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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 13 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

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Jordan: London Initiative 2019

1. **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What her priorities are for the London initiative 2019 on opportunities for growth and development in Jordan. [R] [909191]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): Mr Speaker, I hope you will allow me to pay a brief tribute to the Department for International Development staff and partners who were caught up in the terrorist attack in Nairobi last month. Some of them, including a British national, lost their lives that day. Despite the trauma of that event, our staff immediately joined the crisis response team, and I want to thank them, as I am sure the whole House wishes to do, for all that they did.

The Prime Minister will lead the London initiative on 28 February to unlock growth, jobs and investment in Jordan. The UK is convening an international coalition of businesses and political leaders to support Jordan's stability and self-reliance, generating jobs for all, but, in particular, for young people, women and refugees.

Kate Green: May I associate myself with the comments that the Secretary of State made about DFID staff caught up in the attack in Nairobi?

I was pleased to hear that the Prime Minister will be leading the UK-Jordan initiative at the end of this month. The Secretary of State mentions the importance of the inclusion of refugees and Jordanian women in the labour market. Will the Government be taking steps to draw to the attention of the Jordanians the barriers women face, including those relating to transport, access to childcare and a sense of physical safety?

Penny Mordaunt: First, I thank the hon. Lady for her interest in this tremendously important conference, which is a real turning point for Jordan. We are absolutely looking to secure investment in that country to enable the public funds to build that infrastructure to support everyone getting to work. Unless women and refugees are included, we will fail in that task.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): May I declare an interest, having recently joined the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) on a visit with Oxfam in Jordan? I very much welcome the London initiative. Will urgent steps be taken to take account of the fact that youth unemployment in the country is now some 38%? Not only is there a high level of female unemployment, but the participation rate of women in the workforce in Jordan is even lower than that in Saudi Arabia. Will those urgent objectives be at the heart of what the Secretary of State is trying to achieve?

Penny Mordaunt: I can reassure my hon. Friend that that will absolutely be the case. This issue has been a focus for me personally on my visits to Jordan, and I will be focusing on it at the London conference.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State realise that one thing holding back development in Jordan is the number of children and young people killed on the roads there? I spoke at a conference in Jordan recently, where we looked at this area. Jordan is one of the better countries in the middle east and north Africa on this, but we need some action to be taken to stop children and young people being killed in Jordan in this way.

Penny Mordaunt: I pay tribute to the work the hon. Gentleman has done on this issue. We often think about disease and other such killers of children, but road traffic accidents take an enormous number of lives—I believe that they are the biggest killer of individuals in developing countries. He will know that we have a new programme looking at this, and we will continue to lean in on the issue.

Female Genital Mutilation

2. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What steps she is taking to help eradicate female genital mutilation in developing countries. [909192]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): The UK leads the world in our support to the Africa-led movement to end FGM. In 2018, we announced the biggest single investment worldwide to date by any international donor: a UK aid package of a further £50 million to tackle this issue across the most affected countries in Africa.

Rachel Maclean: I am sure that I speak for all Members in expressing disappointment that the FGM Bill did not receive its Second Reading in the House last week. I am pleased to see that the Government have committed to bring the Bill back in Government time. Will my hon. Friend confirm that her door always remains open for any Member of this House who wishes to discuss what the Government are doing to stop this appalling crime?

Harriett Baldwin: I am pleased to be able to confirm that, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, wearing her gender equalities hat, has reached out to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). She hopes to sit down with him and other colleagues should they wish to discuss this important issue.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Since I got my Female Genital Mutilation Bill through Parliament in 2003, we have had only one successful prosecution. That is a disgrace and I feel embarrassed talking about the eradication of FGM in other countries, but I wish to ask about what is being done in Kurdistan. My past experience leads me to believe there is a problem with FGM there, so are we tackling it?

Harriett Baldwin: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the fact that FGM happens in many countries in the world. The DFID funding that I mentioned and the work that we have been doing has been focused specifically on 17 African countries. In that regard, I am pleased that 8,000 communities, representing more than 24 million people, have pledged to give up the practice.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the Minister tell us why the Government have not introduced legislation—they control the House and could get it through—rather than leave it to the vagaries of a private Member's Bill? If they are interested in it, they should do something about it.

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend would lead me down paths that are best left to the Government Whips and the Ministry of Justice, but the UK does of course believe that we can work with some of the citizen-led movements in Africa to change perceptions around FGM.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Minister alluded to the Africa-led initiative, which has been positive, but will she not undertake to be much more emphatic in trying to co-ordinate an Africa-wide initiative to eliminate this vile practice?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the fact that this is a worldwide effort. We focus our efforts in countries where the practice is most widespread and where there is the greatest opportunity to work with the African-led movements to really effect change on the ground.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): We have just had the first prosecution for FGM in this country; what more can this country do to prevent families from taking their girls abroad to have FGM done to them?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we have done a lot in this country to change domestic legislation—for example, to put reporting requirements on parts of the NHS. One must pay tribute to the tireless campaigning by courageous activists, both here and overseas, in respect of changing the practice and changing communities on the ground.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Everyone would agree that we need to tackle female genital mutilation. The Minister will be aware that the private Member's Bill on the issue was scuppered. In the light of that, does she understand that confidence in the Government's willingness to deal with the issue has been shaken? It is important that they now move quickly to restore that confidence.

Harriett Baldwin: I encourage the hon. Lady to continue with that confidence. We can point to a strong track record of working on this issue, not only in the UK but with some of the African-led initiatives in African countries. She will have heard it announced during the urgent question on Monday that the Chief Whip has committed to taking forward the UK legislation as quickly as possible.

Yemen

3. **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the level of humanitarian assistance required in Yemen. [909193]

8. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Yemen. [909198]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt): Yemen remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with nearly 80% of the population requiring humanitarian assistance. The UN is set to launch a new \$4 billion appeal for 2019 later this month, at a pledging conference at which I hope to represent the UK. The UK is providing £170 million this financial year, including enough food for the equivalent of 4 million Yemenis for a month.

Ellie Reeves: More than 3 million people have been internally displaced and thousands killed in Yemen, mainly as a result of the Saudi coalition bombing campaign. Last year, the cholera outbreak affected 200,000 people. More than 22 million people are reliant on humanitarian aid and millions of children are unable to go to school. When will the Government stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia and work towards an end to the conflict?

Alistair Burt: The situation in relation to the conflict has moved on a degree with the fragile peace agreed in the Stockholm agreement. That fragile ceasefire and redeployment of forces continues, as a result of which the humanitarian situation is improving. The latest figures I have show that in January commercial and humanitarian imports via sea, over land and via container met 94% of monthly food requirements and 83% of monthly fuel requirements. The situation in Yemen was caused not by the Saudi coalition but by a Houthi-led insurgency.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Before Christmas, there was much discussion about the ceasefire around the port of Hodeidah and the prospects that it would bring for improving the humanitarian situation in Yemen. What further progress does the Minister expect to be made in helping those who have suffered for so long in Yemen?

Alistair Burt: The ports of Hodeidah and Salif are open and they are taking in more ships. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the test of whether the political agreement in Stockholm is having an impact will be measured by success on the humanitarian front. We will continue to do all we can to support the UN efforts to find peace in Yemen.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The Stockholm agreement is indeed very welcome, but the Minister is right that it is also fragile. One of the features is the World Food Programme supplies, to which it is hard to get access. Will he update the House on the prospects of getting that access because the head of the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs has said that there is a risk that the food will simply rot and therefore not be available for consumption?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman is right. I spoke to the World Food Programme director, David Beasley, last week. The situation is that it has been difficult to get to the Red sea mills because of mining. There is a concern that some food not only has rotted, but has been stolen by illicit elements, so we have to find out what is there. The continuing progress in relation to peace will make access to those mills more likely, and we will continue to press for that.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I welcome what my right hon. Friend and his Department are doing in this tragic situation. What more can the UK do to make sure that children in particular who are suffering so much are helped more?

