes for licence fee payers. I look forward with interest to Ofcom's commissioning statement and to seeing the BBC's continued progress on collaboration and competition. I hope that the hon. Member for East Londonderry gets satisfaction regarding his inquiry and concerns in due course.

Mr Vaizey: The Minister has focused on the BBC, but given that the debate is about the BBC and the media in Northern Ireland, it is worth mentioning how successful Northern Ireland has been in supporting the creative industries, thanks to the great tax credits that the Minister oversees. The making of "Game of Thrones" and many others have transformed the Northern Irish economy.

Margot James: I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend, and I am glad that he has made that important point. We enjoy an ecosystem of fine creative talent in Northern Ireland. He rightly praises "Game of Thrones", which has been an amazing global success, but is far from the only one. I wish the creative industries in Northern Ireland every continued success.

Question put and agreed to.

11.25 am

Sitting suspended.

Economic Growth: South-west

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered economic growth in the South West.

It is a great pleasure, Mr Owen, to serve under your distinguished and experienced chairmanship.

It is a delight to see the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) in his place. Today it is my intention, and I think that of my colleagues, to build on the debate we had about two and a half years ago regarding the successes and challenges of our great region—the south-west—and to reiterate the requests that we make of the Government to make our area even better than it is at the moment.

I am a great believer in summaries, partly because I only ever read the executive summary of any report. At any event, a summary of my speech would be: our region is doing well, many businesses and sectors are flourishing, and we are grateful for the commitments that the Government have made to us, especially regarding infrastructure, but we want 2019 to be the year of delivery.

I have been in the House for 26 years.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): Not very long.

Sir Gary Streeter: Not long enough, I know. Thirteen of those years have been under a Conservative Government and 13 under a Labour Government, and the reality is that there has been under-investment in our region's vital infrastructure for the entirety of those 26 years. At last we have a Government who are listening, and now we need to see delivery to our ambitious region.

First of all, I will just say a few words about what our region actually is. I suppose that the best way of describing it is variable geometry. For some purposes, it is the seven counties that are in the European region—dare I use that expression in the company of some of my hon. Friends? For some of us, it is the two counties of Devon and Cornwall. Increasingly, however, we can talk about the four counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset working together. There are four counties and three local enterprise partnerships working together to make the peninsula—

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): May I remind the hon. Gentleman that Cheltenham is a proud part of the south-west? It is the gateway to the south-west and, in fact, the jewel of the south-west. Does he agree?

Sir Gary Streeter: All of those things are true, of course, but I did say that “for some” the south-west is the seven counties, including even Gloucestershire, which Cheltenham is in. I understand that Cheltenham itself is a small market town somewhere to the north-east.

I will describe that which is going well, what we welcome from the Government already and what we still want to see. First, what is going well? Of course, our natural assets are still there and they remain unrivalled: the sea, the coast, the moor, the areas of outstanding natural beauty, the stunning landscapes and the beautiful towns and villages. The south-west is a region like no other.

I am delighted to say that tourism is flourishing. We have more quality places to stay, and better visitor destinations and tourist attractions. Mr Owen, you might be interested to know that I will make the case that we are not just a tourist region—far from it—but 311,000 people were employed in the hospitality sector in 2017 and it provides roughly 11% of the overall regional employment. So tourism remains significant and it is doing well, thanks partly to the fact that we had some wonderful weather last year and the roads were full all the time.

The second thing that is going well is the collaboration between our local enterprise partnerships, and our local authorities and national parks. That collaboration is the closest and most effective since records began, and in all my time in this House I have certainly never seen our various component parts working together as they are today. There is also a close working relationship with the private sector. Some colleagues in Westminster Hall today will recall the “Back The South West” campaign that we launched in 2016, with the charter—the south-west growth charter—that I will refer to shortly. All of that is driven by private sector companies that are ambitious for our region and determined to deliver.

At the 2016 Exeter conference, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government came down and made a great and passionate speech, and told us to speak with a single voice in the south-west. We have done that; we are more joined-up than ever before, and I think it is beginning to make its mark upon Government.

Far from being just a tourist area, our region boasts some wonderful companies. For example, Princess Yachts in Plymouth employs 3,000 people and Babcock employs 4,500 people in the dockyard and naval base. That is to name but two; there are many other companies and I am sure that colleagues will mention some of the high-performing companies in their constituencies.

I will single out just two companies from the south-west that are doing particularly well. First, there is the Pennon Group. Brilliantly led by Chris Loughlin, it includes South West Water, which is a leading national water and sewerage company that will make £1 billion of investment in our region by 2025. Its business plan has been fast-tracked by Ofwat for the second time in a row, which I think is unique among the water companies. Pennon Group also includes Viridor, which is the UK's largest recycling company, so we have this successful and ambitious green company that employs over 5,000 people UK-wide. It is a company that our region is rightly proud of and it generates over 6,000 jobs in our region alone through direct and indirect employment. We thank the Pennon Group for all it does for our region.

The second company is Thales, which is a major global defence contractor that employs over 1,100 people in the wider south-west, including in Cheltenham. Thales

stated recently that it sees huge potential for its business in the south-west and the region as a whole:

“There is the opportunity to put the region on the map in the digital technology and maritime space and with the support of Government we think the region can go from strength to strength.”

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The Heart of the South West local enterprise partnership has a focus on the marine environment and in Taunton Deane we have the UK Hydrographic Office, which is the global leader on marine data. It is putting in a bid for a geospatial hub in Taunton, as well as an innovation centre. Does my hon. Friend agree that building on that will help the whole of the south-west to really up this sector, which will bring with it untold economic opportunities for the whole region?

Sir Gary Streeter: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. That is one of the areas of development for our region that makes it very exciting indeed, and I am very happy to add my support to her excellent support for that project and opportunity.

I will just go back to Thales briefly. It recently opened a Maritime Autonomy Centre at Turnchapel Wharf in my constituency, which I know the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) has visited. That work includes capital investment of over £1 million, which represents the company's commitment to its future in the south-west as a place where it can invest in digitally transformative maritime technologies—not a phrase to say after a glass or two of wine. This facility will act as the key maritime integration, test and evaluation centre for the combined United Kingdom and French maritime mine countermeasures programme. It is very impressive.

Our region therefore has substantial companies operating throughout it and is not just a place for people to come for their cream tea, although of course, Mr Owen, you would be very welcome to come down next summer and enjoy one.

Our universities are also doing well—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): As I am from the north of England, like the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), who is the spokesperson for the Opposition, I wonder whether my hon. Friend could just clarify an issue, because I think it is interesting. Can he clarify whether someone should have jam or cream on a scone and, if it is both, in what order they should be put on? [*Laughter.*]

Sir Gary Streeter: The Minister will be interested to know that there are colleagues here from Devon and Cornwall, so he will get two different answers. I will continue something that I have made a pastime of in my 26-year career to date, which is to sit firmly on the fence.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): The cream is put on first.

Sir Gary Streeter: My hon. Friend says the cream is put on first; I will go with him.

As I was saying, our universities are doing well. Exeter, of course, is a world-renowned university and part of the Russell Group. Plymouth University is also

making great strides as a university and it is really transforming the city of Plymouth, so I pay tribute to the work that it has done, particularly in the marine engineering and science departments. However, let us not forget Plymouth Marjon University—the colleges of St Mark and St John. It has experienced significant growth over the last two years, bucking the current trend and producing ever-greater results for its students. Intellectual capital in our region is powerfully underpinned by excellent places of learning.

The south-west is also home to one of the largest engineering projects in Europe, at Hinkley C, which represents a massive investment in our region and is producing many skilled jobs.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: Notwithstanding the fact that the Chair has Wylfa Newydd in his constituency, with which we have had problems, may I just put some figures on this? We will create 25,000 jobs and more than 1,000 apprenticeships; we have just finished the National College for Nuclear, which is fantastic; our Inspire programme has now reached 15,000 schoolchildren; and 64% of the total build at Hinkley is going to UK companies. My hon. Friend has made such powerful comments on that. If it helps Devon, it helps Cornwall, it helps Dorset and it helps Somerset. I know he is celebrating that, and I thank him for his thoughts.

Sir Gary Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I do celebrate that tremendous project and success story. He is right that it is something for the entire region, not just for the county of Somerset, and we are pleased to be supporting it.

All of what I have said so far is about the things that are going well in our region. What we have welcomed from the Government in the past 12 months or so includes some of the things that were mentioned in the Budget. The transforming cities fund is hopefully of great benefit to Plymouth, and perhaps the Minister will say something about the timescales for decisions on that. The freezing of cider duty was well received by the apple producers of Somerset and, indeed, throughout the region. We have seen the improvements to the Dawlish seawall get under way in the past few months, and I will come on to talk about the major announcement that we anticipate. We welcome the new Great Western Railway trains, which are having a gradual impact on our crucial Penzance to Paddington link—a very pleasant travel experience. We welcome the £10 million for fisheries innovation, to help local fishers.

In January 2019, planning permission for the north Devon link road was given, and I pay tribute to the persistence of my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones). When he started talking about the link road, we all thought, “That can never happen. There is no money in the jam jar for that. He is just off on ‘a frolic of his own’, as Lord Denning once said”. Well, his frolic is bearing fruit, and well done to him for being such an incredible campaigner for his constituents.

We welcome and celebrate the major work to tackle flooding at Cowley, east of Exeter. We all remember the red sausage, or the balloon, that was in evidence some two or three years ago. That should now be a thing of the past, thanks to Network Rail's investment.

[Sir Gary Streeter]

We welcome the Government's industrial strategy and the fact that our local enterprise partnerships are working hard with officials from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to develop a local industrial strategy, looking especially at productivity, which I know will be music to the Minister's ears.

Finally, we must not forget our farmers. We have excellent farmers throughout the region and they welcome the fact that the Government are listening to them and helping to shape our UK-wide agriculture policy post Brexit. I have said two words that I know some of my friends will be very, very pleased to hear.

What do we now need from the Government? I will focus on that for a few minutes, and I will then conclude and let others have a say. We await, of course, the major Dawlish announcement. Today is the fifth anniversary of those extraordinary images of the railway line waving in mid-air and everything beneath being washed away by the winds and waves of that winter's storms. I will never forget the journey we have been on since then, via Downing Street, the Peninsula Rail Task Force, the 20-year plan and the negotiating with Government. Of course such things take time but, even though the announcement will, I hope, come next week, and even though I think it will be a good and fully funded one that we will all welcome, for me, it has taken at least 12 months too long. The region has become impatient. It will be fine, provided we get what we are looking for, and perhaps the Minister can say something about that.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Although we look forward with anxious trepidation, but hopeful expectation, to what might happen next week, does my hon. Friend at least feel encouraged by yesterday's announcement that there is now an application for planning for the work that will happen along the Dawlish station wall? That is something very concrete that we can celebrate.

Sir Gary Streeter: Yes, I completely agree with my hon. Friend. It was good to see that announcement. It could perhaps have been better dovetailed in with the Government's announcement, so that we had one and not two. Perhaps that was because of a planning time cycle—I am not sure. I hope that by the end of next week, we will have received all the news we have been waiting and fighting for for five long years. We cannot allow our region to be cut off from the rest of the country just because of adverse weather conditions.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Gary Streeter: I give way to my hon. Friend from London.

Dr Offord: Chair, you probably wonder why, as the Member of Parliament for Hendon, I am standing in a debate on the south-west. Not only did I grow up in Cornwall; I undertook my PhD in economic development on Cornwall, so I thought I would come along and have a listen. My hon. Friend is entirely correct that the county of Devon in particular is cut off. A major component of Cornwall's economic development

programmes of the 1990s and 2000s was the Actnow project, which was to bring superfast broadband to the whole county. Does he agree that connections are not only physical but include electronic communications, which are able to reduce the peripherality of a county like Cornwall, bringing the markets to the consumers and, indeed, the consumers to the marketplace through technology?

Sir Gary Streeter: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. If I may say so, I think he summarises the situation wonderfully well. Many of us in this Chamber have often said that our biggest challenge in the west country and the south-west is peripherality and that the answer is connectivity. When I started my political career in 1992, connectivity meant road and rail, but these days it most certainly means digital connectivity, which is probably more important—[Interruption.] Or as important; that is absolutely right. Cornwall has benefited from the programme my hon. Friend talks about. I will come on to say that we want to see the roll-out of superfast broadband speeded up and that we must have 5G in our region. I am getting towards the end because I know so many colleagues want to speak.

First, there is the rail announcement next week—fingers crossed it is what we have been waiting for. It is so important to our region and we look forward to it.

Secondly, there is the A303. I am grateful to the Government for the commitment to dualling it to Taunton and am glad that the work at Stonehenge has started, but we really need to see spades in the ground at our end of the A303 so that that very important project can get under way and be concluded as quickly as possible. The M5 is now snarled up every Friday and Saturday from May until September, particularly from Taunton to Bristol. I do not think there is a plan on the table to consider that, but the Minister may know more than I do. We desperately need a new second major arterial route coming into our region—a dual carriageway at least—that can cope with the flow of traffic at peak times. That is another critical aspect of infrastructure delivery that the region is waiting to see.

Coming on to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) mentioned, digital connectivity is absolutely essential in our region. Possibly the roll-out of superfast broadband has been too slow. We have had the hiccup with BT internet in Devon and Somerset, and we now have Gigaclear. I hope that all the targets will be met in the next couple of years. That is critical.

What we are seeing now, and perhaps other regions have seen this before us, is that bright young things are coming to our universities and, instead of returning from whence they came, more and more of them are staying locally and inventing their internet-based businesses—in their bedrooms probably—and planting a business in our region. That is really encouraging, and it is transforming the bottom-up business and economy of our region. It can happen because of digital connectivity. We can do almost anything from almost anywhere if we are online and connected, and that is a game-changer for our region. We are desperate to see the roll-out of all the superfast broadband, including 5G.

Finally, on the issue of marrying together physical transport infrastructure—the trains—and digital connectivity, we must have the capability for people to be online all the time while they are travelling on our

trains. That is what the business community has demanded: it is even more important than shaving five or 10 minutes off the journey time from Penzance to Paddington. We must have connectivity, and I know that the Government are working on that. Of course, that responsibility is a cross-departmental one, but I say to the Minister that it is a huge priority for our region.

To conclude, when we last discussed this matter in 2016, we all mentioned the south-west growth charter. The first headline ask from the region was for a new Government partnership with the south-west, which is starting to take shape. The second was for investment in digital connectivity and high-speed business: some progress has been made in that area, but we would like to see a bit more. The third was for investment in energy connectivity—switching on to opportunity—on which, again, there has been some progress, but there is further to go. The fourth was for investment in transport connectivity and getting business moving, on which there has been some progress, but that is still our big ask. We say to Government that our demand is infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure, and may 2019 be the year of delivery, delivery, delivery.

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Seven Back Benchers are indicating that they wish to speak. I will call the Front Benchers at 3.40 pm, which leaves about six minutes each. That gives Members some indication that they should keep the debate flowing.