Alistair Burt: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his words. The best thing that we can do is, first, support the negotiations to ensure that the conflict comes to an end—that is the best thing. Secondly, we should keep up our support for humanitarian aid and assistance, which has been significant. In relation to the children, we should back things such as a nationwide measles and rubella vaccination campaign, which is under way and which will target 13.3 million children in Yemen between 9 and 14 February. That demonstrates how much we owe to the aid workers who are involved there and also the contribution that the UK is making.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): There is no doubt that the Minister has done a huge amount of work on this issue, but the key is the resumption of the peace talks. The parties last met on 18 December. When will they meet again? That will unlock the corridor and unlock the humanitarian needs.

Alistair Burt: The right hon. Gentleman of course knows as much about Yemen as anyone in the House. The peace talks are built on confidence, and the next round will take place when UN envoy Martin Griffiths believes that there is sufficient confidence for those talks to proceed. At present, the ceasefire, although fragile, has held. Confidence is building up between the parties, and when the time is right, we will be able to move forward to the next stage.

Infectious Disease Surveillance

4. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What steps her Department is taking to support global surveillance systems for infectious diseases. [909194]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt): Infectious disease surveillance is vital to global health security. The UK supports global, regional and national efforts to strengthen surveillance, including through the World Health Organisation, the

global fund and the global polio eradication initiative. The Department for International Development's tackling deadly diseases in Africa programme and Public Health England are helping to strengthen regional and national surveillance capacity.

Dr Whitford: The eradication of polio in the next few years represents an incredible achievement of both vaccination and international co-operation, but the infrastructure and staffing of the global polio initiative has provided a lot of the surveillance that helped to detect epidemics such as Ebola. How does the Minister plan to replace the polio resources and ensure that both vaccination and surveillance continues?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Lady, who understands this issue very well, is right to point to the importance of the global polio eradication initiative, which has been the bedrock for disease eradication efforts. Innovative approaches have helped to provide timely and high-quality surveillance. What we need to do is ensure, through both in-country programmes and the work being done through WHO, that surveillance on polio does not slacken off because of potential eradication, and we will continue to do that.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): What potential is there for the work that the Department did last year with the Met Office, NASA and other US scientists on cholera in Yemen to be scaled up and used in other crisis situations to prevent the spread of disease?

Alistair Burt: My right hon. Friend points to a remarkable innovation that, recognising the importance of wet and damp weather for the spread of cholera, used the resources of the Met Office to ensure that accurate support was provided in areas of risk. It is a very good use of modern technology, which we intend to see replicated elsewhere.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): The Minister will be aware of some of the excellent work done by researchers in universities across the UK, including the University of St Andrews and the University of Dundee, in tackling illnesses such as AIDS, TB and malaria. Given the drop in aid to health spending recently, will he commit to ensuring a fully funded global fund?

Alistair Burt: We have been one of the leading donors to the global fund, and there is no suggestion that that should end. My father was a graduate of St Andrews and was also at Dundee, and we will be making sure that good research facilities remain key to the United Kingdom's support efforts.

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I associate the Labour party with the Secretary of State's comments in respect of DFID staff in Nairobi.

We in the United Kingdom are rightly proud of our publicly run national health service, and it is thanks to our incredible NHS staff that we are able to effectively tackle the causes and symptoms of infectious diseases here. Does the Minister agree that this experience should underpin the Department's work on health and that our overseas development work should therefore focus explicitly on supporting Governments and citizens to invest in their own universal healthcare systems?

Alistair Burt: Absolutely. Much of our work in global health is designed to support particular projects to eradicate individual diseases, but it is also crucial that we support and sustain health systems where they are. These health systems will do an incredibly valuable job in looking for the sort of illnesses and infectious diseases, such as antimicrobial resistance, that could spread around the world.

Prosperity Fund

5. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that aid spent through the prosperity fund complies with her Department's duty to reduce levels of poverty. [909195]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): The primary purpose of the prosperity fund is to reduce poverty through sustainable and inclusive economic growth in middle-income countries. Other Departments are responsible for ensuring that their overseas development programmes from this fund meet the requirements of the International Development Act 2002.

Daniel Zeichner: Climate change will hit the world's poorest people hardest, so why on earth is 29% of the energy component of the prosperity fund being spent on oil and gas extraction, including supporting fracking in China?

Harriett Baldwin: I know that the hon. Gentleman shares my commitment to doing what we can to tackle the incredibly important issue of climate change. We should be wholeheartedly supporting opportunities that work as climate change initiatives to move power beyond coal.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: What a pleasure to call a west country knight, no less—Sir Gary Streeter.

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): I strongly support DFID Ministers' approach to the prosperity fund, which looks to promote economic reform in middle-income countries, where 70% of the world's poorest people live. Are not trade and economic reform still the most effective ways to lift people out of poverty?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct that the way in which the world will end poverty is by having sustainable and inclusive economic growth. To achieve the sustainable development goals, we need to crowd in not just development finance, but \$2.5 trillion annually for development.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Alleviating poverty should be at the core of everything that DFID does. As such, I am sure that the Secretary of State will be just as deeply concerned as I was to see the former Foreign Secretary throw his weight behind a report published this week that calls for changing the Department's purpose from poverty reduction to furthering "the nation's overall strategic goals".

Will the Minister take this opportunity to confirm that the Department will not become a subsidiary of the Foreign Office and that the 0.7% of gross national income will be firmly committed to poverty reduction?

Harriett Baldwin: Yes, I can confirm that that is the Government's policy.

Leaving the EU: Developing Countries

6. **Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on the effect on the economies of developing countries of the UK leaving the EU. [909196]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): Our Departments are working together to ensure that development stays at the heart of UK trade policy. For example, we are creating a trade preference scheme that will continue to provide the same level of market access to about 70 countries as is provided through the EU's generalised scheme of preference.

Jo Swinson: As we learned today that only six of the promised 40 trade deals will actually be in place by the end of March, it seems that the International Trade Secretary is in competition with the Transport Secretary for who can do the worst job. What assurance can this Secretary of State give to the House that we will see full impact assessments on the social, environmental and human rights impacts of any trade deals before they come into force?

Penny Mordaunt: What the hon. Lady says is not the case. We are looking at the EPAs—economic partnership agreements—and other arrangements. The numbers she gave are not accurate. Our first priority is obviously trade continuity, and after that we will then be able to introduce the UK's trade preference scheme, which will grant duty-free, quota-free access to 48 least-developed countries, and grant generous tariff reductions to about a further 25.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Is it not an absolute disgrace that coffee producers in the developing world are, at the moment, not allowed to do the value-added bits of putting coffee into packaging, selling and marketing it, and all the rest of it? Under EU rules, that has to be done within the EU. Brexit will enable those countries now to do the value-added bits in their own countries, thereby being of huge benefit to developing countries.

Penny Mordaunt: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. We want people to be able to trade their way out of poverty, and it is high time that we walked the walk as well as talked the talk.

Topical Questions

T1. [909206] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): I am sure that the whole House will be deeply concerned to see the distressing images of the suffering of the Venezuelan people, with the UN estimating that 4 million people are suffering from malnutrition. UK aid will deliver an additional £6.5 million aid package focused on dealing with the most severe health and nutrition difficulties. We have had staff deployed in the region last year and will keep our humanitarian

efforts under review. I would call on all actors to ensure that we have unhindered humanitarian access. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: I understand the predictable air of anticipation in the Chamber just before Prime Minister's questions, but I would remind the House that we are discussing the plight of some of the most vulnerable people on the face of the planet. I think some respect is in order.

Mr Carmichael: Indeed, Mr Speaker, and there are few parts of the world that see more vulnerable people than Gaza. Medical Aid for Palestinians reports that since March last year at least 250 Palestinians have been killed as part of Israel's use of force against the Great March of Return protests. Among them were three health workers, killed by Israeli forces while trying to reach, treat and evacuate wounded demonstrators. A further 600 health workers have been injured. What are our Government doing to ensure the safety of health workers in Gaza and to hold the Israeli Government to account for these actions?

Mr Speaker: I look forward to reading the right hon. Gentleman's treatise in the *Official Report* tomorrow.

Penny Mordaunt: The right hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East does as he asks on a regular basis. With regard to the humanitarian work that we are doing, he will know that we have stepped up our offer—in particular, looking at providing additional medical support. We will continue to do that.

T5. [909211] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): Will the Minister ensure that her Department's education policy and financial decisions prioritise making sure that all children have an opportunity to learn, as recommended in the Send my Friend to School coalition's new report?

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): I know that my hon. Friend will want to tell the schoolchildren of Dudley, who are supporting this campaign, of the great work that is done through UK Aid, which has ensured that some 7 million children have had access to a decent education.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Why does the Secretary of State believe that the UK's commitment to spending 0.7% of national income on aid is unsustainable?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to remind the House that it was under a Conservative-led Government that the commitment to 0.7% was introduced, and it is a Conservative Government who have retained that commitment. What we want to do in future, though, is look at maintaining that with public funds but reducing the burden on the taxpayer.

Dan Carden: I ask that because the former Foreign Secretary has called for the Department to be closed, and the Secretary of State has said nothing. Her party colleagues have called for aid to be redefined away from poverty reduction, and she has said nothing. Is it not the sad truth that Conservative Members who are now circling the Prime Minister know that their leadership prospects are buoyed by appealing to the tiny number of Tory party members who hate aid as much as they want to bring back capital punishment? Why should

anyone trust a Government who have pushed 14 million of their own citizens into poverty to stand up for the world's poorest people?

Penny Mordaunt: They should trust me as the Secretary of State and as someone who has been an aid worker. They should trust this Government because we introduced the policy and are retaining it. The hon. Gentleman mischaracterises the comments of certain colleagues. For example, the former Foreign Secretary has not said that he wishes to abandon the 0.7%. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to talk about the global goals at the Dispatch Box. We want to deliver them, and to do so, we need additional funding of \$2.5 trillion going into developing countries. That is what this Government are focused on delivering.

T7. [909213] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What work is the Department doing to ensure that our independent trade policy will lead the way globally in alleviating poverty?

Penny Mordaunt: Seventy of my staff are embedded in the Department for International Trade, forming a new post-Brexit trade offer, and a great deal of that effort is looking at what we can do to enable developing countries to trade their way out of poverty.

T2. [909207] **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): It has been reported that up to 300,000 Venezuelans could die if aid does not reach them shortly. Given that the Maduro regime will not allow aid from America, what can Britain do politically and practically to help Venezuelans on the ground?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that critical issue. The Foreign Office is doing a tremendous amount and is meeting its counterparts in not only the US and Canada but in the region to see what more we can do. We stand ready to do more, and what we do will be driven by what we find on the ground. He will understand that this is sensitive, because some of our partners with whom we work in the region are very vulnerable if we identify precisely who they are and what they are doing, but I assure him and the House that we will stand by the people of Venezuela.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that the restrictive common agricultural policy has damaged agriculture in Africa. After Brexit, what can we do to stimulate trade, particularly with farmers in sub-Saharan Africa?

Harriett Baldwin: I am pleased to reassure my hon. Friend that there is already a lot that we can do. There are many products, such as avocados and cashew nuts, that we simply cannot grow in the UK, and I know that UK consumers and African producers will benefit from growth in those areas in years to come.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—
Engagements

Q1. [909176] **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 13 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Later today, this House will have an opportunity to pay tribute to the Clerk of the House, Sir David Natzler. May I take this opportunity to add my own? Sir David has served this House for over 40 years with dedication and tireless devotion. His support and advice on parliamentary procedure and business has been invaluable, and I know that Members from all sides of the House will want to join me in thanking him for his service and wishing him the very best for the future.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and, in addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Helen Whately: May I too pay tribute to the work of the Clerk of the House?

In January, the mother of a three-year-old girl was convicted of female genital mutilation. It is our first FGM conviction, but a chilling reminder that young girls are still being cut not just in Africa and around the world but here in the UK. Will my right hon. Friend make Government time to progress the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) to protect more girls from this abhorrent practice?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this abhorrent practice and to recognise the importance of the first prosecution that took place on female genital mutilation here in the UK. It is only right that we find time for this Bill, and the Government will provide time to deliver it. We have strengthened the law on FGM, leading to that first conviction, and we are helping communities around the world to end this appalling crime, but it is important that we give time to this Bill and act further to ensure that we end what is an absolutely abhorrent crime that scars young girls for the rest of their lives both physically and mentally.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I am sure the Prime Minister and the whole House will join me in sending our deepest sympathies to the friends and family of the cadet who died at Sandhurst last week. I am sure the Ministry of Defence is supporting the family and fellow cadets at a difficult time, but I also hope it will be reviewing the mental health support it gives to all members of the armed forces at all times.

We also mourn the loss of Gordon Banks, and send our condolences to his friends and family and to the entire football community. He was one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time, with 73 caps for England, including playing in every single game during the victorious 1966 World cup campaign, which I remember with joy.

I too want to thank Sir David Natzler for his work as Clerk of the House and wish him well in his retirement. He has been here even longer than I have and has always been a source of advice to all Members, irrespective of their party, and I always admire his dry wit and humour while describing the proceedings of the House. I think we owe him a big debt of gratitude.

The Government's handling of Brexit has been costly, shambolic and deliberately evasive. Nothing symbolises that more than the fiasco of Seaborne Freight—a company with no ships and no trading history. On 8 January, the Transport Secretary told the House:

“We are confident that the firm will deliver the service.”—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 193.]

What went wrong?

The Prime Minister: First, may I join the right hon. Gentleman in the remarks he made about the cadet at Sandhurst. He referenced the issue of mental health. This is an important issue overall, but it is obviously an important issue in our armed forces as well. I would like to pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for the work that he has done in relation to mental health in the armed forces.

I would also like to send my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Gordon Banks. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I am old enough to remember the 1966 World cup—

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Never!

The Prime Minister: Let us be honest in this House; I think that is important.

From being part of that team to something else that I think people remember—the astonishing Pelé save in 1970—Gordon Banks was regarded as one of the world's greatest goalkeepers. I also know that he did a lot of community work in his local area as well. I know Members from all parts of the House would like to join me in paying tribute to him.

As regards the freight capacity, the Government let three contracts: 90% of that was let to DFDS and Brittany Ferries. Those contracts remain in place, and that capacity has been obtained. Due diligence was carried out on all of these contracts. As the Secretary of State for Transport made clear in this House earlier this week, we will continue to ensure that we provide that capacity, which is important in a no-deal situation, and we will ensure the capacity is there.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Transport Secretary told the House that the decision to award the contract to Seaborne Freight had no cost to the taxpayer. This week, the National Audit Office found that £800,000 had been spent on external consultants to assess the bid. Will the Prime Minister use this opportunity to correct the record?

The Prime Minister: I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that he is a bit late to the party, because I was asked that question yesterday on the statement, I think from the SNP Benches. Labour following the SNP—well, whatever next? Of course, as I just said, when the contracts were all let, proper due diligence was carried out. That included third-party assessment of the companies that were bidding for the contracts. There would have been a cost attached to the process regardless of who the contracts were entered into with.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am really impressed that the Prime Minister could keep a straight face while she said that due diligence was carried out. The Transport Secretary said that

“its business and operational plans were assessed for the Department by external advisers”.—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 190.]

On the basis of that advice to his Department, he was told that Seaborne was a start-up company with no ships and that the contract was “high-risk”. Why, if he was told that it was high risk, did he proceed with the contract?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman appears to be suggesting that the Government should never look at start-up companies or at opportunities for new companies. It is entirely right that the Government ensured that the majority of the contracts went to established companies, and it is entirely right that a company on which due diligence had been carried out—[*Interruption.*] It is no good saying it wasn't, because it was. We will ensure that the ferry capacity is there.

What we are doing in these contracts is ensuring that we are able to deal with the situation were we to enter into no deal. The right hon. Gentleman has said in the past that he does not want any money to be spent on no-deal preparations. He has also said that he does not want us to go into a no-deal situation. That is fine, but if he does not want us to be in a no-deal situation, he is going to have to vote for the deal.