2.51 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my neighbour, the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter). I believe I was just 13 years old—probably causing as much nuisance then as I do now—when he was first elected, and it seems as though some of the issues that affected our region in the 1980s and 1990s were similar to the ones that we face today. There is still a lack of investment in our strategic infrastructure, and the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to signal road and rail as areas in which we need investment. We also need skills and investment in education, delivering benefits for all young people right across the region, so they can stay in our region and create jobs and future prosperity.

Similarly to the hon. Member for South West Devon, I want to distinguish between the south-west and the far south-west. When I talk about the far south-west, I mean Devon and Cornwall, because there is sometimes a temptation for Ministers to lump together improvements in Swindon and in Bournemouth as part of the overall benefit to the south-west. We need to break down the larger region and focus on where some of the benefits can best be felt, particularly around the peninsula of Devon and Cornwall, as well as further up in Somerset and Dorset.

As a region, we have a lot to be proud of. We are a region of immense beauty, immense skill and talent, real professionalism, and huge potential for job creation. However, we do not always talk enough about how good we are as a region. That is certainly true of Plymouth, but I realise it can be true of our wider region: we hide our light under a bushel, and then we hide the bushel. We are not always as good at talking

ourselves up as we need to be. If we are to get our fair share from Government, we need to be bolder about our ambition, clearer and more relentless about where we need help, and prouder about the areas in which we do so much and excel. That unfairness is one of the reasons why I first thought about going into politics, because as a young lad growing up in Devon, I saw other parts of the country getting stuff that we were not getting. My friends in other parts of the country seemed to have more opportunities than were being afforded to young people in the south-west, and that did not seem fair.

Whether a person lives in Plymouth, Devon, Cornwall, or anywhere else around the country, they should have the same opportunities, but sometimes our peripherality seems to restrict our opportunities in that respect. To engage with those opportunities, we need a structural, long-term, cross-party plan, and I hope that today's debate will help to put pressure on Ministers to create such a plan, because our region needs a turning point. As the only Labour Back Bencher in this debate, with my regional Tory colleagues sitting opposite me, I feel as though I am up against a very tough job interview—the question is whether I would like the job at the end of it, if it involves working with that employer. I know that the other Labour MPs who represent the region—my colleagues from Bristol and Stroud—would echo this point; sadly, the Whips have timed statutory instrument Committees very well in order to avoid their being present here. However, if we are to succeed as a region, fairness and cross-party working are important, and my Labour colleagues would like me to emphasise the benefits that come from working together in order to achieve that.

We know that as a region, we have been starved of investment for far too long. We know that our education, health and transport spending per head is well below the national average. We know that those structural problems have affected our region, not just since 2010 but for decades prior to that, and we know that we need to change that. I am mindful of the fact that, with the Government's entire majority sitting opposite me, we have a power and a voice that we should be using more. The sooner our region starts standing together across parties, and being louder and more determined about our key asks, the more likely it is that Ministers will listen to Members from the far south-west. It should not be only the Democratic Unionist party and its 10 Members of Parliament who hold sway in this House. The DUP received about 300,000 votes at the last general election, but 260,000 people live in Plymouth, and we need to start evening out our influence as a region, because there are still some problems that we need to address.

There are also some opportunities, which I will briefly dwell on. The hon. Member for South West Devon spoke about Dawlish. I honestly wonder what went through the minds of Ministers in the Department for Transport when they decided, knowing that today was the fifth anniversary of Dawlish being washed away, to park the announcement on funding until two weeks hence. I cannot understand why that has happened. Equally, at the end of the funding—I anticipate that it will come in a couple of weeks' time; if it does not, I hope there is an almighty stink about it—we will still only have a train line at Dawlish that closes slightly less

[*Luke Pollard*]

than it does at the moment. That funding will not deal with the structural inequality and slowness of our service, or its capacity.

The superb Peninsula Rail Task Force report, which I recommend to the Minister and to all colleagues who have not apprised themselves of it recently, talked about our long-term investment from Penzance at one end of the region to Paddington and other destinations. Some £8 billion of investment over 20 years could transform our economy. Just imagine the transformation if an average journey of three hours and 30 minutes from Plymouth to London could be reduced to two hours and 15 minutes, as the PRTF suggests. Imagine the potential for job creation, greater investment, more tourism and greater connectivity, and the broader horizons for our young people that that transformation could create. I realise that the Minister is not a Transport Minister, but any nudges and winks that he could give to his colleagues in the DFT to encourage them to push out the announcement we know is sitting in their press office, waiting to be announced in a couple of weeks' time, would be greatly appreciated. It is not just rail that we need to improve: we need to extend the M5 from Exeter to the Tamar bridge, and we also need to be bold in some of our vision.

Finally, I will mention the huge potential that our natural environment presents to the region and our economy. I want Plymouth sound to be designated as the UK's first national marine park. That project has the support of Plymouth Marine Laboratory, the University of Plymouth, the Marine Biological Association and many of the genuinely world-class institutions that just happen to be based in Plymouth. Being able to protect and value our coastal waters is incredibly powerful, and I know that there are people on both sides of the House who recognise the importance of protecting our coastal waters and valuing them more.

Having the UK's first national marine park in Plymouth sound could send a strong message that Plymouth is open for business not only for marine sites, marine engineering jobs and fishing, but for marine conservation. It could send a message that our wider region is open to the job creation potential that could flow from greater investment in our marine sector, in terms of both science and the exciting element of marine autonomy, keeping our Royal Navy jobs and the marine refit jobs that accompany them in the city of Plymouth. It is an exciting project, and I hope that Government Members will join the increasingly large numbers of individuals who are getting behind this campaign on a cross-party basis. If it works for Plymouth sound, it could work for coastal waters right around our peninsula, and indeed around our country. It could be really quite exciting.

2.58 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard). I also give credit to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) for having secured this debate and for his inspiring leadership, driving us to continue to bang the drum for the great south-west.

To take Members a few hundred miles further west, if that is okay, my constituency—which covers St Ives, west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly—and the Duchy of

Cornwall more generally are a brilliant and unique part of the UK, with a thriving culture that contributes much to the UK as a whole. Our tourism industry is a great success, which increasingly attracts visitors from across the globe—so many, in fact, that Visit Cornwall decided to turn them away in the summer, and made that point to the media.

We also have a proud story to tell about supporting and hosting renewable energy platforms and about environmental protections, but the fact remains that distinct economic challenges exist that hold us back from achieving our potential. Handouts are not needed, but Government policy, support and investment are needed to create a thriving and prosperous economy that leaves no one behind in Cornwall. I want to use the opportunity today to flag up the moral case for ensuring that Cornwall and other parts of the south-west receive adequate and appropriate support and funding from Whitehall. Gross value added per head is £17,634, which is 35% below the UK average. Wages are 20% lower than in the rest of the UK. House prices do not reflect that reduced income and are roughly the same as in the rest of the UK. One can imagine that for a family starting out and working on the average wage, the cost of getting a home and having a stake in their area is prohibitive.

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is the only local enterprise partnership area in the whole of England that is currently classified as less developed. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate to remind the House that work and effort is needed to change Cornwall's economic development. The Government have made it clear that a shared prosperity fund will replace European funding streams once we have left the EU. In response to that opportunity, I set up a jobs and growth roundtable bringing together business owners, Cornwall Council, local elected representatives and members of the voluntary sector. We meet every quarter to focus on how shared prosperity funds could address the problem of low wages and sustained deprivation in west Cornwall. That is something that European funds have not successfully addressed.

I was grateful that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury attended our inaugural jobs and growth roundtable and was clearly engaged in the issues we raised. She asked us to set out the barriers to growth in west Cornwall. In response, we said that there were many barriers in the way of ambitious young people seeking a good career in west Cornwall. That results in a skills drain, with young people moving out of the area to find a career. The colleges confirm that the biggest challenge in west Cornwall is providing young people with good employment opportunities. The Government must support employment and apprenticeships and stop messing around with further education curriculums, which are currently not fit for purpose for small companies that are keen to take on apprentices.

The Isles of Scilly Steamship Company, a significant employer in the constituency, state that its biggest issue is attracting skilled staff, including marine crew and aircraft engineers. Other companies say they have to send staff to other parts of the country for training. Goonhilly Satellite Earth Station is having similar problems, and it has to recruit out of county and find means to attract people to Cornwall.

Despite changes to business rates, the charge is having a crippling effect on our town centres. Public transport is not suitable for getting to and from work, and our road and rail network can no longer meet current demand. There has been a historic lack of investment in west Cornwall. Much will be said in this debate about the need for investment in infrastructure, and that is true of the whole south-west. The Minister will be acutely aware of the various priorities I have raised repeatedly in this place. In addition, we absolutely need to smash the problem of low wages, and we must invest in people. Investment is needed in providing skilled apprenticeships and training schemes to support employment, ambition and the futures of our children and grandchildren. Investment is needed to make Cornwall a more attractive economic hub. Transport infrastructure is central to that.

There is no denying that Cornwall is a wonderful place to live, with beautiful scenery and the best culture in the land, but we must ensure our economy matches the thriving local culture. I was delighted to support the launch of the “Great South West” initiative last year. Cornwall’s future prosperity cannot be addressed in isolation, and Cornwall is an enthusiastic partner of the “Great South West” initiative. I echo its calls to promote the south-west’s opportunities, to develop shared propositions to attract investment and boost productivity, to work on areas of common interest, and to drive opportunities through the work of local leaders, businesses, schools and authorities.

In conclusion, one area offers great opportunities, skilled jobs and a sustainable future—Cornwall has a specific tale to share in the area—and that is our response to global warming, and the need to care for our environment and leave to our children a planet that is in better shape than we found it. There is a renewed ambition in Cornwall to reduce harmful emissions and increase renewable energy supplies. Cornwall is working together to set up a clear plan on how that can be delivered by 2030. I would like Government funding to dramatically improve our fuel-poor homes, which are some of the leakiest in Europe; to empower greater development and installation of all forms of renewable energy; and to use the latest smart technology to improve the A30. All that will ensure our houses are warmer and cheaper to keep, our air is cleaner, our energy is cheaper and our harmful imprint on Earth is reduced. That is a sure way to create jobs, increase wages, reduce the cost of living and create prosperity.

3.4 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my fellow Cornish Member, my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) for securing this debate. We have already had discussion about where the south-west actually is. For those of us in Cornwall, we kind of think that anything past Taunton is the midlands. We very much see the south-west from our perspective, which is looking from the far end of it, but there is no doubt that Cornwall in particular faces a number of unique economic challenges, and those are largely down to our geography. I do not think enough reference is made to the fact that being a peninsula creates a number of unique challenges that nowhere else in the UK faces. That is shown by the figures that my hon. Friend the

Member for St Ives commented on. GVA is 35% below the rest of the country, and our wages reflect that. There is a desperate need to address that productivity gap to grow the Cornish economy and create better paid jobs so that we can start to see the Cornish economy catching up with the rest of the country. Much of that is because our economy is based on traditional sectors that have been low paid, particularly tourism, agriculture and food.

Cornwall has a rich history and heritage of being an industrial heartland. Many of the great advancements in industry and technology started in Cornwall. The invention of the steam engine by Trevithick sparked the industrial revolution. In more recent times, Marconi sent the first transatlantic telegram from Cornwall. My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives mentioned Goonhilly, which received the first transatlantic satellite TV signals. Cornwall has always been at the heart of industrial and technological advancement. My great hope is that Cornwall can once again recover some of that history and put itself on the map as a place for great advancement in technology and industry.

There are some opportunities before us that I want briefly to touch on. It is good to see the chief exec of our Cornwall and Isles of Scilly local enterprise partnership in the Public Gallery. I commend its production of an excellent publication called “10 Opportunities”, which lays out the opportunities before us for Cornwall’s economy. I will touch on three. The first is the space sector, which is well known. I am sure my hon. Friends will be sick to death of me talking about the potential of the space port coming to Newquay, but it would remiss of me not to mention it again. We need to see it delivered. As my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon said in opening the debate, this has to be the year of delivery. If we can get the space port to Cornwall, it will unlock huge potential for investment and new jobs.

The second is lithium. We are all aware of the growth in demand for batteries. Cornwall is rich in lithium deposits. Only yesterday, I met the Cornish company Cornish Lithium and the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington) to see how Government can support the extraction of lithium. Various figures are quoted, but we are talking tens of billions of pounds of precious metal in Cornwall that would revive our mining industry. No longer will it be “Poldark” tin and copper; it will be a new generation of precious metal extracted for battery production.

The third is renewable energy. My focus is particularly on geothermal. The Minister will know, as I have been working with him on this for some time, that we are already digging our first geothermal well in Cornwall, but there is potential for much more. Cornwall has a unique landscape and is the only place in the UK where geothermal energy is possible. It could unlock some great potential for our economy.

We need the Government to support the Cornish economy in the development of those new sectors. Part of that has to be the replacement of the European regional development programme. I am a huge supporter of leaving the EU, but Cornwall has been the biggest beneficiary of economic support through the EU. I never say “from” the EU, because it is UK taxpayers’ money that it recycles and gives back to us with a whole

[Steve Double]

load of strings attached. The fact is that the programme has failed, because Cornwall is still reliant on it. If the programme had been successful after its three rounds, we would not need it any more. We still need it, therefore I believe we can do better with our own UK-based programme. Will the Minister update us on the shared prosperity fund, which will be absolutely essential for supporting the Cornish economy going forward? I know that there have been delays in the consultation, but perhaps he will use his offices to try to push it forward. Those of us who work in Cornwall on the future of our economy need some certainty about what the programme will be so that we can start to work towards it, and any further delay will hinder progress.

I very much believe that there are great days ahead for the Cornish economy. The opportunities before us are substantial. There is an absolute appetite in Cornwall to unlock potential and see things come to pass, but we need the backing and support of the Government. I acknowledge that in my time in this place we have seen a Government who are hugely supportive of the Cornish economy. We have touched on the investment that we have seen in our infrastructure—our roads and railways and the Government's support for our air connection from Newquay to London. The recent announcement that that connection will be switched to Heathrow will be hugely welcomed. We need the support to continue, the shared prosperity fund put in place as quickly as possible, and Cornwall's potential opportunities unlocked. I simply ask the Minister to do all that he can to make progress on the spaceport, support for lithium mining, and the shared prosperity fund as soon as possible.

3.11 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) for initiating the debate. As we speak here in Westminster Hall, in the main Chamber there is a debate on the police grant report. It is welcome to see the extra grant for the police forces across the country. It is very much needed.

The south-west is a great place to live, work and do business, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon has said, but more needs to be done to attract and retain the high-skilled jobs that we need to boost wage growth and offer opportunities for young people. Hinkley Point will play a useful role in that. The availability of labour and skills continues to be a significant challenge to many south-west businesses affected by factors such as transport, housing affordability and an ageing population. It is great that we have several speakers here from Cornwall, but I remind them that they have to go through Devon, Somerset and many other counties before they can get to Cornwall. I remind the Minister that we are debating what has happened in the south-west peninsula. Bristol is a great city, but there is an awful lot of land between Bristol and Penzance. We want our fair share of resources, which we are getting more of, but we need even more.

In areas such as agriculture, hospitality and tourism, we continue to rely on a high proportion of migrant labour. We need a system in which we have control over

migrant labour and have enough migrant workers in future. As we leave the EU, not only do we need to ensure that we can still get access to EU migrant labour to fill the jobs but we need to devise a south-west strategy to retain graduates and skilled labour, boost investment in our infrastructure and grow business in our region.

Improving transport in the region and around the south-west is vital. There are two strategic transport corridors for rail and road into the peninsula, which means that the south-west lacks resilience. We welcome the development of the A303, but it will be dualled all the way to Ilminster and then out through the A358 to Taunton. A little bit of the A303 from Ilminster to Honiton needs a little bit more done to it. Much as I welcome and support what is happening to the north Devon link road, we also need that last little bit of road to make sure that we get a second arterial road.

We are improving resilience on the Dawlish railway line. Not only have we got the mainline from Paddington to Penzance but we have a great line from Waterloo to Exeter, which goes through the south of my constituency and runs through the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire). We could do a lot more to invest in loops and other things to make sure that we get more trains through the second route. It is essential to have a second railway link into the south-west. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), I am interested in the Devon Metro coming through Somerset and creating more resilience on our existing lines so that we can have smaller trains as well as the large commuter trains. That will be a great improvement.

Improving transport will improve education accessibility, so that students can choose whether to do A-levels, apprenticeships or technical education. Not only do we have the great universities of Exeter and Plymouth, and of course Bristol, but we have Petroc, Axe Valley and many other colleges across our region. Apprenticeships are so useful because not everybody wants to go to university, and it is a great bonus to have that provision.

Improving transport will mean that tourists can get around the whole of the south-west, from the Jurassic coast to Exeter Cathedral, and even down to Cornwall, as well as to great towns such as Seaton, Axminster and many others in my constituency.

Broadband and mobile connection is hugely important. As many colleagues have said, it is a huge driver of the economy. Superfast broadband is absolutely essential.

Rebecca Pow: A recent report by the South West Rural Productivity Commission said that improving digital connectivity was a game changer for rural businesses. Also, it is one of the key things in the Somerset Chamber's report and is its businesses' most important factor in upping productivity in our region. Will my hon. Friend join me in a campaign to get the Treasury to extend state aid so that Connecting Devon and Somerset can bring about the final rollout of the superfast broadband that we so urgently need in our two constituencies to deliver for our businesses?

Neil Parish: I very much support my hon. Friend, who is a neighbour on the Somerset border. We have worked together not only on delivering in the Blackdowns but across our constituencies. State aid will be essential

to keep the money flowing. Also, I look forward to Gigaclear really getting its act together and getting more investment in, which will help us to deliver broadband overall in a combination of state, council and private sector funding.

With everything online now, from tax returns to farming administration and farm payments, and from online shopping to school homework, it is imperative that we get the improvements to broadband and mobile coverage that we need. In some areas the mobile system will deliver broadband to some of the very hardest-to-reach areas. Mobile and broadband speeds might not be such a problem here in Westminster, but in the south-west they are a constant handicap for many farm families and businesses. In my own farmhouse there is very little connectivity. Sometimes it can be a blessing when the Whips are trying to get hold of me; I can be completely unconnectable and off the page.

Despite the best efforts of colleagues here today, we still have some of the worst mobile coverage of any region apart from Wales. It is getting better, but we need to do more. We have to make sure that the mobile companies do not keep the masts all to themselves; they must share them more. Joining everything together will make things work better with the same resource. Delays to broadband in the Devon and Somerset area have been extremely disappointing, mainly because we know how transformational superfast broadband will be to our rural economy and home lives once it is delivered. We need the Treasury to provide state aid.

Finally, I want to touch on the importance of farming to our rural economy and the south-west economy as a whole. The UK's food and farming industry generates more than £110 billion and employs one in eight people in the UK. Farming is a driver for the local economy as it brings money to the south-west, which is then spent in the south-west. However, I cannot get through a whole speech on the economy without mentioning the B word: Brexit is both an opportunity and a threat to our rural economy. We need more fish for our fishermen. We might see greater opportunities for deep-sea anglers, more fish for our processors, and much needed regeneration of our coastal communities. We also need to ensure that we produce good food so that our food processors—our largest manufacturing industry—continue to thrive. Brexit offers us the opportunity to reposition agriculture and the wider rural economy as a powerhouse in its own right. It needs to be recognised across Government, and not just in DEFRA. I hope that the Minister will today recognise the vital multiplier effect of farming businesses in the rural economy, along with tourism in the south-west, and will do everything possible to protect and help farmers as we leave the EU.

3.19 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) on securing the debate. I am sure that all of us here believe passionately in the south-west. The region is already an economic powerhouse, which can rival the northern powerhouse or the midlands engine. We now have a network of professional organisations whose job it is to promote aspects of economic growth in the region. I pay tribute to the local enterprise partnerships—especially the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP, my local one. Mark Duddridge and his team have a clear vision:

“By 2030, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly will be the place where businesses thrive and people enjoy an outstanding quality of life.” Those few words really sum up the joy and opportunity of living in the south-west.

I was born and bred in my constituency, and we all know what a brilliant quality of life people can have in south-east Cornwall. Apparently the rest of the south-west region is not that bad, either, apart from the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) insists on putting the cream and jam on to scones the wrong way. However, that amazing quality of life is no good unless it is built on a strong economic foundation. We need profitable, expanding, forward-looking businesses, to create value that earns profits and pays taxes. To support those businesses we need to be able to provide smart investment funds where they are most needed.

The LEP does a great job, but there are headwinds. For example, when we leave the European Union we can redirect the shared prosperity fund. I, like others, am keen to hear details of how that will be spent in a way that is tailored to suit the needs of Cornwall, instead of dictated by the European Commission. The most important thing is for funds to be directed to where they can most affect productivity. If productivity in the south-west matched current levels in the south-east, the region would add about £18 billion a year to the UK economy. In that regard I want to mention the farming industry, which I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton will be pleased about. It is one of the most productive sectors in the south-west. Farming brings a lot of money into the region, most of which stays in the local economy. It is vital that farming should be given prominence in the industrial strategy.

Rebecca Pow: My hon. Friend is making a good case. Does she agree that if we combined agriculture with the food manufacturing and processing industries that would represent the largest economy in the south-west region? We could make a good case for its being a major plank of the industrial strategy. I see that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) is in the Chamber, so perhaps he and the Minister who is responding to the debate will take notes.

Mrs Murray: I completely concur with my hon. Friend.

As hon. Members know, I am passionate about our highly professional fishing industry and determined that our fishermen should reap the benefits of Brexit. I urge the Government to do everything they can to protect fishermen and ensure that British fishermen get the best from our highly productive fishing grounds. We all know that infrastructure investment is key to the region's success. We have some superb schemes well under way. The Looe flood protection project will protect the fishing industry's future and stimulate the local economy and tourism in the area surrounding the town.

Improvements to the A38 are vital. Thousands of people use it every day, and 1.2 million vehicle hours are wasted every year due to delays. Think of the environmental impact. We all know about the safety concerns. Finally, a few improvements to the railway line could make a big impact. I, too, am looking forward to next week's announcement. I would like more frequent services, a move towards clock-face timetables, early adoption of a

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

free 5G network for travellers and, of course, better integration with local bus services—especially in rural constituencies such as mine.

I could go on with a shopping list of superb investment opportunities, but I will simply reiterate what a fantastic quality of life we have in south-east Cornwall and the rest of the south-west. Let us see what we can do to create the economic growth that is needed to support that quality of life.

3.25 pm

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) on securing the debate and publicly congratulate him—I think this is the first time I have been able to do so—on his well deserved knighthood.

I know that several organisations in the south-west are watching our debate with keen interest. My hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who is also a south-west MP, is also with us. I think that he is one of the longest-serving farming Ministers ever, and we are grateful to have him sitting in on these deliberations. I am sure that my hon. Friends will have enjoyed reading the briefings from the National Farmers Union, the Devon chamber of commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Heart of the South West local enterprise partnership, which conveyed a passion for expanding the region's potential.

The key question is how we can attract high-value, non-seasonally dependent jobs, enhance our productivity and secure clean economic growth for the region. Admittedly, we have perhaps grown too accustomed to using terms such as “productivity”, “growth” and “connectivity”. A notable example is the Government's flagship industrial strategy. Its four grand challenges put the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future: artificial intelligence and data, ageing society, clean growth, and the future of mobility. As many hon. Members would no doubt agree, its comprehensive scope marks out the Conservatives as the party with the long-term plan for our country. No Government or multinational corporation is free from the risk of descending into obfuscation when talking about economic growth, but let us step out of Whitehall-speak and the lexicon of glossy masterplans. When we talk to our constituents in our email bulletins, meeting halls, surgeries and correspondence, we must tell them how investment will increase the number of jobs and improve living standards.

I recently had the pleasure of another visit to the Exeter science park in my constituency. The science park helps innovative science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine companies in a campus-style setting. It covers sectors such as cyber-security and renewable energy. The site is on track to grow, so that 200 to 700 jobs in 2020 will rise to 2,100 by 2027. The wider region is well connected, with immediate access to the M5, the nearby Exeter international airport and Exeter itself. I represent two wards in Exeter—St Loyes and Topsham—and I am pleased to say it will be one of the UK's fastest growing cities over the next three years. A practical example of that outstanding growth is Luminous, a start-up that is designing, developing and

exporting state-of-the-art special effects hardware for the global entertainment industry. Its rate of jobs growth—from one person to eight people in a mere 12 months—is a trademark of the technology industry. Yet it is not in tech-savvy Shoreditch but in the heart of our region. That is what economic growth looks like on the ground: it is new consumers, new careers, and a better quality of life.

The case for Exeter science park is strong, as it seeks to add more buildings and expand its capacity. I speak not purely as the Member for East Devon but, I am sure, on behalf of my colleagues in the south-west, who would like it to expand and thrive. That is why I urge the Minister and other interested parties who are watching today to get behind Exeter science park so that it can fulfil its potential.

The main impediment to the business growth of Exeter science park is the fact that it has to repay loans on its science park centre. The science park had to take out loans of £6.5 million—mainly from the local enterprise partnership, at a commercial rate—because grants were unavailable during its start-up phase in 2013. Private sector loans were not available because Exeter science park had no assets; they were held in trust by a local authority. Given the vast resources going to the part of the world with which the Minister—he is responsible for the northern powerhouse—deals, he might find that extraordinary set of circumstances difficult to recognise, but it is yet another example of how we in the south-west feel slightly discriminated against.

My first request—this is the Minister's road to rehabilitation—is to consider how we can use Government capital infrastructure spending to reduce, or ideally erase, those debts. Secondly, how can the Government assist in encouraging Government-backed technology and projects to locate to the science park? If the Minister were able to assist with both those matters, it would provide a huge endorsement for our often-overlooked region. Why, for instance, would an engineering giant such as Rolls-Royce, or a defence contractor such as Babcock—it is already strong in Plymouth, as we have heard—not expand alongside the innovative tech start-ups that are already located there?

Members often lament how our neglected south-west gets limited airtime compared with other UK regions. Local authorities, LEPs and businesses up and down the land compete vociferously for a pool of Government investment. However, we should talk up areas where our regional economy is doing well, and talk practically about how we can do even better. That is surely the way to sell the benefits of economic growth to the public, and attract new jobs and companies to our south-west.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con) *rose—*

Alex Chalk *rose—*

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I call Peter Heaton-Jones. There are approximately eight minutes remaining and two Members who wish to speak.

3.31 pm

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): Thank you, Mr Owen, I shall not take up too much time, because I want my hon. Friend from that south-west central city of Cheltenham to get in—

Alex Chalk: Town!

Peter Heaton-Jones: Oh, it is a town—well, there we are; even less of a reason.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and to speak in this debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter). I thank him for his kind words about the campaign to get funds for the north Devon link road. Yes, that is something I have gone on about. As a relatively new Member, my name popped up on the Order Paper to ask a question of the Prime Minister. The then Prime Minister, David Cameron, approached me in the Lobby and said, “I bet you’re going to bang on about the north Devon link road.” I said, “Absolutely, Prime Minister, I am.” When he said that to me, I thought, “Well, we’ve won this battle, and I am proud to be banging on about it.” We made that happen with the success that comes with £83 million of Government funding, plus £10 million from Devon County Council. The north Devon link road is a vital bit of our infrastructure and part of the connectivity that my hon. Friend and other colleagues so correctly identified.

Connectivity is a vital driver of the economy not only in north Devon, but in the entire south-west. That includes roads such as the A361, the A303, the A30 and the A358, but it is also about railways, which have been mentioned at some length. I echo what has been said to the Minister. This is not his Department, but perhaps he could have a quiet word in the ears of his hon. Friends in the Department for Transport and ensure that when we have an announcement, it will be the news that we need about long-overdue investment in the resilience of the vital route that connects the south-west peninsula with the rest of the country. I look forward to that happening; I hope it will be in the next couple of weeks.

I also wish to mention the railway line in my constituency, and I declare an interest because I am proud to be the honorary president of the Tarka Rail Association—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] Thank you. It is one of the roles that I am proudest to hold, because that organisation has done much to promote the need for investment in the line that links Exeter and Barnstaple, and will continue so to do.

In 2019, connectivity also means digital connectivity. I have had numerous meetings with Connecting Devon and Somerset, British Telecom, and Airband, which unlike in the rest of our region—it is not Gigaclear—is the contract holder to provide fast and superfast broadband in north Devon. I have had a number of meetings with Airband to try to push that agenda forward. It is vital that that continues, because although a lot of good work has been done so far, we need to do more.

Those who put together the south-west growth strategy reckon that properly investing in our region’s connectivity could produce gross value added economic benefits of more than £41 billion and create 22,000 jobs—that is how important it is to get connectivity right. Colleagues have also mentioned agriculture, which is extraordinarily important in north Devon and the greater south-west, and a great contributor to economic growth. There are excellent farming businesses in my local economy, and it is well documented that they can help to close the productivity gap.

Let me acknowledge David Ralph, who is in the Public Gallery. He is head of the Heart of the South West local enterprise partnership, and it is good to see so much support for the region as a whole. According to the excellent report by the South West Rural Productivity Commission, our rural local authority areas account for 60% of all workforce jobs—far above the figures for elsewhere in England—which shows how important it is to get growth right in our rural areas.

Let me raise a couple of other issues that I think are important. We have placed a bid for a south-west institute of technology in our area, which is vital. Petroc College and other institutions in my constituency are really pushing hard for that, and part of it will be based in Barnstaple. That could be a real driver as far as the Government’s economic and industrial strategies are concerned. I see that time is running away, so I will end with pretty much the same phrase as the one with which I ended another debate on this subject, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon about 18 months ago. We hear a great deal about the midlands engine and the northern powerhouse, and of course they are important. In the south-west, however, we are like a coiled spring. We have so much potential ready to be unleashed, so I say to the northern powerhouse, “You ain’t seen nothing yet!”

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I call another coiled spring, Mr Chalk, who has three minutes left.