Jeremy Corbyn: To be fair to the advisers, it appears that they were instructed to restrict their due diligence to the face value of the presentation put to them by Seaborne Freight—a company that had no trading history. Looking at the directors of Seaborne, it appears that some of them would not have passed a due diligence test.

The Transport Secretary told the House:

“This procurement was done properly and in a way that conforms with Government rules.”—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 192.]

However, a freedom of information request reveals that the Secretary of State bypassed those rules, because the procurement assurance board—a senior panel of experts and lawyers—was denied the chance to scrutinise the deal. What action will the Prime Minister take over what appears to be a very clear breach of those rules?

The Prime Minister: The contract was awarded following commercial, technical and financial assurance at a level in line with the company's status as a new entrant to the market, carried out not only by senior DFT officials but by third-party organisations with experience and expertise in this area, including Deloitte, Mott MacDonald, and Slaughter and May. It was designed in recognition of the risks posed: no money was paid to the contractor and no money would be paid until services were delivered. Therefore, no money has been paid to that contractor.

The right hon. Gentleman has stood here time and again and said that, actually, we should not be doing anything to prepare for no deal. It is entirely right and proper that this Government are taking the action necessary to ensure that, should we be in that no-deal situation—it is not our policy to have no deal; it is our policy to get a deal—we have the capacity we need, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Jeremy Corbyn: Could I bring the Prime Minister back to the question of Seaborne ferries? Eurotunnel has called the ferry contract procurement a “secretive and flawed” exercise. Taxpayers now face a legal bill of nearly £1 million to contest that—the money goes up and up. The Secretary of State's decision to award the contract to Seaborne has increased the budget deficit of Thanet Council, the owners of Ramsgate port, by nearly £2 million. When questioned by the hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay), the Transport Secretary refused to give a guarantee. Can the Prime Minister

today give a cast-iron commitment to the people of Thanet and confirm that they will not be picking up the bill for the failure of this contract?

The Prime Minister: The Department for Transport and other parts of the Government are in discussion with Thanet Council about the impact of the contract. I remind the right hon. Gentleman why the Department for Transport has taken these actions in relation to ferry capacity: to ensure that in a no-deal situation we are able to guarantee that medicines, primarily, will be brought into this country. We are prioritising medicines being brought into this country. Again, that was a question I seem to remember being asked on more than one occasion yesterday by SNP Members who had an interest in that. The right hon. Gentleman does not seem to be interested in ensuring that we can, in a no-deal situation, provide the medicines that people in this country need. That is what we are doing. That is the sensible approach of a Government who are taking this matter seriously.

Jeremy Corbyn: Maybe the Prime Minister should follow the advice of the House and take no deal off the table and negotiate seriously with the European Union. It cannot be right that a hard-pressed local council and local taxpayers are footing the bill for the incompetence of the Secretary of State for Transport and this Government.

The spectacular failure of this contract is a symptom of the utter shambles of this Government and their no-deal preparations. The Transport Secretary ignored warnings about drones and airport security; he gave a £1.4 billion contract to Carillion despite warnings about their finances; he oversaw the disastrous new rail timetable last year; and rail punctuality is at a 13-year low and fares at a record high—that is some achievement. And now the Transport Secretary is in charge of a major and vital aspect of Brexit planning. How on earth can the Prime Minister say she has confidence in the Transport Secretary?

The Prime Minister: Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what the Transport Secretary is delivering: the biggest rail investment programme since the Victorian era, spending nearly £48 billion on improving our railways to deliver better journeys—20% higher on average every year than under a Labour Government. That is what the Transport Secretary is delivering: commitment to transport in this country and commitment to transport across the whole of this country.

I notice that the right hon. Gentleman wanted to focus his questions in that way, rather than asking more general questions in relation to Brexit. There are still a number of issues on Brexit where we do not know his answers to the big questions. We do not know if—[*Interruption.*] It is no good Labour Members burying their heads in their hands. We do not know whether their leader backs a second referendum. We do not know whether their leader backs a deal. We do not even know whether he backs Brexit. He prefers ambiguity and playing politics to acting in the national interest. People used to say he was a conviction politician—not any more.

Q3. [909178] Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): On Friday, I visited Tiverton High School, a great local school rated good by Ofsted. However, Tiverton High

School is facing many challenges: the buildings are old and stressed, and there is not enough capacity for all local children to attend Tiverton High School. Tiverton is a growing town and a great town, but poverty is higher than both the county and the English national average. The school buildings are located in a flood zone, so when the River Exe bursts its banks there is a significant risk to life. That means we really do need a new school. Fortunately, we have a site with planning permission and Devon County Council has completed a plan. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister facilitate meetings between me and schools Ministers, so that we can together deliver a new school that Tiverton deserves?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that with me. Obviously, the quality of school buildings is an important issue in our education system. That is why we are putting more money into it—we are investing £23 billion in school buildings through to 2021. He raised the specific issue of Tiverton High School, and I will make sure that a Minister from the Department for Education will be happy to meet him—and the headteacher and the council, if that is appropriate—to discuss this issue.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I congratulate so many of my colleagues on sporting yellow today as a mark of solidarity with those from Catalonia who are on trial for the political principle of supporting self-determination.

Will the Prime Minister rule out bringing the meaningful vote to this House less than two weeks before 29 March?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman was present yesterday when I made my statement to the House and he heard the process that we will be following. Of course, a debate is taking place tomorrow, and then, as we have made clear, if a meaningful vote has not been brought back and passed by this House, we will make a statement on 26 February and have a debate on an amendable motion on the 27th.

Ian Blackford: I am afraid that that was no answer from a Prime Minister who continues to run the clock down. This is the height of arrogance from a Government set on running the clock down. Just 44 days from a no-deal scenario, the Prime Minister is hamstrung by her own party and rejected by European leaders. The Prime Minister must stop playing fast and loose. Businesses are begging for certainty; the economy is already suffering. Prime Minister, you have come to the end of the road, rumbled by your own loose-lipped senior Brexit adviser. Will the Prime Minister now face down the extremists in her own party and extend article 50?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about certainty for business. He can give business certainty by voting for the deal—that is what gives business certainty. He complains about no deal, but of course, it was the Scottish National party who wanted to leave the UK without a plan—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps we should remind the SNP that independence would have meant leaving the EU with no deal.

Q7. [909182] Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I will be chairing a Delegated Legislation Committee while the tributes to David Natzler are paid, so I publicly

wish him well on his retirement and thank him for all the support he gave me, particularly when I was Deputy Speaker. Thank you, David—good luck.

Slaidburn health centre serves 1,100 people in the village and surrounding rural areas. It is well used and well loved by an ageing population with no bus service. The contract is up for renewal and people really do fear the salami-slicing of services, or even worse, the closure, so will the Prime Minister publicly give her support to health services such as Slaidburn today and say that either the reduction of services, or even worse, the closure, would be totally unacceptable?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the issues with Slaidburn country practice, and of course, we are aware of the pressures facing GPs. That is why there is going to be a major new investment in primary and community healthcare. This is a very important element of our national health service, and that has been set out in the long-term plan. In the event of a practice closure, NHS England assesses the need for a replacement provider before dispersing the list of patients at that GP surgery. I understand that in relation to Slaidburn health centre, discussions are ongoing on the future of the practice, and the local clinical commissioning group is currently exploring options.

Q2. [909177] Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure that the Prime Minister welcomes the news that Instagram has pledged to crack down on images of suicide and self-harm. However, there are growing online communities that glamorise, encourage and normalise eating disorders, preying on vulnerable people who are going through extremely personal and private battles. Will she agree to meet me and other organisations and charities to discuss ways in which we can combat that?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the action that the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is taking on social media sites and the action the Home Office is taking in conjunction with DCMS. We want social media companies to do more to ensure that they do not promote harmful content to vulnerable people. He raised the specific issue of the impact on people with eating disorders. We want to take action in a way that helps to keep people safe in looking at images, and I will ensure that a Minister from the Department meets him to discuss this issue.

Q8. [909183] Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Notwithstanding Brussels bar-room chatter, will the Prime Minister rule out a delay to Brexit beyond 29 March and a future customs union arrangement that would prevent us from doing those global trade deals that the Bank of England Governor says could spark a golden age for trade?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I and the Government have been very clear in our customs proposals that we want an independent trade policy—it is specifically referenced in the political declaration. We believe it is important, and I am pleased to hear what the Governor of the Bank of England has said today about the importance of free trade around the world.

On my hon. Friend's first point, I am grateful he has asked me that question, rather than relying on what someone said to someone else, as overheard by someone else, in a bar. It is very clear that the Government's

position remains the same: the House voted to trigger article 50; that had a two-year timeline that ends on 29 March; we want to leave with a deal, and that is what we are working for.

Q4. [909179] **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Two weeks ago, I asked the Prime Minister to unblock the funding for Dawlish and give us the investment to improve that train line. Two weeks later, we still have no funding. I worry that Brexit is causing the Government to sit on announcements that need to be made on both rail funding and the long-term basing of the Royal Marines in Plymouth. Will she tell the Transport Secretary to get on with it and announce the funding for Dawlish this week without any further delay?

The Prime Minister: As I said previously to the hon. Gentleman, the Department is reviewing Network Rail's proposals for an effective and resilient solution on the Dawlish line, and there will be an update on funding in due course. The first phase of work to protect the sea wall at Dawlish began in November, of course, as part of the £15 million of wider investment to make the railway at Dawlish and Teignmouth more resilient to extreme weather.

Q10. [909185] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I know from the doorstep in Corby and east Northamptonshire that local people want to see more police officers out on the beat catching criminals and deterring crime. Will the Prime Minister join me in calling for the additional money she has rightly announced for policing to be invested in frontline presence?

The Prime Minister: I recognise my hon. Friend's comments from the doorstep, and I know that he is an assiduous Member who listens to his constituents and brings their views to this Chamber. It is important that we have made more money available to police forces, and I am pleased to say that the number of people joining police forces as officers is at its highest level for 10 years. We made more money available to police forces—£970 million over the next year—although it is a sadness in this Chamber that the Labour party voted against it.

Q5. [909180] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): What has the Prime Minister got against towns in north Wales? In the week following the loss of a £20 billion Hitachi contract in the region, the Government announced the moving of 380 Wrexham tax office jobs to Liverpool and Cardiff city centre. Is it her view that towns across the UK should not have public sector jobs?

The Prime Minister: No it is not. On Hitachi and the Wylfa site, we offered a package of support that no previous Government had been willing to consider of one third equity, all-debt financing and a strike price of no more than £75 per MWh. Ultimately, we could not at that stage reach an agreement among all the parties, and Hitachi decided on a commercial basis to suspend the project, but it has made clear that it wishes to continue discussions with the Government on bringing forward new nuclear at Wylfa, and we will support those discussions.

Q11. [909186] **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): Over the past four years, the number of people stopped and searched by the police has fallen by two thirds. At the same time, the number of stabbings has increased by a third. Does the Prime Minister agree that, carried out in the right way, stop-and-search is an effective part of the battle against knife crime?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree that, carried out in the right way, stop-and-search is an effective tool for our police forces. We recognise the concern felt about violent crime—the hon. Gentleman has raised the specific issue of knife crime—which is why the Home Secretary published the serious violence strategy, and why we established the serious violence taskforce.

Let me reiterate that we want the police to use stop-and-search properly and lawfully. It is a vital and effective policing tool, but when they use it, we expect them to do so lawfully.

Q6. [909181] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I am sure you recall, Mr Speaker, the halcyon days when the Prime Minister was telling a rapturous Tory conference that she would put an end to rip-off energy companies once and for all. On Thursday Ofgem relaxed the energy price cap, and on Monday E.On announced a 10% price increase. Now we discover that the number of households in official fuel poverty has risen to more than 2.5 million. How does the Prime Minister think she is doing?

The Prime Minister: It was, of course, this Government who introduced the energy price cap. That was not done by the previous Labour Government. The cap has protected 11 million households, and energy suppliers will no longer be able to rip off customers on poor-value tariffs. It will save consumers £1 billion a year. Citizens Advice has previously said:

"the cap means people are paying a fairer price now, and will continue to pay a fairer price even if the level of the cap rises".

Q15. [909190] **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): Since 2014, the number of children being excluded from schools has risen by 67%. In every school week, 4,253 children with special educational needs have been permanently excluded or excluded for a fixed period. That is a burning social injustice. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the progress of the Timpson review of exclusions, and will she tell us whether the Government will make schools accountable for the outcomes of the pupils whom they exclude, as recommended by our Education Committee and as suggested by the Education Secretary?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend and the Education Committee for their work on this important issue. Obviously we all recognise that good discipline in schools is essential, but it is also important to ensure that any exclusion is lawful, reasonable and fair. Guidance sets out that headteachers should, as far as possible, avoid permanently excluding any pupil who is subject to an education, health and care plan, and make additional efforts to provide extra support to avoid excluding those with special educational needs. We want to ensure that schools play their part in supporting children who have been excluded, in collaboration with alternative providers and local authorities.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the Timpson review. It is still ongoing, but I can assure him that when it reports in due course, we will look very seriously and very carefully at its recommendations.

Q9. [909184] Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Since 2013, 220 parliamentarians and 450 members of their staff have received mindfulness training in the House. Our cross-party mindfulness all-party parliamentary group has published a report, “Mindful Nation UK”, on the uses of mindfulness in education, health, prisons and the workplace, and it has been well received by the Government. After Brexit negotiations have been concluded—when the Prime Minister might need to de-stress—will she meet representatives of our cross-party group and senior scientists to discuss what more can be done through mindfulness to reduce human suffering and promote human flourishing?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important issue, and I thank the mindfulness APPG for its work and its recent report. As the hon. Gentleman knows, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for adults with depression.

I am aware of the training that staff have received. A few weeks ago, a constituent came to my surgery to talk about mindfulness. A member of my parliamentary staff who was with me had undertaken that training, and was therefore able to speak about the impact that it had had.

The commissioning of psychological therapies is a matter for NHS England, but I will ensure that it is aware of the report.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) is obviously a beneficiary of mindfulness himself. He seems a very calm and phlegmatic fellow these days, which was not always the case in the past.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): The honours system is designed to acknowledge and celebrate great public service to our nation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that when a small minority of recipients of honours, like Philip Green, bring the system of honours and business into disrepute by being found to have behaved disgracefully, letting down the vast majority of businesses who set the highest standards, then it is right for this party and this Government to be the first to stand up for decent standards and look at beginning a process for seeing whether people who behave in that way should be stripped of their honour?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend said, the honours system recognises exceptional service and achievement in a wide range of spheres of public life, and if the recipient of an honour brings that honour into disrepute it is important that steps are taken to review that honour. There is a forfeiture process for that purpose; that includes an independent forfeiture committee which gives recommendations to me for Her Majesty's approval. That is the process, and it is important that we have that so that when anybody who has been in receipt of an honour brings that honour into disrepute steps can be taken to review that.

Q12. [909187] Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Last weekend Millwall Lionesses from my constituency played and beat Lewes FC in the fourth round of the FA cup. In the women's competition, the Lionesses received £2,000 in prize money; the winners in the same round of the men's competition received £180,000. Is the Prime Minister willing to put pressure on the FA to equalise prize money for the men's and women's competition as Wimbledon did in 2007?