3.37 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): In the three minutes available, may I say that although we rightly talk about economic growth, we need to step back and ask what we mean by that and why it matters? It matters, because it is all very well for us to say that we believe in social mobility—I dare say we all do, across the House—but we should also believe that economic growth provides opportunities for people from all walks of life, and allows people who come from deprived communities to go as far as their talents will take them. I therefore think it is incredibly important to focus on that issue, and we have a moral duty to do so.

When I was elected in Cheltenham in 2015, a lot of Members might have assumed that it was an area of great affluence, which to some extent it is. However, we also have pockets of genuine and grinding deprivation. Importantly, when I looked at the growth figures, I saw that Cheltenham’s growth rate was less than the national average. It seems to me that increasing economic growth is an important way to tackle those areas of deprivation, and I feel that very passionately. There are two elements to this. First, we must ensure that we have a supremely well-educated workforce. That is why I welcome the increased emphasis on fair funding. We have not yet completed the task, and although Cheltenham’s secondary schools get £1.2 million more a year than they did before, we need to increase that. We also need great job opportunities for people once they leave school.

I want to focus on Cheltenham’s cyber future. In November 2015, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, came to GCHQ and said that an arc of cyber-prosperity could extend from Cheltenham all the way down through the south-west. That critical sector will generate £20 billion a year for the UK economy and, crucially, we can be part of that by

[Alex Chalk]

leveraging some of our state expertise in facilities such as GCHQ to improve our local economy. There is so much more to talk about, including the A417 missing link, and I am delighted that the Government are investing more than £400 million in improving that road, because doing so will unlock that corridor of prosperity. This is a moral duty. If we want to achieve social mobility, economic prosperity and a plan for growth must be at its heart.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and to all Back-Benchers for their restraint. I will now call the Front Bench spokespeople, who I am sure will leave a few minutes for Mr Streeter to wind up. I call Chi Onwurah.

3.39 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) on leading this important debate.

There is no hiding under a bushel the importance of the south-west. Its economy is bigger than that of Greater Manchester and twice that of Birmingham, contributing £127 billion per year to the UK economy. It is a diverse region, with great cities such as Exeter, Bristol and Plymouth, great agriculture and one of the highest rates of tourism outside London. However, as the hon. Members for St Ives (Derek Thomas) and for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) emphasised, the benefits of that are not shared equally by all.

The south-west evokes cream teas and coastline pleasures. Rodda's renowned clotted cream, with the jam above or below it, is of course manufactured in Cornwall, along with Ginsters famous pasties. However, we must not forget the industrial heritage that the region shares with the north-east. It was Dartmouth's Thomas Newcomen who invented the steam engine, perfected by Richard Trevithick, although it took a Geordie, George Stephenson, to bring about the first commercial train journeys. Happily, we can take joint credit for the renowned Peter Higgs, of Higgs boson fame, who was born in Newcastle but went to school in west Bristol.

The bedrock of industry in the south-west lies in food, farming, fisheries and tourism—sectors that are due to be disproportionately affected by Brexit. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Torbay and Devon are all in the top 20 areas where people work in tourism for their first or second job. Some 32% of marine fishing occurs in the south-west, meaning that, if a bad Brexit deal affects the Budget promise of £10 million for fisheries, that will be of great significance to the area.

The Government's strategy on Brexit does nothing to protect small-scale farmers in Devon and Somerset against the massive American agro-industrial machine. May I ask the Minister how the Government expect those small farmers to compete with American wheat farms the size of small counties and pig farms the size of small towns, without ruining the glorious beauty of the south-west countryside?

Bristol is home to the largest aerospace cluster in the UK, with firms such as Airbus and Rolls-Royce having to stockpile parts in the face of Brexit uncertainty. In

the last month, Airbus has warned once again of the impact of a no-deal Brexit. Its supply chain crosses the channel several times, meaning that any friction at the border will cause substantial problems for the company, which employs 3,000 people in Filton in high-skilled, high-paid jobs that are key to future economic growth. How does the Minister plan to protect those jobs?

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I apologise for not being present earlier; I have been on a Delegated Legislation Committee—some of us spend a lot of time on those. Does my hon. Friend accept that Airbus is to the south-west, particularly my part of the south-west, what Nissan is to the north-east?

Chi Onwurah: I thank my hon. Friend for emphasising the importance of Airbus to the south-west; I absolutely accept that point. The warnings of industry leaders and companies such as Airbus and Nissan need to be taken seriously by the Government, and listened to.

As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) emphasised, the south-west has one of the highest skills gaps in the UK, with a third of all small and medium-sized businesses having difficulty hiring people with specialist skills. That will only worsen after Brexit, if the Government press ahead with plans to slash so-called low-skilled immigration. Businesses will be even harder pressed to find and retain labour, as we have heard.

More than that, the south-west has been a major beneficiary of EU funding, receiving the second largest share of regional development funding and social funding. The key economic hubs of Bristol and Swindon are among the largest UK recipients of Horizon 2020 research grants, from which we get more back than we put in. After the UK leaves the EU, that hole will be filled by the Government, but the existing institutions exhibit the kind of south-eastern bias that means that, for example, the south-west receives half the per capita UK Research and Innovation funding that London got in 2016-17. How will the Government ensure that funding is replaced in a way that does not exacerbate regional inequalities?

At the heart of all those challenges is the need for a strong, positive industrial strategy, capable of building and rebuilding the economy to meet the challenges of the future and of Brexit. Unfortunately, we have seen no evidence of one. Labour has the answer. [Laughter.] Hon. Members should listen. We are committed to raising spending on research and development to 3% of GDP by 2030—an additional £1.3 billion in public investment. That will get us part of the way, and will certainly benefit the region's burgeoning tech industry, which grew 47% from 2014 to 2016.

Much of that additional spend will draw on our industrial strategy, which is about investing in areas such as nuclear power as part of our commitment to low-carbon energy, ensuring that we have the skills for Somerset's Hinkley Point.

Dr Offord: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Chi Onwurah: I am afraid I will not; I simply do not have time.

We will improve digital infrastructure, as part of our commitment to an innovation nation. That will be complemented by the £250 billion national transformation fund, which will enable the growth of the infrastructure needed to increase productivity and investment.

Successive Tory Governments have refused to invest in transport. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) highlighted that today is the fifth anniversary of the Dawlish railway line being washed away. Labour has only two Members of Parliament in the far south-west and seven in the region as a whole, yet we have committed to fund the Peninsula Rail Task Force's recommendations. Why can the Minister not match our commitment?

Dr Offord: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Chi Onwurah: I am afraid I will not give way.

Regional disparities and the unique issues facing the south-west are the reason we need the £250 billion national investment bank. *[Interruption.]* May I just point out that we have heard much more from Government Members than Opposition Members so far?

Many Members mentioned the need for regional investment. Our network of regional development funds will ensure that regional needs are put first and that local decision makers decide what is right for their area. The future of the south-west, and of our country, depends on a real industrial strategy that lays a path for a high-wage, high-skill, high-productivity region. The Government should follow Labour's example in crafting a visionary, vigorous and viable industrial strategy.

Rebecca Pow *rose—*

Dr Offord: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Chi Onwurah: If the hon. Gentleman insists, I will give way briefly.

Dr Offord: Labour has obviously announced many spending commitments. Perhaps the hon. Lady could explain to the House where Labour will get an additional £1 billion to invest in water quality in the south-west when it has nationalised South West Water?

Chi Onwurah: I would love to give the hon. Gentleman a basic lesson in economics and explain that the Tory Government's economics of austerity have failed entirely to produce the productivity and rising wages that can deliver the tax base for such investments. I hope to hear from the Minister how he will address that.

3.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) on securing this important debate. It is not about Brexit, but if I were channelling a famous son of Devon—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who wrote "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"—I would say that Conservative Members believe that Brexit is full of opportunities, while the Opposition have already

shot the albatross and hung it round the neck of every business in this country, because they see Brexit only as a risk.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) said that Labour has a real industrial strategy. As Minister for local growth, I must tell her that I visit businesses all over the United Kingdom and they tell me that they have one thing on their risk register at the moment: not Brexit, but a Labour Government. Industrial strategies are not created by political parties that believe in the appropriation and removal of businesses from their owners. It is a Labour Prime Minister, not Brexit, that is the real risk.

Rebecca Pow *rose—*

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. I am sure that this intervention will be on the subject of the debate.

Rebecca Pow: It relates to something that the Minister has just said.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): No, you are not listening. We are debating the motion before the Chamber. It has been a good-hearted debate and you have made several interventions, but they have to relate to the subject matter.

Rebecca Pow: My intervention relates to the south-west. Colleagues have made a strong case for upping the productivity in the south-west region, but under this Government a great deal of funding has come to the south-west—far more than ever before. We simply want to build on that.

Jake Berry: That is why we have heard from 10 Conservative colleagues, but only one Opposition Back Bencher. It is a sign that we are a Government who listen to colleagues in the south-west and ensure that economic growth in the south-west is at the heart of our approach.

We have had an interesting debate that has focused on three areas. The first is infrastructure, which we have to accept is one of the building blocks of any vibrant economy outside the capital. We have described this year as the year of delivery for digital, road and rail infrastructure, so it is important that our debate has addressed how we can ensure that we continue to deliver for everyone living in the south-west of England, particularly after years of under-investment. That is the real similarity between the north of England, where we have the northern powerhouse, and the south-west region: for far too long, under different Governments, the country has focused on infrastructure and industrial growth in London and its surrounding hinterland. It is about time we moved beyond that.

We have heard some good speeches today about human capital, in relation both to education and productivity. It is right to focus on how we can drive opportunity to people young and old across the south-west for a more varied educational picture, whether that is through the brilliant universities that have been mentioned or the great businesses that drive productivity. There are huge opportunities for productivity in cyber-security, spaceports, civil and nuclear developments in Hinkley, tourism, agriculture and our maritime economy.

[Jake Berry]

I applaud the south-west local enterprise partnerships for their creation of the Heart of the South West economic co-operation and growth area. I hope that that combined effort will be reflected in their local industrial strategy, because this year needs to be the year of our regions, not just of our capital city. As Minister for local growth, I firmly believe that our biggest opportunity after leaving the European Union will be regional, and that is what the Government should be measured on.

In the limited time available, I will attempt to deal with the questions raised by hon. Members. First, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon spoke about tourism's value to the economy. The Government continue to invest in tourism, particularly through the "Great" campaign to attract overseas visitors to this country. I encourage him and his LEP to engage with BEIS to discuss the developing potential of the tourism sector deal and pursue the idea of putting natural capital—the beauty that exists across the whole south-west—at the heart of their local industrial strategy.

Many hon. Members raised transport, particularly the Dawlish line. Colleagues will acknowledge that the Government have already invested £70 million in the line to date. I have heard the calls from Members across the parties to use whatever influence I may have over the Department for Transport to get it to fast-track its announcement about the line and ensure that we complete our commitment to making sure that it remains a robust and reliable connection for their constituents.

Hon. Members also raised the transforming cities fund, which we announced in the Budget. Some of that £2.5 billion fund has already been devolved to areas with Mayors, such as the Bristol city region, and the remaining £1.2 billion in the pot is subject to the competitive bidding process. The results of that process will be announced after the assessment of the bids; the Department for Transport tells me that that announcement will be made shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) raised geothermal energy, which the Government recognise as a large opportunity. I encourage her to ensure that clean growth continues to be a priority, not just for the Government but for her area's local industrial strategy.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), who made the only speech from the Opposition Back Benches, spoke with real passion and in a very non-partisan way about the opportunity for a marine park in Plymouth Sound, which takes me back to the point that we need to ensure that local industrial strategies and our national industrial strategy accurately reflect the value of natural capital. When we talk about things like productivity, it is all too easy to ignore what may be on our doorstep.

I hope that in 2018, when the landscapes review undertaken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs consulted on whether the current

network of national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty should extend out to sea, partners in Plymouth and Devonport made a strong case for that marine park. There is no update from DEFRA yet, but I will continue to watch developments with interest because the marine park is an important idea that could be rolled out across the country—not least in your Anglesey constituency of Ynys Môn, Mr Owen. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport is right that we need to be bold and clear about our passion to grow the south-west's economy; his speech made that point very well.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) spoke well about the UK shared prosperity fund. He will be aware of the Government commitment to ensure that the current round of EU structural funding has the benefit of a Treasury guarantee until March 2021, but our specific aim in introducing the UK shared prosperity fund is to provide a single domestic local growth fund without the bureaucracy of EU funds. As my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) noted, we need to ensure that our UK growth funds concentrate on what we need to grow in this country. That is one of the opportunities that leaving the European Union will bring.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) spoke about the desired growth of the Cornish economy. Of course the spaceport has already received funding of £2 million from the Government, and the Space Industry Act 2018 will enable spaceships—I guess—to take off by 2020.

I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon an opportunity to wind up, so I do not have time to answer all the questions asked by hon. Members, but I will write to them about any outstanding issues. This has been a wonderful debate. This is the year of regional growth, and the south-west must be at the heart of it.

3.59 pm

Sir Gary Streeter: I thank the Minister for his speech. It is good to know that the Government are listening, that they are supportive and that they are committed to regional growth, especially in the south-west.

I thank all colleagues for taking part in this debate; we have heard some very powerful speeches today. Collectively, we are a good team for our region—we are all committed to working across the parties and to doing the best for our constituents. We already represent a wonderful region. If we can just get our infrastructure right, my firm hope and belief is that our best is yet to come.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered economic growth in the South West.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. Would those who are inexplicably not staying to hear about the Red Arrows please be kind enough to leave quickly and quietly?

RAF Scampton and the Red Arrows

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the closure of RAF Scampton and the location of the Red Arrows.

There are strong historical, social, economic and human factors at play in the closure of RAF Scampton. It is more than 100 years old; it was founded in 1916 as Home Defence Flight Station Brattleby, and renamed to Scampton a year later. With the expansion of the Royal Air Force throughout the 1930s, the base at Scampton played its part in developing the skills and training that was to prove vital just years later. After the outbreak of war, it became one of the central air stations for Bomber Command and is most well-known for the Dambuster squadron, led by Guy Gibson, which inflicted a serious blow against the Nazis with the famous raid. Gibson was awarded the Victoria Cross, RAF Scampton's third, and his insensitively named dog is still buried at the base today.

Across the second world war, RAF Scampton saw a loss of 551 aircrew and 266 aircraft. The bomber legacy was continued after the war, housing Canberras and Vulcans in the 1950s. It was then that the runway was extended, forcing the old Roman road of Ermine Street, the A15, to curve in compensation. That was recognised on the station's official badge, with the curved longbow representing the new layout of the old Roman road from London to York, and the arrow had the same north-easterly orientation as the runway. The Central Flying School came to Scampton in the 1980s, as did the ever popular Red Arrows, in 1983.

It is not just historical considerations but practicalities that matter. In the 1990s, RAF Scampton was mothballed and the Red Arrows were moved to RAF Cranwell. What looked a good decision on paper proved a very bad one in practice. Cranwell proved far too crowded a base for the Red Arrows, which had to share it with the RAF College, a flying school, several training squadrons and a naval air squadron. One air enthusiast wrote to me to point out one incident that proved what a bad idea it was to base the Red Arrows at Cranwell. One day a flight faced a landing gear malfunction and had to land with its wheels up, or pancake as the flyers call it. The fuselage of the Hawk aircraft hurtled across the apron of the runway at great speed, passed through a car park and ended up wedged against the control tower and the duty operations Land Rover, damaging a number of cars en route. Clearly, it was not just the uncrowded skies of Scampton that had proved so useful. That is a very important point in terms of avionics and the Red Arrows—uncrowded skies.