The Prime Minister: As president of the Wargrave girls football club, I am very willing to commend all those girls and other females who play football. Members across this House have been concerned to hear of the disparity between the winnings that the hon. Lady has raised with the House. Obviously this is a matter for the football authorities, but I am sure they will have heard the concern expressed in this House about the current position.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It takes courage and leadership to admit difficult things, because that is how we start to recognise the need for change, so I would like to thank the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for acknowledging that there has been a link between accessing universal credit and food bank usage. But it is not the case that there has been a link; there is a link. Will the Prime Minister please urgently review the five-week wait and the benefit freeze? Both must go, because the unpalatable truth is that our welfare safety net is no longer holding up those most vulnerable in society; it is tangling around their feet and dragging them under the water.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend and I have discussed universal credit and its roll-out in the past. As she will know, as we have been rolling this out slowly and carefully, we have taken a number of measures to address issues that have arisen. Shortly after I became Prime Minister we cut the taper rate so people could keep more of the money they earned. Subsequently we have of course scrapped the seven-day waiting. We have introduced the two-week overlap in relation to those in receipt of housing benefit. And of course we have also ensured that 100% of a full monthly payment is available to people at the start, for those for whom that is necessary. So we have been taking steps and will continue to look at universal credit, but universal credit is a system that encourages people into work and makes sure that work pays, compared with the legacy system from the Labour party that left 1.4 million people for nearly a decade trapped on benefits.

Q13. [909188] Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): Despite the Prime Minister's party's manifesto promise, nearly 7,000 pensioner households in my West Lancashire constituency could lose their free TV licences. Often the television is their only source of company. Are the Government going to keep their manifesto promise by taking back the responsibility they have outsourced to the BBC, to ensure that older people keep their TV licences?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the value that people across the country place on having a television, and for many elderly people the connection that brings with the world. That is why the free licences for the over-75s are

so important. We have been clear that we want and expect the BBC to continue free licences when it takes over responsibility for the concession in 2020. May I just say that taxpayers rightly want to see the BBC using its substantial licence fee income in an appropriate way to ensure that it delivers fully for UK audiences?

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My constituent, Ben Seaman, receives employment and support allowance benefits and was awarded £20,000 after the recent court ruling on ESA underpayments. Ben has to spend a lot of this within a year in order to avoid having more than £16,000 of assets and risk losing his eligibility for ESA. Clearly this is an unintended anomaly, so will my right hon. Friend encourage the Work and Pensions Secretary, who I know is sympathetic to the situation, to resolve this as soon as possible through an exemption for Ben and for any others who are similarly affected?

The Prime Minister: This is a concerning case that my hon. Friend has raised with me. I understand that the Department for Work and Pensions is aware of it and I am assured that it is looking into the issue, and I will ensure that he receives a response as soon as possible.

Q14. [909189] **Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): The Prime Minister's determination has been widely acknowledged, but the truth is that she cannot get her deal through unless something fundamentally changes in that deal. However, there is a way in which she can get it through unchanged and which would also help with the reconciliation of our country on the other side. It would mean following the example of the Good Friday agreement and having confirmation from the people afterwards, but there would be fundamental benefits from that happening. I am not asking her to pass judgment on this at the Dispatch Box right now, but will she agree to meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), just to briefly talk it through and explore the possible benefits?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Gentleman knows my view in relation to a second referendum; I have expressed it many times in this House and it has not changed. I believe it is important that we deliver on the first referendum, but my colleagues and I are meeting Members from across the House to discuss the issues that they wish to raise in relation to the Brexit matter, and I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Sedgefield can meet, if not with me then with an appropriate Minister.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): With the return of the Royal Air Force Tornados from operations for the last time, will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute not only to this remarkable jet, which has given 40 years of operations from the cold war through to the mountains of Afghanistan, but to the remarkable men and women who have flown and maintained her?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the Tornado and to the men and women who have flown and maintained the fleet over the last 40 years. He has referenced the cold war and the mountains of Afghanistan. From the Gulf war through to operations against Daesh in Syria and Iraq, the Tornado has also been an integral and vital part of

RAF operations. As my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary said last week, it is with a heavy heart but enormous pride that we bid farewell to the Tornado from operations after it has played that vital role in keeping Britain and the allies safe. It will of course be replaced with worthy successors in the improved Typhoon and the new F-35s, which will keep us as a world leader in air combat, but I am happy to pay tribute from the Dispatch Box to the plane and to all those men and women who have flown and maintained it over those 40 years.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The UK's democracy is defunct. Its economy and society are chronically unequal. Britain is breaking. Let us speak as others find us. This plain truth has not gone unnoticed. In pubs, clubs and homes, on pavements, at schools and workplaces, and at a Yes Is More gig in Cardiff on Friday, people are talking about this place and about how Westminster is failing them. When will the Prime Minister lift her gaze above party interests and the Westminster interest? When will she work with others to remake this island as three self-sufficient, thriving nations, rather than perpetuating the assumption of privilege for one?

The Prime Minister: When I became Prime Minister, I was very clear that I wanted a country that worked for everyone, and that was the entire United Kingdom. I note that in her question the hon. Lady failed to recognise that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. We want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. I also say to her that democracy is not defunct. Democracy in this country will be shown by this House recognising the vote that took place in 2016, delivering on the result of the referendum and voting for a deal for us to leave the EU.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): Despite our comparative size, the UK has more Government Departments than even the USA. We hear in this place all the time about the challenges of cross-departmental working. Will my right hon. Friend commit to looking carefully in the spending review at opportunities to shrink the size of government and instead focus our spending on public services?

The Prime Minister: The question of the size of government is something that several colleagues raise from time to time. I must put my hand up and admit the role that I played in that by creating the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Department for International Trade, and of course we are also employing more civil servants to ensure that we deliver on Brexit, something which I believe is close to my hon. Friend's heart.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Maryam is just six months old, and she is beautiful. She was recently diagnosed with a devastating form of muscular dystrophy. Her brother had the same condition and died tragically young. Spinraza is a new and highly effective drug produced by Biogen that is available in 23 countries, but not in England. If Maryam lived in the west of Scotland instead of West Ham, she would get it. Negotiations between the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and Biogen have been unsuccessful, leaving

Maryam and two other babies as tiny pawns in an argument about price and profit. Will the Prime Minister please intervene and help prevent Maryam and others from suffering an early and painful death?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises that case with great passion, and I will ensure that a Minister from the Department of Health and Social Care looks at the matter and responds to her.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): The consumption of dog and cat meat goes against our British values. They are our companions. They are not food. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a ban on consumption here, where, astoundingly, it is still legal, would put us in a leading position and send a clear message to the rest of the world that the sickening and horrific suffering that the animals experience during slaughter should be stopped? If so, will she commit to the change, which has cross-party support, as demonstrated by my amendment to the Agriculture Bill?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of my hon. Friend's amendment, and I thank him for raising the issue. Animal welfare is a priority for this Government. I am pleased that it is illegal to sell dog and cat meat in the UK. No abattoirs are licensed to slaughter dogs and, thankfully, there is no evidence of human consumption of dog or cat meat in the UK. I certainly hope that other countries will join the UK in upholding the highest standards of animal welfare.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. In wishing the hon. Lady a very happy birthday and hoping that the House will join me in doing so, I call Rachel Reeves.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker—21 again.

My constituent Harriet recently gave birth to her baby three months premature. When Harriet was due to return to work, her baby had only recently come out of hospital, and she had to choose between taking additional time off work but struggling to pay the bills or returning to work but missing crucial bonding time with her baby. The Government had committed to reviewing the issue by the end of January, but we are now halfway through February. Will the Prime Minister commit to taking action and to extending parental leave for the parents of children who end up in neonatal wards?

The Prime Minister: First, happy birthday to the hon. Lady. We are reviewing the situation, and we are also looking at what applies in other circumstances, such as miscarriage. I will ensure that she receives a written response.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): The Leader of the Opposition has shown today that a little knowledge is a very dangerous thing. He chose to ask about Seaborne Freight and Ramsgate port, which is in my constituency, but he does not speak for South Thanet; I do. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the people of Thanet are ready and prepared to keep the port open

for Brexit eventualities? Can she give a commitment to Thanet District Council that it will be indemnified for costs here on in?