In early 2000, the RAF realised the foolishness of the move and re-opened Scampton to house the Red Arrows again. The proposal now makes the same mistake twice. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. I was the MP when they mothballed Scampton the first time and our arguments were not listened to then. Lessons need to be learned from the recent past.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): The last time that this happened, it was apparently found that the land at Scampton needed a lot of remediation. I tried to find out if the land might actually be sold at a loss because of the remedial work needed, but I have been denied access to the impact assessments. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that information needs to be made public?

Sir Edward Leigh: Obviously, we have to hear from the Minister about land values and regeneration, which is an important part of the debate.

In all our dealings with defence, we must learn that we need the flexibility to deal with changing situations and unexpected threats. That applies as much to keeping HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark, with their amphibious assault capabilities, which I am glad the Government have committed to continuing, as it does to keeping RAF Scampton open. The situation we are in today may change rapidly and we need the ability to respond to that effectively. So, too, may the threats we face. Relations between the UK and Russia, while far from war-like, are not quite friendly either. Russian aircraft test our air defences frequently, as NATO aircraft likewise test Russia's. Scampton is not, of course, a frontline fighter base at the moment. It is not unimaginable that we would need to deal with a scenario in which things heat up over the North sea. As one of my constituents pointed out, if somehow RAF Coningsby was taken out of action, RAF Scampton could be very quickly converted into a frontline role with quick reaction alert capability. If the base is permanently shut and redeveloped, that option, and the flexibility it provides, is off the table. Obviously, if we lose a runway, it is lost.

There are strong economic worries, given the hit that the local secondary economy will take. We need to consider the needs of local enterprise and businesses that are involved directly or indirectly with RAF Scampton.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I was blessed to visit RAF Scampton during my time in the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme and to see Vasco, who looked after us. My colleague, the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) participated also. I noted the tremendous integration between the local community and the base, and the fact that many depend on the base for their livelihood. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that community must be a material consideration in any decision, and that the Ministry of Defence owes that community a duty of care that it must fulfil?

Sir Edward Leigh: As always, the hon. Gentleman makes a very valuable point. I entirely agree with him.

Let me mention Hawker Hunter Aviation. Its land and buildings are privately owned, but it fulfils contracts for the Ministry of Defence and its suppliers. Its business depends on the continuing existence of the airstrip at Scampton, which is far from guaranteed. If the base is redeveloped, we will also need to know what ground has been contaminated by defence use and what the cost of clean-up will be—a very important point. There are many stories to the effect that when the MOD re-routed the A15 to curve around the extended runway, it gave a guarantee that if the base was shut it would restore the original route of that ancient Roman road. Will the Minister comment on that point?

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

Talking of the Minister, I thank him personally for the gracious way in which he has tried to keep me informed at all times, including coming to my office two months before the decision was announced in public, with several of his officials, to explain what he was doing. I objected then to the closure, as he knows, and I keep objecting, but at least he has been very gracious in trying to keep us all informed. As we all know, he is a quite excellent Minister.

Of course, it is all very well for Ministers and civil servants to find savings—I encourage it—but I fear that they have made a decision to close RAF Scampton without being in full knowledge of the facts, and the changing facts.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, I was also lucky enough to visit RAF Scampton with the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme last year and to meet the Red Arrows and to hear of the wonderful work that they do. They also told us of the very specific piece of airspace that they have secured above Scampton, which is very difficult to replicate elsewhere in the UK. It is both high and wide, giving them plenty of room to practise their clever manoeuvres. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a very important consideration?

Sir Edward Leigh: That is an absolutely essential point. The decision, although signed off by Ministers, is really taken by air marshals, avionics experts and all the rest of it. Scampton is unique in having this very high, wide, clean airspace. This is not just about RAF Scampton. It is about what is good for the Red Arrows and what is good for Lincolnshire. We want to keep them in Lincolnshire, not have them moved to Yorkshire, for very good reasons. This is not about sentiment. There are very good reasons to do with the clear blue skies in Lincolnshire.

It may be less expensive to keep Scampton open for defence purposes than to bear a huge clean-up cost to make it marketable to private sector development. There are four hangars at Scampton in various states of disrepair; the Minister may want to comment on that. At least one is in a relatively bad state of repair. Of course, the one that has the Red Arrows is in a superb state of repair—you could eat your breakfast off it. The others, particularly the one behind Guy Gibson's office, is not so good. The MOD cannot do what it has done in the past—just clear out and leave these huge hangars there, with a massive clear-up bill. It must make sure before it leaves the site that the hangars are fully repaired. It cannot walk out once again and neglect its responsibilities.

I know that West Lindsey District Council and Lincolnshire County Council are already making preparations with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that any transition is done sensitively and takes on board the needs of the community. Unfortunately, we have seen the Ministry dispose of such sites very badly in the past—particularly at Hemswell and Binbrook in my constituency—and lessons need to be learnt.

Ex-MOD communities in West Lindsey have witnessed a variety of problems. They are often geographically remote or separate from other communities. Housing stock is disposed of in various ways, lessening the chances of developing cohesive, resilient communities

who can establish links with other communities. Large structures that are poorly suited for conversion to civilian use are left to fall to pieces, making them more expensive to refurbish or demolish. The closure of MOD assets such as shops and social clubs has a profound effect, leaving communities with few amenities and dependent on travel by car or insufficient bus services. Roads have been poorly maintained, sometimes to the extent that they are deemed unfit for use. Heavy fencing and barriers, which are useless once the MOD assets that they protected are gone, are often left unmoved. Access to utilities such as gas mains has been an issue—not to mention broadband connectivity.

I echo the concerns of West Lindsey District Council and agree that if closure goes ahead, which we oppose, a robust and adequately funded exit strategy will be needed if the MOD is going to do the job properly. Ministers will have to tell us whether the full financial impact has been costed. There is also the superb RAF Scampton Heritage Centre, which provides free admission to the general public. One needs to pre-book in order to visit it, which is understandable because it is on a functioning military base. Can the MOD guarantee that the Heritage Centre will be allowed to continue? West Lindsey District Council and Lincolnshire County Council do not have the funding to take it up.

Can the Minister guarantee that the history of this important site will not be simply destroyed or neglected? The history of Bomber Command is no less important than our maritime history, which is so well funded in, say, Portsmouth. This is not a matter of just handing over control and saying, "Here—it's your problem now." We are lucky to have a wonderful group called Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire, which is a partnership between the county council, the military, the commercial sector and volunteer heritage centres and museums, spread across 19 sites. The groups and entities that combine as members of Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire do an amazing job of preserving this important aspect of our county's history—bomber county—and provide incredible value for money. Ministers should tell us how they can better facilitate the work of these groups, especially the Heritage Centre at Scampton. If the MOD is serious about ensuring a proper, sympathetic and ethical transition for RAF Scampton, this should include a funding formula for preserving the history of the base.

We have to think about the future. A young constituent wrote to me to say that growing up and seeing the Red Arrows at Scampton was

"one of the main reasons that I am now studying aerospace engineering at university."

If the RAF leaves, she suggests that we consider turning Scampton into a large-scale aviation attraction. She writes:

"It is vital that young people are encouraged into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers, and a STEM zone should be incorporated into the museum to help inspire the next generation of pilots and engineers."

She suggests that the recent announcement that Retford Gamston Airport in nearby Nottinghamshire is to close means that there will be strong demand for an airfield devoted to general aviation. Scampton's runway is nearly 9,000 feet long and gives a fantastic strategic advantage to air shows and heritage aviation, as we have seen in recent years. By comparison, the Imperial War Museum in Duxford has a runway of only 5,000 feet.

More broadly, we need to know how many jobs will be lost. How many roles will be transferred elsewhere, and what will be the impact on the local secondary economy? The Ministry of Defence does not exist in a bubble; in Lincolnshire, we fund it with taxpayers' money. If its savings will mean losses to the wider community, the MOD needs to outline realistic plans to compensate for those losses and soften the impact of shutting down Scampton. If the base is to shut, the MOD needs to consult all key stakeholders who know Scampton well and have creative ideas that unleash the full potential of the site.

West Lindsey is under constant pressure from the Government to build more houses. Given the size of our schools, the location of our medical practices and the state of our local road network, that is easier said than done. There is great resistance to any more large-scale housing in the villages north of Lincoln, including places such as Cherry Willingham, Nettleham, Saxby and Welton. Should the base close, which we oppose, there will be an opportunity for relocating projected or desired housing numbers from existing villages to a large, new village in Scampton. In order for that to work, proper facilities will have to be created and the surrounding roads upgraded. The MOD must play its part and pledge—today or soon—to do that.

In addition to the historic, economic and social impact, there is a human consideration. Many people in the Royal Air Force community have made Scampton their home over the past century, and many ex-service personnel continue to live all across Lincolnshire. RAF Scampton is not just a facility; it has been a home and community where people have formed bonds and where memories persist. Lives have been lived at Scampton, and many lives have been lost in serving the nation. I would particularly like to remember Corporal Jonathan Bayliss, whose step-brother contacted me in advance of this debate. Corporal Bayliss was the engineer with the Red Arrows who died tragically last year in an accident. He is memorialised at Scampton just outside the offices of the Red Arrows, alongside the two pilots who died in 2011. The bar has been renamed JB's Bar in Corporal Bayliss's memory.

Last year, second world war veteran John "Snogger" Watkins volunteered to grab a rifle and stand guard at RAF Scampton in order to keep the base open. He is 94 years old and was seconded to the Dambusters squadron in 1943, just in time for its famous raid. There is so much to celebrate at RAF Scampton—the services that have been rendered and the sacrifices that have been there. There is a strong case for keeping this base open and in operation. The last review was done only a few years ago and concluded that it was well worth completely resurfacing the runway. It also concluded that Scampton was the best place to keep the Red Arrows. What has changed?

To the bureaucrats, shutting Scampton looks great on paper. Perhaps closure would be an acceptable argument if this was only about reducing costs and saving money, but there is so much more involved. In terms of serving the local community in Scampton and Lincolnshire and maintaining our flexibility in the defence of our realm, the best option is to keep the base open.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate can last until 4.30 pm, so the Minister has just over 12 minutes to perform loop-the-loops, barrel rolls or whatever he chooses.

4.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I will do my best to impress, Mr Hollobone. As is normal practice in these debates, I start by thanking my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) for his very kind words in recognising the issues I have to deal with—providing the news and dealing with the real estate—and for his courtesy in our discourse about this very delicate matter.

I also take this opportunity to welcome back the Tornado pilots who have returned from their duties in Iraq and Syria for the last time. The Tornado is an incredible aircraft, which came into service in 1979. It has now returned to RAF Marham and will be replaced by the F35 and the Typhoon. That demonstrates the advancement of our incredible capabilities, which were reflected across the nation in the 100th anniversary last year. I think that was a welcome reminder to the nation of just how important our armed forces are. We as a nation step forward when perhaps other countries do not. That is part of our desire and appetite to help to shape the world around us, as a force for good. The RAF has played, and continues to play, an important role in that.

Before I discuss RAF Scampton in detail, I want to put into context the wider picture of defence real estate optimisation that we face. My right hon. Friend touched on that a number of times in his speech. We must recognise that a base or a garrison is not just an operational locality; it is also a place for families and friends, where children grow up. It is part of a community and forms a bond with the society in which it is embedded.

We must also recognise that because of decades—indeed, centuries—of development of the armed forces real estate, the country is peppered with little localities, from Dad's Army operations to huge bases. Some 3% of the UK is MOD land. Owing to the reduction in the size of all three services, some of that is surplus to requirement, and that means that we must make tough decisions.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I am sure the Minister will agree that the presence of the Red Arrows makes Scampton more important, because they are such an iconic institution in the United Kingdom. We associate them with the commemoration of important events and anniversaries, and particularly the 100th anniversary of the RAF. We have an important event coming up on 29 March this year. Does the Minister think it might be possible to arrange for the Red Arrows to fly over Parliament so we can properly celebrate that important historic event?

Mr Ellwood: I am tempted to say so many things. My hon. Friend, for whom I have huge respect, knows that we were on different sides of the argument. To be clear, where we are is not where I would want to be. However, I am committed to democracy and I recognise the process that we have undergone, so I respect the fact that, if there is a deal, we will depart from the European Union on 29 March. I hope he will forgive me for saying that although 17 million people may be shouting for joy on that day and may demand that the Red Arrows participate, the nation as a whole—43 million voters—must come together, put aside their polarised views and the gridlock we have faced, and move forward.

[Mr Ellwood]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough touched on the challenges we face, including what Russia is doing. China is tasking us in another void. We must work with our European partners to meet the threats and challenges we face in a diverse, very complex, changing and threatening world. I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) will understand if I do not jump at the opportunity to stand with him on the point that he made.

I return to the subject of the debate. To conclude my point about the defence real estate optimisation programme, we must reduce the size of the footprint of the estate and drive down the running costs.

Dr Caroline Johnson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: I will finish this point.

We must invest heavily in the core sites where our personnel will be based. That is the focal point. As we reduce the size of all three services of our armed forces, we are building up super-garrisons where we can invest in the long term to improve the accommodation and training facilities, but that means that we must take difficult decisions to close bases.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Has the MOD had any discussions with other Departments about whether it should be funding the cost of the Red Arrows, given that their great value is not to war fighting and defence, but to UK plc's influence around the globe? Scampton is now a historic education centre, and that is not the MOD's core business.

Mr Ellwood: No. We are jumping into discussing one of the assets that is based at RAF Scampton. Given the time, I might as well throw away my speech and just go for it, because I will not be able to get through the points. The RAF Red Arrows are critical to our capabilities in a number of ways. They allow our pilots to develop skillsets that they would not get in any other forums. They do much to promote Britain's activity, soft power and so forth. They do outreach—for example, at Scampton and the Bournemouth air show. They reach out to youngsters and invigorate them to think about potentially serving in the armed forces, or at least to support and have reverence and respect for what our armed forces do.

There is no threat to the Red Arrows, but we must ask two questions. First, where can they be based? The RAF itself must make a judgment call on that operational decision.

Karen Lee: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: I will finish this point, if I may.

Secondly, where do the Red Arrows train? They spend some of their time training, and some of their time doing display work. The training area is not necessarily right on the doorstep of where they are based, but the training must be done with the permission of the Civil Aviation Authority, so there are many factors that must be taken into account when allocating where the Red Arrows will be. The Red Arrows have moved regularly since they were created. They have never been in one place for any huge length of time.

Dr Caroline Johnson: My understanding is that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) said, the Red Arrows have been in Lincolnshire since 1983. I was a hospital doctor before I came to Parliament, and I remember the joy that many local patients would get from watching the Red Arrows practise outside the window.

I wonder whether the Minister has given consideration to a couple of points. First, RAF Cranwell will soon have a special G-force training facility, which the RAF Red Arrows will use—they are, obviously, local. Secondly, has he had any discussions with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy about contributing to the Red Arrows?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is eating into my time. Will she expedite her question?

Dr Johnson: Thirdly, what discussions has the Minister had with the Civil Aviation Authority about the special piece of airspace that the Red Arrows have for practising in? My understanding is that that is terribly difficult to replicate elsewhere.

Mr Ellwood: I will not answer those questions here because, with respect, this is the debate of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough. I will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) with the answers.

On the Red Arrows and Lincolnshire, I have had the good fortune to visit many of the bases. I was in RAF Marham on Thursday, which is to be the home of the new 617 Squadron in tribute to the Dambusters, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough mentioned. Lincolnshire does incredibly well, given that ever fewer runways and airbases from the second world war survive. It is the home of the RAF. I have mentioned Marham, and Coningsby is also based there, with our quick reaction force. My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham mentioned Cranwell, where officer training takes place. She is right that there is a new state-of-the-art facility there for F-35 training, which involves a simulator that allows pilots to experience not just taking off and landing, but other moves; it gives them the exact experience of being in the aircraft. Then there is Digby, and not least Waddington, where our star capability is. As a county, Lincolnshire does incredibly well.

Karen Lee: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: I will not give way again. I literally have two and a half minutes left, and I am on page 2 of my speech. I might as well give up.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough said, some of the assets at RAF Scampton—the bases and buildings—are exactly the same as they were in the second world war. We have not invested in the site for some time. The runway itself requires huge investment because of the weight of the aircraft, the distance and the runway systems. The cost of bringing all that up to the standards we expect would be prohibitive. There is huge recognition of the history of that important site, given the role of the Dambusters, which my right hon. Friend touched on. We do not want to lose sight of that. I am pleased to hear that the museum is going well. In our private conversations, I have said that I would like

to speak to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to see what more we can do invest in that site.

I make it very clear that we do not take these decisions lightly. Through the full scoping of the RAF real estate, we must make tough judgments about where we will invest in the long term. I am very sorry that Scampton was not one of the sites chosen, but we need to work with those who will be based there to ensure that, as the relocation takes place, they and their families are looked after.

Ultimately, this is an operational decision made by the RAF itself. I promise my right hon. Friend that Lincolnshire will continue to play the most significant part in the air contribution to our military capability.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I thank the Minister for meeting me about the future of the assets at RAF Kirton in Lindsey. I hope he will ensure, as he deals with the transfer at Scampton, that there continues to be proper engagement with local people in relation to the assets at Kirton in Lindsey.

Mr Ellwood: In conclusion, I simply say that I understand hon. Members' passion. It is important that MPs come here to support their communities and recognise the value that RAF personnel and their families bring. I recognise that, and I recognise the difficult decisions that must be made. I stand here as a pilot and as somebody who served in the armed forces. It is important, given the complexities and challenges we face, that the RAF continues to advance. We will continue to invest in the people, the real estate, the training and the airbases.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Unpaid Work Trials

4.30 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Before we begin the debate, I advise hon. Members that we are expecting a Division in the House within the next 10 minutes, upon which this debate will be suspended for 15 minutes to enable hon. Members to vote. I call Stewart Malcolm McDonald.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the use of unpaid work trials at the outset of employment.

Thank you very much, Mr Hollobone; it is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair. Hon. Members will know of my longstanding interest in this issue, having introduced a private Member's Bill on it after the 2017 election: the Unpaid Trial Work Periods (Prohibition) Bill. Unfortunately, and I hate to start on a sour note, my Bill was talked out by the Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), when he was in post. I am an optimist, however, and I am optimistic that the new Minister will drive us in a different direction, see the gravity of the problem, and bring forward the necessary legislation to prevent that exploitation from continuing.

There are many people—not just in this House, but outside it as well—whom I should thank for their input during my preparations for that Bill and for this debate, and during my long campaigning on the issue, but I will single out one campaign for mention: Unite's "Better Than Zero" campaign. It has been at the forefront of not only challenging the use of unpaid work trials, but putting forward a credible alternative to exploitative work practices, with a particular focus on the hospitality sector. I encourage all hon. Members to support that campaign, particularly its hospitality charter.

I will outline exactly what is going on and why it is a problem that needs fixing. Unpaid work trials—the period between applying for a job and being given the formal job offer—are at the heart of what I want the Government to fix. I want them to fix the fact that that part of employment law is entirely unregulated, although I am sure the Minister will dispute that when she gets to her feet. There is a deficiency in the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, for which, in fairness, I do not blame Labour. Nobody saw it as an issue then and has not for the last 20 years, but it is a deficiency that needs to be fixed.

During my research for this debate and the preparations for my private Member's Bill, many hundreds of people got in touch to give me their personal experiences of what it is like to take part in an unpaid trial shift. I myself did it when I was younger, as, I am sure, did many other hon. Members. Unpaid trials range from perhaps a couple of hours in a coffee shop or a hotel, for example, right up to the extreme end, with the most extreme that I have come across being a 40-hour working week, where people tried out for a job that they would not be paid for and had no guarantee of securing permanently.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on all the work that he has done to bring this important issue to the public's attention.

[Patricia Gibson]

More than half of people know someone who has experienced an unpaid work trial or have done one themselves. Does he agree that that shows the scale of the problem and the abuse of workers that is taking place?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Indeed. Although there are no Government or trade union statistics on that, it is a problem that everyone knows exists, because we have either done it ourselves or know somebody who has.

Not only do people work—as in the case that I mentioned—for up to 40 hours without pay when trying out for a job, but we have the vicious situation of people being offered work trials for jobs that do not even exist. That can take the form of a job being advertised so a business can get itself through a busy period such as Christmas, or the wedding season in the spring time if the employer is a hotel. It can also be used to cover staff sicknesses. People are being taken advantage of when they are asked to come in and try out for jobs that there is absolutely no chance of them getting, because all the employer wants to do is cover shortages in their own rota.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing the debate. He talks about some of the more extreme examples. He may be shocked to hear the experience of a constituent of mine. She had a seven-day unpaid work trial, but was also told that if she was subsequently employed and left within the first year of employment, she would have to repay the company for the cost of her training and her Disclosure and Barring Service check.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Rather unusually, I am blown away and have no words. I have never before heard of that kind of thing happening, but it does not surprise me at all. Imagine how dispirited and depressed that kind of situation leaves an applicant feeling, particularly if they have applied for job after job and have got nowhere, often with no feedback from those from whom they hoped to secure employment.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has clearly outlined some worrying issues. I do not think anybody present would support somebody not being paid for a one-week work trial if that is how it is badged. There are also legitimate concerns that, as part of the interview process, people may be asked to perform certain work tasks to see whether they are suitable for the role. How would he differentiate between the unethical practices that he outlines and genuine job interview and job selection processes?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: My Bill deals with the very scenarios that the hon. Gentleman mentions. I want to make it clear that I am not against trying people out for a job. The Bill is quite clear on that, too. I am against the use of unpaid trials to exploit people. Later in my speech, I will mention a business that has changed its practices as a result of this debate approaching, which might address the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Some employers know that the practice is wrong but are indulging in it. I know that they know it is wrong, because they changed their practices when my Bill was introduced last year. I will give two examples. The first, believe it or not, is the BBC. I had been told that the BBC was taking advantage of young freelancers; abusing their time, talent and energy; involving them in the production of programmes; and doing so through the guise of an unpaid trial period. I wrote to the BBC about the matter and, as a result, it has stopped that practice. Why? It knows that it is exploitative.

Aldi has changed the way that it interviews and recruits people. It has taken away what might have been thought of as the interview element, whereby someone carried out a work task. Instead, it now has a shorter interview period that involves shadowing someone around the store to see exactly how the business works and, crucially, so that the applicant can determine whether the job is for them. That is a better way to recruit people.

My Bill would also have given some of the cards to the applicant who, it strikes me, holds very few in the entire process. My Bill would have made it clear that employers offering a trial shift had to be doing so for a job that actually existed; that when the trial period started and finished had to be stipulated in black and white; and that applicants knew that, however they got on during the trial, the employer would give them proper feedback as to whether they had got the job. My Bill was all about empowering applicants and making it clear to them that the law is on their side, rather than it being deficient and too often working against them.

When I introduced my Bill, the Government were of the view that the law was not deficient and dealt with these matters as it was. In fairness to the new Minister, she has brought forward guidelines on the use of unpaid work trials. That is welcome—I get that change often happens in small steps—but I am afraid that it is not enough. She is, I am sure, unsurprised to hear me say that. We know that millions of people up and down the UK are crying out for proper legislative change that will back them when they go for a job. At the minute, the law absolutely does not do that. That can be evidenced by the fact that there has never been a single fine—

4.40 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.55 pm

On resuming—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Hon. Members will be glad to know I am bringing my remarks to a close, to allow the debate to begin properly.

It is my understanding that the Government believe the current law is sufficient, presumably with the addition of their recently published guidelines. However, the evidence suggests that it is not: there has not been one fine, prosecution or even public shaming of a company or employer that has used unpaid trial shifts, particularly in the most pernicious and exploitative fashion, in the history of the National Minimum Wage Act.

I am sure many Members will wish to share the experiences of their constituents; I would like to share just one. A mother whose son had gone through an unpaid work trial said:

“My son was asked to do a trial shift in our local restaurant. The manager who was on shift did not even speak to him when he was in! He was left in the bar with no direction and when he tried to help the others he was told to get back behind the bar! He wasn’t paid a penny for his time. The same restaurant had already done the same thing to a friend of mine’s son except it was for a kitchen porter and he did 4 hours, no pay and again at end of his shift he just left, waited over a week with no job offered.”

I cannot expect the Government to legislate against obnoxious behaviour, which surely that example represents, but they can legislate to prevent unpaid trial shifts being used in such an obnoxious fashion.

Some may say that I am being partisan, but I think I make an accurate observation: this Government are utterly out of ideas. I am offering them a free idea at a time when we are asked to believe that the Prime Minister wants to improve and enhance workers’ rights in one fashion or another. Assuming there is no general election between now and the upcoming Queen’s Speech in June, I plead with the Minister to do everything she can to ensure legislation is brought forward in one form or another, either in this Session or in the Queen’s Speech later this year, to ensure that we end the use of unpaid work trials.

When I was lucky enough to be picked in the ballot for private Members’ Bills, inevitably I was bombarded by outside interests saying what they would like a Bill to achieve. Obviously, any Member who finds themselves in that position wants to bring in a Bill that can genuinely make a difference to people’s lives. There are millions of people, particularly young people, up and down this country who have fallen victim to this practice day after day for many years. Even with the new guidelines, millions more will fall victim to it.

Knowing what we know, it would be an utter dereliction of duty for this Parliament and this Government not to act. I do not look to this Parliament to solve many problems—hon. Members understand my political view of it—but it can solve this problem. I ask the Government to get serious and start solving it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench spokespersons no later than 5.23 pm. The guidelines give five minutes to the SNP, five minutes for Her Majesty’s Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister. Stewart Malcolm McDonald will be allowed a couple of minutes at the end to make concluding remarks. Five Back-Bench Members wish to contribute, so I will impose a four-minute limit on each speaker.

4.49 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) on securing the debate and on the way he introduced the subject.

As we have heard, unpaid work trials are becoming a widespread practice. I, too, have heard about many cases, predominantly from young people desperate to

get a foot on the employment ladder, who have been given false hope of employment and been cheated—yes, cheated—out of a day or more’s pay. They are used to provide free labour, to cover staff shortages or to reduce costs, with the final insult of not being hired for the job they applied for in the first place.

Sadly, it does not surprise me that Unite the Union—I declare for the record that I am a member—has heard from many of its members in the hospitality sector, who believe that these trials are in fact a crude ruse that will allow companies to get away with not paying people a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work. It is clear that some companies are offering shifts with no intention of giving somebody a job, and others, who may actually give a job to someone, want to see how many shifts they can squeeze out of them first for no pay at all, or at a lower rate. It is nothing short of scandalous and should concern us all that Unite says that the use of unpaid trial shifts has increased exponentially in recent years.

The sad reality is that we are having this debate today because both the law and culture in this country place little emphasis on workplace protection and do not support or respect it. We give far too little attention in this place to the reality of the world of work. Far too many people experience insecurity, uncertainty and exploitation, and until this place resolves to do something about that, the kind of injustices we have heard about today will continue.

The blunt truth is that unpaid work trials are a scam. They are a means for employers to increase their profits at the expense of the workers, and are part of a wider problem across society whereby workers, especially young people, are seen as a disposable commodity. In an ideal world, all employers would act like the majority of decent and responsible employers out there, who pay their trial workers, and we would not need legislation to tell them to pay people fairly for the work they do. We do not live in an ideal world, and some people need to be told what is unacceptable. We should all stand four-square behind the principle that if you work, you should be paid for it.

I welcome the publication of the new guidance from the Department, but the proof will be in the pudding. The guidance says that it will ultimately be up to enforcement officers, courts and tribunals to decide whether there has been a breach of minimum wage regulations, but how realistic will that approach be? How many people will resort to litigation, waiting many months with an uncertain outcome, possibly facing experienced lawyers, just for a day’s pay? How much enforcement will actually take place? The International Labour Organisation has a benchmark of one labour market inspector for every 10,000 workers, but in the UK we have only one for every 20,000 workers.

Would it be easier to put a legal presumption in place? If you are working for a minimum wage it should apply, whether it is a trial shift or not. It is open to employers to have a robust interview process and seek references, and thanks to the weak employment laws in this country, they can sack workers with impunity anyway, if it does not work out in the early stages. If there is any need for trial shifts at all, there is certainly no justification for them without pay.

I am angry at this systematic, cynical and avaricious exploitation, but I am also sad that many young people think that unpaid work trials are just the way things are.

[Justin Madders]

Do they not deserve more respect than that and more protection? Can the Minister set out what more she can do to increase awareness among young people? In 20 years of the minimum wage, there have been only 14 prosecutions. Unless rights are enforced, they will never be truly worthwhile. The Government need to step up to the plate.

5.3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) on bringing this forward. It is a pertinent issue and one that I firmly believe in.

I am also a firm believer in hard work—that is a fact. I was raised that way and raised my boys in the same way. If people want a new car, they must work hard and save hard, and keep the old banger as long as they can. If they want their own house, they must work hard and save for longer. That has always been the motto in our family. I understand that it is harder now for young people to get into the housing market, no matter how much work they carry out, but that is a debate for a different day.

The debate today is clear. As I said to the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) before the debate started, I can well remember my dad hiring people, watching them for the day and then saying at the end of the day, “Here is your pay; I don’t think you are actually cut out for this job.” By and large, the person understood and accepted that. I can never imagine him getting someone to work for the day and then saying that they did not pass the test. That is for a very simple reason: it is simply not fair to expect someone to work for a day and not pay them—not ever. That is the way it is. If that were true in my dad’s time, it is certainly every bit as true today. The principles of decency and rightness dictate that we treat people how we would like to be treated—with dignity and respect. That is what the hon. Member for Glasgow South referred to in his introductory speech—dignity, respect and fairness.