The Prime Minister: No one can doubt the passion and vigour with which my hon. Friend speaks up for the people of his South Thanet constituency. He mentions Ramsgate port, and I am aware of the discussions between the council and the Department for Transport, and I believe that they are continuing. Obviously, I recognise the significance of the possibility of ensuring that suitable capacity is available at Ramsgate harbour, and I will ensure that the Department for Transport looks at the specific issue that he raises.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Yes, on this occasion I will take a point of order from the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) because I gather that it appertains to the session that has just concluded. I very gently say to him that I hope that this is not a cheeky ruse to be deployed on a weekly basis to secure for himself a third question, which our procedures do not allow. That would be very wrong, and I am sure he would not knowingly do anything very wrong. We will put it to the test. *[Interruption.]* There is a certain amount of chuntering from a sedentary position, not least from the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who suggests that she thinks that he might engage in such behaviour. I am a charitable chap, and I am prepared to give him a chance.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Heaven forbid that anyone would abuse the privilege that you afford us on such occasions.

We all recognise our responsibility for the language we use in the discourse that we have in this House. I want to be helpful to the Prime Minister because she perhaps inadvertently misled the House when she said that there was no plan for Scottish independence. Unlike the Brexit campaign, which was no more than a slogan on the side of a bus, we had—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who is brandishing a document. I have a feeling it will feature in his next press release. He has made his point with force and alacrity, and it requires no reply. I hope he is satisfied with his prodigious efforts. We will leave it there.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah! The hon. Gentleman ought to know about good behaviour in the Chamber and elsewhere as he is a distinguished football referee.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I appreciate your comments. For clarification, given that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) held up a copy of the SNP's White Paper, how can I put on the record the fact that it contained many errors and omissions? For example, it did not include any transition costs, it wildly overstated the predicted revenue from oil and, interestingly, many

of the proposals in it related to powers that the Scottish Government and the SNP already had in Holyrood in Edinburgh.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has found his own salvation, as he well knows. Hitherto, I had always thought that the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) was a notably cheeky chappie in the Chamber, but I realise that the role of cheeky chappie is not confined to the Scottish National party. We are grateful to the hon. Member for Moray, who has made his point and looks very delighted with his efforts. We will leave it there.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar looks very happy. We do not need to hear from him further at this time. I remind him that he also has cerebral status as the Chair of a Select Committee and should behave with due decorum to reflect the very high standing he enjoys, possibly in Scotland but certainly in the House.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is something that has been troubling me for a few weeks now. When I first

came here, I was told that the protocol of the Chamber is that hon. Members must never cross the line of sight between you and whoever is speaking. However, on multiple occasions this Chamber has emptied when my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) has stood up, to the point at which people cut off your line of sight when you are in the middle of speaking to Members. Could you advise us on how that can be corrected?

Mr Speaker: What I would say to the hon. Lady is twofold. First, it is a breach of the conventions of this House for a Member to walk past a Member who has the Floor on that side of the House. That is unseemly and discourteous behaviour, and it falls into the category that the hon. Lady is helpfully deprecating.

Secondly, I hope the hon. Lady will not take it amiss if I say that it is regrettable that her prodigious efforts on behalf of her party leader have not been witnessed by the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber himself, for the simple reason that he has already exited the Chamber. However, the saving grace for the hon. Lady is that her efforts have been observed by no less a figure than the Chief Whip of the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). That probably bodes well for her in the future. We will leave it there for now.

EU Trade Agreements: Replication

12.55 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade to make a statement on the progress he has made in replicating trade agreements between the United Kingdom and those countries with which the EU has a trade agreement.

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): As a member of the EU, the UK currently participates in about 40 free trade agreements with more than 70 countries. In 2018, the trade agreements in force constituted about 11% of our trade. They cover a wide variety of relationships, including free trade agreements, economic partnership agreements with developing nations, association agreements that cover broader economic and political cooperation, and mutual recognition agreements.

The Government's programme for providing continuity and stability for businesses, consumers and investors in our international agreements is of the utmost importance. We are committed to ensuring that those benefits are maintained, providing for a smooth transition as we leave the EU, but the House will be well aware that the best way to provide that continuity and stability is to ensure that we have a deal with the European Union so the UK remains covered by all those agreements during the implementation period.

We have already signed a number of agreements, including with Switzerland—the largest in terms of our trade flows, representing more than 20% of the value of all our roll-over agreements. We have also signed agreements with Chile and the Faroe Islands, and an economic partnership agreement with eastern and southern Africa. The texts, explanatory memorandums and parliamentary reports for those agreements have already been laid in the Libraries of both Houses.

As we leave the EU, we have no intention of making our developing country partners worse off, as the Opposition would have us do by abandoning EPAs. It is important for the prosperity of their people that we maintain our trading relationships so they have the opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty. We have recently reached agreements with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and we intend to sign them shortly. Just today, we reached agreement on the UK-Pacific EPA. We have also signed mutual recognition agreements with Australia and New Zealand, and will be closing two with the United States soon. A number of negotiations are at an advanced stage. All international negotiations—indeed, any negotiations—tend to go down to the wire, and I would expect nothing different from these agreements. That is the way that countries do business.

To put the economic value of the agreements in perspective, the countries covered by 20 of the smallest agreements account for less than 0.8% of the UK's total trade. For the countries with which we may not be able to sign a full agreement by exit day, it is responsible to ensure that we have contingencies in place should we end up, unfortunately, in a no-deal scenario. That is exactly what my Department, alongside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, is doing. We will shortly be

updating businesses and the House about the progress on these agreements, and will continue to inform the House as soon as further agreements are signed, in line with our established parliamentary procedures.

Barry Gardiner: Yesterday, the Department's risk matrix for the so-called roll-over agreements was published in the media. Of the 40 agreements that the Secretary of State famously promised would be ready one second after midnight on exit day, precisely four have been signed. Nine are off track, 19 are significantly off track, four cannot be completed by March 2019 and two are not even being negotiated.

Throughout the passage of the Trade Bill, Members repeatedly said that they were concerned that it would not be possible to replicate the terms of those agreements fully, and that many countries would seek to renegotiate terms in their favour. I therefore ask the Secretary of State to write to me to set out for each country what objections or demands to concluding a new roll-over have been presented, what concessions he has offered in respect of preferential access to UK markets in order to overcome such obstacles, and what assessment he has made of the impact on trade flows with the UK of a failure to conclude a new deal.

Many in the business community feel that the Secretary of State has diverted too many of his Department's resources to entirely new free trade agreements, and so keen has he been to grandstand with the new that he has ignored the fundamental grinding work of securing what we already have. So I ask the Secretary of State to write to set out: the number of full-time personnel engaged on securing entirely new agreements; the number engaged on securing the roll-overs; and whether he believes his Department has been adequately resourced to handle so many trade negotiations at once.

Recently, the Secretary of State suggested the unilateral liberalisation of tariffs in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Will he explain to the House how he thinks negotiations would go with the remaining roll-over countries once he had given up our key negotiating leverage by reducing all tariffs to zero? Most Members might think that by doing so we were the ones being rolled over. Will he categorically rule out such a proposal? As we speak, goods are being loaded on to vessels that will be arriving in our markets from overseas after 29 March. How does he intend to support business with these transactions, given that nobody knows what tariffs and non-tariff barriers they will face when they arrive at their destination port? Increasingly, the Department for International Trade looks as though it has inadequate resources, focused on the wrong priorities, set by incompetent Ministers.

Dr Fox: As ever, the hon. Gentleman gives us a rich menu of the things on which he is wrong. First, if we want to ensure that all our agreements are rolled over, the best way to do that is by reaching a deal with the European Union so that they will apply one minute after midnight. I voted for that continuity. Did the hon. Gentleman? Did his party? Secondly, he asks about the reasons why countries may not want to continue these things. I have had discussions with a number of Opposition politicians about this. Some countries have said that they did not like some of the human rights elements that were incorporated by the EU and they would like

us to drop those in order to roll the agreements over. I am not inclined to do so, because the value we attach to human rights is an important part of who we are as a country. The hon. Gentleman was wrong in that, rather than diverting resources in my Department from roll-over agreements to future free trade agreements, I have done exactly the opposite, reducing the number working on potential future FTAs in order to give maximum resource for this. Finally, he was wrong as I did not advocate unilateral liberalisation of tariffs—that was something mentioned in a newspaper—and the Government will determine what their day one tariffs will be as a collective decision in the event of no deal.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right to stress that if we were to leave on 29 March with no deal, it would have a disastrous effect for many industries, because we would suddenly lose very important trading agreements across the world that we have enjoyed for many years. I agree with him on that, but does he not accept that when we get into the transition period he is still going to face enormous difficulties and will need a very long transition period to start negotiating so many trade deals with so many important markets for our economy? Does he not accept that his principal problem is the lack of bargaining power that the UK has on its own compared with what the EU has as a bloc in carrying out bargaining arrangements? He mentions human rights and other things, but very important countries such as Japan and South Korea, and others, are going to expect better terms from the UK, at the expense of the UK, than they have had to give to the EU. He says that they will take it to the wire. He accepts that he is having tough negotiations. Would he contemplate urging on his colleagues, even at this stage, moving to some sort of customs arrangement and regulatory alignment with the rest of the EU which will rescue us from these chaotic negotiations and allow us to enjoy the benefits of trade agreements which, for the most part, were ones that previous Conservative British Governments urged upon our EU partners and took a leading role in getting put in place in the first place?