I fully understand those who wish to trial employees. Do they have the customer skills? Can they think on their feet and use logic? Can they handle the work? People can or cannot—a trial will ascertain that. I am all for trial periods or probation, but I believe they must be of a short duration and for a specific purpose, and most of all they must be paid. That is why I welcome the Government’s commitment to entrenching the right to be paid for work. I am glad that it allows people to come for an interview that includes work experience time. The six tests that the Government outline and how they expect the law to be interpreted are very clear. I want to quote them here, to have them on record.

“Whether a ‘work trial’ is genuinely for recruitment purposes,” and that is the crux of the matter,

“(if it is not, it will generally be considered to be work and the individual will be eligible to be paid the national minimum wage or the national living wage); whether the trial...exceeds the time that the employer would reasonably need to test the individual’s ability to carry out the job offered (in the Government’s view an individual conducting work in a trial lasting longer than one day is likely to be entitled to the national minimum wage);...the extent to which the individual is observed while carrying out the tasks;

the nature of the tasks carried out by the individual and how closely these relate to the job offered (where the tasks are different from those which the job would involve...but rather to get the tasks carried out); whether the tasks carried out have a value to the employer beyond testing the individual...(this will normally indicate that they do not have such a value and that the individual is not ‘working’); whether trial periods are important (aside from recruiting) to the way the employer runs its business.”

There should be no other misunderstanding with employers or perspective employers. If someone is asked to work a day, they should be paid for that day. I recently read an article on the calling of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church. A massive part of his outreach was about better working conditions for mine and coal workers. While impressed with what he achieved a long time ago, it is sad that we are still having to say to people that it is not okay to expect something for nothing, from someone who wants nothing more than a job to pay the bills.

I am all for internships and apprenticeships, and I am also all for ensuring job suitability. If someone cannot do a job then they may lose that job. What I am not for is people being taken advantage of, and unfortunately that is what is happening. It must stop. Minister, we are seeking clarification of the law and assurance. We support the workers in their every attempt to ensure that those who work are paid, no matter how long or short that work is.

5.7 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), not just on securing this debate but on the legislation he introduced under the private Member’s Bill process. It is an area of deep regret that that legislation has not been pursued. It highlights the absolute folly of the private Member’s Bill system in this place, but that is a debate for another day.

I rise to make similar points to those already made. We need action on this today. I think, “Okay, fine, great, guidelines,” but the reality is that we need this enshrined in law. In the time I have been in this House, I have already seen a number of areas of employment legislation and employment practice that do not do justice to our constituents, quite frankly. Some of it is about unpaid work trials, which I reckon will be even more of a thing after Brexit. The hospitality sector largely relies on EU nationals. When the drawbridge is brought up as a result of the Immigration Bill, the chances are that the hospitality sector is going to rely more on people in the local population working in those jobs. I would be very concerned if hotels and restaurants decided that they were going to deploy unpaid work trials.

Patricia Gibson: The UK Government have said that they are of the view that unpaid work trials are permissible in legitimate recruitment processes. Does he agree with me that the problem is that nobody is monitoring what is permissible and what is legitimate?

David Linden: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point; that is something the Minister should consider. When we say that this place just does not deliver for workers’ rights, we look at the absolute lack of any action on zero-hours contracts. We look at, for example,

the age discrimination in the national living wage, which is not applicable to those under 25. Those are areas where the Government have been told time and time again that Parliament wants action, but they sit back and say, “Oh well, we’ll do guidelines, or we’ll do consultations.” I certainly welcome consultations, but at this stage we need to see legislation.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) has made the point that, even though the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 is on the statute books, only 14 employers have been found in breach of the legislation since it came into force. I do not think that is helpful at all.

The point I would make, which people would expect to come from a Scottish Nationalist Member of Parliament, is that if Westminster is not willing to take action on better employment conditions, then surely it should look at devolving that legislation to the Scottish Parliament, where we have a track record of taking action. Take, for example, the business pledge, whereby companies make commitments to say that they are investing in youth, do not have zero-hours contracts and do not discriminate based on someone’s age. There is clearly action in Scotland that can and will be taken to provide better employment conditions for people.

I regret that a number of parties in this Parliament blocked the devolution of employment legislation. If hon. Members are going to stand up in this Chamber today and say that they want better employment rights for people, that is fine—I would like to see better employment rights for people across the UK—but I do not want to come to another debate and make this point again and be stonewalled by the Government. If the Government are not willing to do it, then the Scottish Government will.

5.11 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) on securing this debate and on his persistent and tenacious work in championing this long-standing issue. It is important, because in many ways his background is reflected in the priorities he brings to this House. I was thinking about the backgrounds of many MPs, and perhaps that is something we need to consider. Is this matter on their radar at all? Do they have even a basic understanding of how this sector operates? Have they ever had exposure to it? Have they ever understood how these exploitative employment practices work?

Like the hon. Gentleman, I share that background of having worked in similar environments. I reflect on my first job when I was at school: I went to work in a pizzeria in Glasgow called La Vita, which hon. Members might have heard of. There is one in George Square, one in Byres Road and one in Bishopbriggs Cross. I was hired on a zero-hours contract, but I also had to do an unpaid trial shift when I started there with my friend Ryan. I remember we were competing against each other for the same job, but they ended up taking us both on.

Often, we would go in during the week and work for maybe an hour, and then be sent home with a free pizza when we were expecting to work five or six hours. It was

okay for me, because I was still living at home at the time, so it was pocket money, but I shudder to think about the people I worked alongside, who relied on that as income to live on and often to take care of children. While I was somewhat insulated from the full effects of that exploitative practice, I none the less realised that it was unfair and discriminatory. We also had our tips taken from us—a practice that was subsequently made illegal. That just shows that, even though we are operating at the margins, things that happened then to me and others are actually illegal now.

We are still dealing with the effects of casualised employment, zero-hours contracts and unpaid trial shifts, which remain to be tackled. I wonder why that is not a priority for this Government and why it is not a priority for more Members of this House, who might otherwise have been here. I think it is simply that they are not aware of it.

Patricia Gibson: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that it does not seem to be a priority for this Government—unless, of course, the Minister is able to enlighten us and tell us what her Government might do. Does he agree, given that we all understand it is not a priority for this Government, that that is a powerful argument for devolving this power to the Scottish Government?

Mr Sweeney: As a Labour Member of Parliament, my analysis is primarily driven by class. I have just as much interest in securing the employment rights of someone who lives in Liverpool as of someone in Glasgow. That is where I operate. I am saying that I want us to have unity of purpose for worker’s rights across the UK, and that is why I believe in the trade union movement and the labour movement. We can have respect for ideological difference on this, but that is my analysis, and it is as simple as that.

I want to increase trade union density, because there has historically been a significant casualisation and a low trade union density in the hospitality sector in this country. That is why the “Better Than Zero” campaign has been particularly effective in mobilising workers and making them aware of their power. I also commend the GMB for the excellent, ground-breaking agreement it achieved with Hermes, the courier firm, just yesterday, which secured holiday pay, guaranteed rates and collective negotiation under the GMB, with full recognition for those workers. That is a lesson for the rest of the gig economy and the hospitality sector that we can really achieve improvements, and a demonstration of a trade union working innovatively. What could we do for workers’ rights across the UK with the real force of law and legislation behind them? I feel that would be a real game-changer for our economy; it would improve average wages and improve the resilience of our economy, and that is the way we ought to proceed.

I have experienced exploitative employment practices, as have other Members of this House. It is time that this House woke up to the reality facing millions of young people and casualised workers across the UK.

5.15 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I, too, start by congratulating the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald)

[Hugh Gaffney]

on both securing this debate and the work he undertook on the Unpaid Trial Work Periods (Prohibition) Bill. When I first arrived at this House after the 2017 general election, I wore my Parcellforce shirt to remind me where I had come from and why I was elected by the people of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, whom I asked to send a working man to Parliament. They sent me here to fight for justice for workers, and that is why I call on the Government to end not just this scandal of unpaid trial shifts, but all employment practices that fail to treat people with dignity and respect.

I was truly disappointed that the Government chose to talk the Bill out, despite the support from hon. Members of all parties, the trade union movement and the public. The Government have allowed this scandalous situation, in which employers can ask someone to undertake an unpaid trial shift, to continue because of their actions. It is not isolated to one sector of the economy or one type of employer; it is a widespread practice in our economy, ranging from the hospitality sector to the creative industries. The practice is used not only by small, family-run businesses, but by multinational corporations that think it is normal. I am sure we can all agree that it is a practice which must come to an end.

I pay tribute to organisations, such as the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the National Union of Students, that are working tirelessly to highlight the injustices faced by those who are made to work unpaid trial shifts. I particularly commend the “Better Than Zero” campaign for the tremendous work it has done and continues to do to highlight some of the worst employment practices in Scotland and to educate, organise and mobilise young workers to fight for their rights. I have joined with the campaign on many occasions, and it was a pleasure to take action together.

It is time for us in this House to take real action on this question. There should be legal clarity for both workers and employers on what constitutes a trial shift. There should be a requirement for employers to outline the length, the criteria and the outcome of any trial shifts undertaken, and it should be made clear in the National Minimum Wage Act that a failure to pay individuals for working on a trial shift is illegal. It is time that the Government sent out that message.

Of course, unpaid trial shifts are just a symptom of the type of economy that the Government have created. It is an economy where many workers are not paid the living wage—I want to see that living wage, or even the national minimum wage, increased to £10 per hour. It is an economy where many workers find themselves with job insecurity, with the use of zero-hours contracts, but we are told that the unemployment rate has never been lower. It has never been lower because of zero-hours contracts; that is how that figure is justified. This is an economy where basic health and safety requirements such as breaks are viewed as optional or outright ignored by employers. It is an economy where workers find it increasingly difficult to organise and mobilise to defend their rights, terms and conditions, all because of this Government’s sustained attacks on the trade union movement. I say to any workers working in low-paid jobs, “Join a trade union today. You can make a difference.”

5.19 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), on securing the debate. I emphasise my support for his private Member’s Bill.

I am one of the Scottish National party signatories to that Bill, alongside my hon. Friends the Members for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), for Glasgow East (David Linden), for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan). I also pay tribute to the hon. Members for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) and for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) for their support. Indeed, the Bill is supported by Members from every single political party represented in the House. You look surprised, Mr Hollobone, but there are Conservative Members who support my hon. Friend’s Bill.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. As Chairman, I have neither a surprised face nor any other kind of face. Mine is a neutral face. I am just listening to the hon. Gentleman’s speech with great interest.

Chris Stephens: Thank you, Chair. All I will say is that I will play you at poker for money any time. We will move on.

The Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South is supported by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Trades Union Congress. As my hon. Friend outlined, he has been assisted by both “Better Than Zero” and Unite the Union’s hospitality section, and I thank Bryan Simpson, a constituent of my hon. Friend’s, for sending us an excellent briefing for the debate. It highlights several issues that hon. Members have addressed, including Mooboo, which I will come on to, and Aldi, which has had to change its practices.

The briefing also includes the testimony of individuals who have been through unpaid work trials. Rachel from Bearsden said:

“I did two unpaid trials of 5-6 hours each for a local restaurant who then strung me along for weeks with the promise of shifts before ending contact.”

Nicole from Renfrew said:

“I went to one of these and it is actually slave labour. They use you to get the shop ready for opening time and get annoyed if you make any mistakes (even though you haven’t been trained to do the job). They just abandon you and come back moaning that you’ve not finished the million tasks to do. They then emailed me the next day saying I was unsuccessful and that they can’t provide feedback because of the volume of applicants.”

Those are just some of the cases studies that Unite supplied.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): We know that not only are such cases fairly common, but particular employers use a string of people like that, giving only short shifts or a day or two of employment. Those employers use people simply to plug a gap in their staffing and never look to employ someone.

Chris Stephens: That is exactly what happens. It is a way for unscrupulous employers to cut their wage bill by essentially introducing unpaid labour. My hon. Friend

the Member for Glasgow South mentioned that some people have worked a 40-hour week in an unpaid work trial. They are then not given the job and another person is taken on to do an unpaid work trial for the same length of time.

The research and case studies provided to us by Unite are also supported by the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed—IPSE—which has looked at the treatment of freelancers. Unpaid work trials are an issue not only in the hospitality sector, but in the creative sector and others. According to IPSE, this has led to an average loss of £5,000 per year for its members, with 20% of its members saying that that is standard practice within the sector.

There is huge public support for my hon. Friend's private Member's Bill. While in the Commons Chamber, several Members of Parliament from Scotland saw an advert on Twitter from Mooboo bubble tea, highlighting its unpaid work trial. We questioned Mooboo about that practice, and we found ourselves blocked on Twitter for having the temerity to question the company and its working practices. That led to a petition that surpassed 13,000 signatures. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South also wrote to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs concerning the practices of Mooboo stores.

Has the Minister been in contact with her friends in the Department for Work and Pensions? We know that individuals who refuse or leave a zero-hours contract job can face universal credit sanctions. If someone refuses the offer of an unpaid work trial, will they be subject to a universal credit sanction?

The fact is that the organisation leading the way on employment law is the European Union. The European Parliament is looking at radical alternatives to employment law, leading the way for workers in the gig economy, in stark contrast to the Government's good work plan, which nibbles around the edges. As my hon. Friends have said, if Members of the Westminster Parliament will not tackle unfairness in the workplace, that job should be handed to the Scottish Parliament, and we will do it for them.

5.25 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) for securing this important debate and for his excellent opening speech. Like him, I highlight the fantastic campaigns by trade unions, particularly the "Better Than Zero" campaign.

As several Members have set out, unpaid work trials have become a widespread practice in the hospitality, entertainment and retail sectors, but it is important that we place that development in the wider context of the so-called gig economy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) did. Characterised by increasingly exploitative working practices and conditions and insecure work, the gig economy affects millions who are struggling to make ends meet, making it harder for someone to say no to unreasonable and exploitative conditions set by employers.

That is the reality for so many, but it is being ignored, and even—dare I say it—encouraged by a Tory Government that represent only the wealthiest few. Everything about

the current crisis of work is a consequence of an environment that is designed to reduce the burden on the employer at the expense of millions of workers.

In addition, more than £3 billion is lost in wages every year through unpaid work, with the continuing practice of unpaid work trials a key contributing factor. After a long campaign by the TUC and trade unions, and after attempts by Members—notably the hon. Member for Glasgow South—to introduce legislation have been repeatedly ignored, the Government attempted last December to set out when unpaid trial periods are acceptable. It was about time. As we have heard, a growing number of workers, particularly younger workers and those with learning disabilities, have been asked to work for free in recent years. Research by Unite has shown that, over the past three years, there has been a six-fold increase in complaints about unpaid shifts.

It is not only the trade unions and those who represent workers who say that the current system is not working. The Federation of Small Businesses has expressed concerns that unpaid trial shifts are shading into exploitation. Far too many employers have made people who are seeking work do a full-day trial shift, and in some cases employers have even demanded a full week of free work. That is not limited to small businesses; it includes large companies, as highlighted by my hon. Friends the Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

The TUC makes it clear that testing skills and abilities should be part of a structured recruitment process. Having worked in industry for 20 years before I came to Parliament, I support structured recruitment processes, which are far better than the old boys' networks they often replace. However, there is absolutely no justification for employers demanding a period of free work as the price of entry into a job. In my view, and in the view of the TUC and other campaigners on this issue, employers who require candidates to do any productive work should be made to pay them at least the minimum wage—which, by the way, will be at least £10 an hour under a Labour Government. Why does the Minister think that productive work should go unpaid? Why will she not commit to a £10-per-hour minimum wage?

David Linden: I realise that this is probably an unpopular point to mention in this place, because the practice is rife, but does the hon. Lady agree that we need to have a conversation about the use of unpaid internships in this building? Often, people will work for an MP for several weeks and there is a possibility that they might get taken on afterwards. It is not quite an unpaid work trial, but there is still a culture, in this building and in other Parliaments across the UK, of unpaid internships.

Chi Onwurah: That is an excellent point, and I would welcome a debate on unpaid internships in this building. I myself offer living-wage paid internships. It also happens in other areas, such as the media, where the BBC and others offer unpaid internships. It is a barrier to entry into certain professions and a form of exploitation.

It is clearly bad employment practice to ask for real work and not pay for it. It also means that employers avoid paying taxes and making a relevant contribution.

[*Chi Onwurah*]

That leaves the taxpayer and the entire country out of pocket. Will the Minister commit to ending such tax avoidance by preventing unpaid trial shifts?

As the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) emphasised, without strong enforcement the new guidance is not worth the paper it is written on, but the organisations tasked with enforcement have faced huge cuts since 2010. The employment agency standards inspectorate has lost half its budget. That is why a Labour Government will invest in enforcement through a new Minister of Labour. How will the Minister prevent companies from simply choosing to ignore what are, after all, just guidelines?

Employers who require candidates to do any productive work should be made to pay them the national minimum wage. Will the Minister commit to these basic requirements when it comes to trial periods, and if not, why not? Workers deserve more. Ending exploitative unpaid trial shifts is just one aspect of redressing the balance in favour of workers, and that is why we will set up a new Ministry of Labour. If the Minister cannot match that, she should at least commit to ending unpaid trial shifts.

5.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) on securing this important debate. I am proud to serve as the Minister responsible for the national living wage and workers' rights, and I am pleased to be responding to the debate. I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is wrong to exploit workers through unpaid work trials at the outset of their employment. Workers have the right to be paid the minimum wage when they are deemed to be working, and this must be upheld.

The Government are committed to building an economy that works for everyone through the national minimum wage and the national living wage. We will continue to ensure that the lowest paid in our society are rewarded fairly for their contribution to the economy. All businesses, irrespective of their size or sector, are responsible for paying the correct minimum wage to their staff. The vast majority of responsible employers ensure that they get it right.

The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members raised examples of constituents and others who had been disadvantaged. Having heard the details, I can say that it is highly likely that those practices were illegal. An individual's entitlement to the minimum wage depends on whether they are deemed to be a worker. If they are a worker, their employment must pay at least the relevant national minimum or national living wage. Our legislation is clear on that.

Many individuals participating in work trials would be considered to be workers. Therefore, they are already protected under existing legislation and are eligible to be paid the minimum wage from the start of their employment. An employer may wish to test an individual's skills using a range of kitchen knives in a restaurant kitchen. That would probably have little or no value in terms of work for the employer, so would not require payment at the relevant minimum wage rate.

Clearly, the circumstances of each particular case would need to be considered to confirm entitlement to the minimum wage. However, the case of the 40-hour unpaid trial is, in the view of my Department, likely to be excessive and, therefore, against the law. Similarly, new recruits who are required by their employers to spend time at the outset of their employment undertaking training are entitled to the minimum wage for that time.

The hon. Member for Glasgow South raised the issue of exploitative unpaid work trials in his private Member's bill of March last year. The Government recognised that concerns had been expressed in the House and in the media. Therefore, we issued new guidance on unpaid work trials on 3 December last year, to provide further clarity for employers and workers. The guidance aims to ensure that workers, especially young people in the hospitality and retail sectors, are not exploited through unfair and excessive unpaid work trials. The guidance sets out a number of relevant factors that should be taken into account, such as the duration of the trial and whether the employee is deriving economic value from the activity.

The Government have clarified their view that work trials that are reasonable, not excessive and clearly part of a legitimate recruitment exercise do not require payment at the relevant minimum wage rate. For example, an employer may wish to test an individual's skill in a restaurant kitchen through a short trial before hiring that person. That would probably have little or no economic value for the employer, so would not entitle the applicant, but it may well lead to a job offer for the individual. However, unpaid trials are not permitted if they are part of a genuine recruitment process, if they are excessive in length or if they are simply for the financial benefit of the employer.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I have no quarrel or disagreement with anything that the Minister has just outlined. The guidelines that she has produced are, no doubt, admirable. What is her objection to underpinning them in statute?

Kelly Tolhurst: As I have already said, we have an enforcement system for the national minimum wage, which, with the guidance, is focusing on targeting the employers that we need to target. We need to recognise—I was going to come to this point later—that in 2017-18, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs investigated and took action against more than 1,000 employers, raising £15.6 million, and affecting over 200,000 workers. That shows that the enforcement work is taking place. HMRC will investigate every worker complaint.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am glad that HMRC investigates, but how many of the cases that the Minister has mentioned, in which money has been clawed back by workers who have been deprived of money to which they were entitled, took place in a period that would be considered a work trial, as opposed to when the worker had formally signed a contract and started a new job?

Kelly Tolhurst: As part of HMRC's involvement and enforcement of the national minimum wage, it investigates a number of breaches, including unpaid trials. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that HMRC is currently actively investigating companies in which there is a suggestion

of unpaid work trials. Obviously, those investigations are currently ongoing, on the back of the legislation and the guidance that we offered.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kelly Tolhurst: I will make some progress. I encourage any worker who has concerns about unpaid work trials to call ACAS for free confidential advice, or to contact HMRC via its online complaints form. ACAS advisors will explain the general position in terms of entitlement to the national minimum wage and advise an individual based on the circumstances of their case. If the caller then feels that they may have been entitled to the minimum wage, the ACAS advisor will explain their options for taking the matter forward, which include contacting HMRC about formal national minimum wage enforcement.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kelly Tolhurst: I will carry on, because I want to give the hon. Member for Glasgow South time to wind up at the end.

HMRC investigators consider work trials on a case-by-case basis. They explore the precise detail of the arrangements, including what the worker is being asked to do and for how long. Where they come to the view that the arrangements constitute work under national minimum wage regulations, they will require the employer to repay any arrears and will impose a fine. HMRC has taken enforcement action where workers were expected to complete an unpaid work trial.

The Government are actively taking steps to tackle non-compliance with the national minimum wage, and to respond robustly to employers who fail to pay their workers correctly. We have doubled our investment in enforcement since 2015-16 and we now spend more than £26 million every year to ensure that employers meet their legal responsibilities. Employers who are found to be underpaying their staff must repay arrears and pay a fine of up to 200% of the underpayment, and may be eligible to be publicly named by the Department.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) mentioned that there had been only 14 prosecutions. As I have already outlined, the figure is actually more than 1,000 businesses in one year. The stat is not 14 but 1,000 in one year.

David Linden: On the issue of enforcement, does the Minister believe that the team in HMRC is adequately resourced?

Kelly Tolhurst: From the feedback I get from business, and from some of the work that I know is going on, I would say absolutely yes. We are enforcing and doubling investment, and we are making sure that HMRC investigates the case of every worker who complains. As

the Minister with responsibility for the national minimum wage, that is exactly what I would like to carry on seeing.

I want to answer some of the questions that have been put to me during the debate. I also want to reassure hon. Members that workers' rights are a big priority for the Government and particularly for me. In the advent of the Taylor review and the good work plan, we have seen a step change in a generation in terms of workers' rights. We have announced that we will ban tipping, which will come further down the line, and we have laid legislation to firm up workers' rights.

I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow South for securing the debate. It is essential that workers are paid the minimum wage. The Government have listened to concerns relating to work trials and issued new guidance, which, combined with robust enforcement, will help to ensure that workers are not exploited through unpaid work trials.

5.42 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The more things change, the more things stay the same. We have a new Minister, but that was by and large the same speech we heard when my Bill was talked out last year. I want to address one issue that the Minister mentioned. I have no quarrel with the workers at HMRC—my partner is an employee, so I would know if I had a quarrel with workers there.

I am afraid that all the things the Minister outlined that people can do if they feel they are being exploited go partly to the heart of the problem. Why is the onus always on the person being exploited to run around and try to get somebody to take action, when the Government could do that in statute?

I am always grateful to hear the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). As a DUP Member, he has greater access to the ears of the Government than I have, so as we approach the next Queen's Speech, I plead with him to take the issue forward.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) questioned whether Ministers had any idea or experience of what we were talking about. Yes, they do; the Minister's predecessor was guilty of offering unpaid work in his office.

It has been a good debate and there is clearly much that we agree on. There is even much that the Minister and I agree on, but I plead with her to do something meaningful and introduce legislation. Let us stop putting the onus on the person being exploited and, for once, give job applicants some of the cards to hold.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the use of unpaid work trials at the outset of employment.

5.44 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 5 February 2019

TREASURY

Contingent Liability

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

I can today confirm that I have laid a Treasury minute informing the House of a contingent liability that HM Treasury has taken on in relation to the sale of certain NRAM loans acquired by HM Treasury during the financial crisis. Although the sale of those loans was completed in 2016, the Government are now amending the contractual protections that were provided to the purchaser, in order to facilitate the potential future sale of NRAM.

On this occasion, due to sensitivities surrounding the commercial negotiations, it was not possible to notify Parliament of the particulars of the liability in advance of the amendments to the contractual protections being agreed with the beneficiaries.

The contingent liability relates to certain market standard time and value capped warranties and indemnities confirming regulatory, legislative and contractual compliance. The maximum contingent liability arising from these warranties and indemnities is £1 billion.

I will update the House of any further changes in respect of NRAM as necessary.

[HCWS1299]

TRANSPORT

Leaving the EU: Road Haulage

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Government are making preparations to allow hauliers and other businesses to continue to transport goods between the UK and the EU, once the UK has left the EU. These include preparations for leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement.

Accordingly, I am today laying a draft haulage statutory instrument designed to ensure that UK law continues to operate effectively in this area if the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

The Government will continue to license UK hauliers to the same high safety, environmental and operating standards as at present, and will require foreign hauliers operating in this country to do the same. The legislation also provides for continued access to the UK market, after exit, for hauliers from the 27 EU member states. Over 80% of haulage between the UK and continental Europe is undertaken by EU hauliers and it is important to ensure that the UK's supply chains are protected. The UK needs to be sure that foreign products can be imported and UK products exported as usual. Our approach of offering access at this stage aims both to provide the reassurance needed for international freight flows to continue, and also to help ensure reciprocal arrangements for UK hauliers.

On its side, the European Commission has proposed legislation that would allow UK hauliers basic rights to conduct operations to, from and through the EU for a limited period of nine months after exit, if there is no deal. The Commission's proposal will need to be agreed by the Council and European Parliament, and is being considered by both institutions urgently. This proposal is predicated on the UK's granting equivalent access for EU hauliers to the UK, and the legislation laid before the House today provides for that access. Indeed, it is a more liberal offer, and we are discussing with the Commission whether there is scope for them to extend the EU's offer so as to match ours.

Depending on the outcome of these discussions, we will review the UK's offer to EU hauliers. Our legislation contains provision to suspend EU hauliers' rights to undertake cabotage operations in the UK. We are putting in place measures to introduce such a suspension, which could be put into effect immediately after exit day if needed. Our expectation, however, is that such a suspension will not be necessary.

In parallel we have been considering bilateral and unilateral measures with EU member states. France is separately progressing with a unilateral measure to provide wider access to UK hauliers in the event of no deal. There are also 22 historic bilateral agreements that would come back into effect if the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

In addition, a multilateral quota of transport licences was introduced by the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) in 1974 to support liberalised road freight transport between member states of that body. The licences, known as ECMT permits, allow for access between the 43 member states (which include all EU member states except Cyprus). The UK has an allocation of 984 annual and 2,832 short-term (valid for 30 days) ECMT permits for 2019. These levels were agreed through a long-standing formula approach before it was known that the UK would be leaving the EU. The Government's expectation is that hauliers should not need an ECMT permit to continue doing a range of business in all or much of the EU, even in the event of no deal. But it is important to continue to prepare for all possible scenarios, and if it should prove necessary to use some of these permits for UK hauliers operating to EU countries, the Government have put in place a scheme to allocate these permits, as detailed under the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Act 2018.

UK hauliers have been applying for ECMT permits and the Government expect to inform applicants of the outcome of their applications later this week. As we expect UK hauliers will have other means of ensuring market access to the EU, we will inform UK hauliers of the outcomes to provide certainty, but will allow a period of time before these need to be formally taken and paid for by successful hauliers. This approach has been agreed with road haulage stakeholders. The 2018 Act provides appropriate arrangements for distributing new permits as may be required under any future bilateral arrangements, if these are needed.

Overall, we continue to believe that reciprocal market access will be secured for UK hauliers. While continuing to plan for all eventualities, we also believe that it is right to underline the fact that the UK is taking a positive and pragmatic approach.

[HCWS1298]

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 5 February 2019

TREASURY

Draft Market Abuse (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 and Draft Credit Rating Agencies (Amendment, Etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

The following is an extract from the debate on the draft Market Abuse (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 and draft Credit Rating Agencies (Amendment, Etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

John Glen: The SI also retains exemptions in MAR—and amends the scope of the exemptions to UK-only—that relate to certain trading activities that cannot be enforced against the regulation.

[Official Report, Thirteenth Delegated Legislation Committee, 23 January 2019, c. 4.]

Letter of correction from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury:

An error has been identified in my contribution to the debate on the draft Market Abuse (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 and draft Credit Rating Agencies (Amendment, Etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

The correct statement should have been:

John Glen: The SI also retains exemptions in MAR for financial instruments on UK and EU markets. These relate to certain trading activities that cannot be enforced against the regulation.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disability Support

The following is an extract from a debate on Disability Support on 19 December 2018.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): Looking at all four measures of low-income poverty—before and after housing costs, and on a relative and on an absolute basis—poverty for people in families with a disabled person has improved since 2010 on three of the four measures, and there was no change in the fourth. I am not complacent. One person living in poverty in this country is one person too many, which is why we are determined to do everything we can to put more money in people's pockets.

[Official Report, 19 December 2018, Vol. 651, c. 944.]

Letter of correction from Sarah Newton:

An error has been identified in my response to the debate.

The correct wording should have been:

Sarah Newton: Looking at all four measures of low-income poverty—before and after housing costs, and on a relative and on an absolute basis—poverty for people in families with a disabled person has improved since 2010 on three of the four measures, and there was **an increase in the fourth**. I am not complacent. One person living in poverty in this country is one person too many, which is why we are determined to do everything we can to put more money in people's pockets.

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