Dr Fox: As ever, my right hon. and learned Friend raises interesting points. Although there would undoubtedly be a greater risk in the case of no deal, I do not agree that this would be disastrous, because we are likely to maintain a high proportion of the continuity of these agreements. Let me just remind him that five of those 40 agreements represent 76% of the trade, by value, that falls into this category. My Department has developed a great degree of expertise and knowledge in the process of transitioning to new agreements. There are those who say, “If we end up getting a deal, much of this work that has been done will be wasted.” I completely disagree with that, as it has created a body of knowledge, experience and expertise in the Department that will stand us in good stead. As for our ability to negotiate with other countries, we remain the world’s fifth biggest economy and many countries have said to us that it would be much easier to do an agreement with the UK as a single country which would then negotiate and ratify than to have to do it with 28 countries, as they do at the moment. On Japan, we have of course made clear our position and finished our public consultation on potential membership of the Comprehensive and

Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership—CPTPP—a subject on which we are likely to have a debate in this House next week. Finally, he asks whether we should not stay in a customs union. That would preclude us from having negotiations on new agreements, such as with the United States, or even with China, with which the EU has no agreement at the present time.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The Secretary of State has just said that countries say it would be easier to do a deal with the UK. One might ask the simple question: if it was so easy, why have we not even been able to roll over more than half a dozen of the deals we currently have? The leaked documents paint a picture of unvarnished failure: with South Korea and Canada we are off track; and with Japan we have no chance of completion. These deals are not simply necessary in the event of a no-deal Brexit; they may well be required at the end of the transition period if the negotiation then is as miserable as what we have seen to date. So why does he not own up? The time to negotiate these deals has run out, and it is highly unlikely that the Prime Minister’s deal, which he supports, will be accepted by this House. This is now the evidence that he and others need to put their weight behind an extension to article 50 so that his Government and his Department at least can complete the simple task of rolling over the deals we currently have.

Dr Fox: Again, I make the point: if Opposition Members want us to get trade continuity, the best way to do so is to vote for the deal that the Prime Minister has already set out. As for future FTAs, we could not negotiate those were we to follow the hon. Gentleman’s advice and remain in a customs union.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): I have had a careful look at the passage of these agreements through this House in the first place. Every one of them was supported by my right hon. Friend but most of them have been opposed by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner): CETA—the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement—in February 2017; the EU-Japan agreement in June 2018; and the EU-Singapore agreement in September 2018. He voted against those. Does my right hon. Friend share my consternation at this urgent question, given that the hon. Gentleman never wanted us to be in these trade agreements in the first place?

Dr Fox: First, let me thank my right hon. Friend for the work he has done in my Department as part of this overall process. What stands out in this debate is the utter humbug we hear from the hon. Member for Brent North, who talks about the need to roll over agreements such as the one with Canada and asks why the Government are late in doing so. The Labour party voted against the agreement in the first place; Labour did not want us to have the agreement. So now, to come to the House asking why we are not rolling it over on time is, sadly, absolutely typical of the way he does business.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The serious matter here is that on 29 March, transition or no transition, the UK is going to be at the mercy of the sovereignty of 70 other countries in their agreeing to the trade deal roll-over. The EU seems to have been very

[Angus Brendan MacNeil]

good at these trade agreements, which include human rights. The Secretary of State wants to maintain those agreements, despite wanting to rip up trade agreements with the most important partners, namely the 27 countries in the EU trading bloc.

The importance of the 40-odd trade agreements with 70 countries is recognised by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, which warns that even if EU trade agreements are rolled over, advantages will not always be met. For example, the EU-Korea agreement allows for 55% automotive content, but the UK cannot reach 55% automotive content. As the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has warned, that will put the UK at the disadvantage of not being able to fulfil the rates of the trade agreement, and we will be on the more disadvantageous World Trade Organisation terms as well. In the 40 agreements with 70 other countries, how many other instances are there of clauses such as the one on 55% content that cannot be met? People who trade and export from the UK need to know, and they need to know now, with 44 days to go.

Dr Fox: The central premise of the hon. Gentleman's question is that we intend to rip up our trade agreement with what he describes as our most important trading partner, the EU27. We have no intention of having a breach. We want to have a full, liberal trading arrangement with the European Union. We do not want Britain to be subjugated in a political relationship that the voters have told us to leave. When it comes to continuity, the Government have set out what we will do with the agreements. For each of them, we have set out to Parliament—this is in both Libraries—the text of the agreement, an explanatory memorandum and the political statement on where there is any change between the agreement in place and the one we are rolling over, if utter and complete replication has not been possible. We have done that already, and we shall do that with the others.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I heard the Secretary of State give the commitment on the guidance that he is going to give. My constituents who are seeking to export to countries now do not know, at the point of departure, what regime their goods will face on arrival. I note the Secretary of State's attacks on the Opposition parties, but he may wish to recall that 117 Government MPs did not vote for the Prime Minister's deal, many because of their ideological commitment to WTO rules. Given that we are 44 days away, when will that guidance be issued to companies in my constituency? I was one of the 40 Back-Bench MPs who supported the Prime Minister's deal.

Dr Fox: The Government are assessing where we are with each of the agreements. Where we believe that it will not be possible fully to replicate, we will set out a technical notice in the coming days. Let me give my hon. Friend the example of Turkey, which is part of the customs union: unless we get an agreement with the European Union, we will not be able to maintain the current pattern of trade with Turkey, although we would look to see where we could mitigate any problems that came up.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The past two and a half years have been a very painful process, as the wild and optimistic promises about what could be achieved from the Brexit process have collided with reality. That includes what the Secretary of State said to the Conservative party conference in the autumn of 2017. The question I wish to put to him is simply this: why does he think that it has proved so difficult to roll over all these deals, when he told that conference that it would be a very easy thing to do and he was confident of achieving it?

Dr Fox: If we get an agreement via the withdrawal agreement with our European Union partners, that is exactly what will happen: those agreements will roll over. Let me explain to the House why: the United Kingdom will be deemed by the European Union to continue to be party to those agreements. We will get continuity, but we will not get the same continuity if we do not get an agreement with the EU. Those who continue, by their actions, to make no deal more likely will have to be responsible for the consequences.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and Somerset neighbour on achieving a deal with Switzerland so effectively. Does he share my enthusiasm that this is the beginning of an opportunity for this country to trade more freely, to be able to cut the cost of goods coming into the country and to stop acting as a protectionist racket for inefficient continental European companies?

Dr Fox: I am grateful to my parliamentary next-door neighbour for his comments. Indeed, we have a great opportunity as we leave the European Union and as we take up our independent seat at the World Trade Organisation to be champions for global liberal free trade at a time when the voices of protectionism are rising. That is important not only for the United Kingdom or, indeed, for the economic wellbeing of the trading world, but for the wellbeing of those we have managed to take out of abject poverty as a result of a liberal global trading environment.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): We have seen some delusional performances at the Dispatch Box this week, but this has to be among the worst ever. May I take the Secretary of State back to his non-answer to the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)? The Secretary of State dodged the nub of that question, which was about why anybody should give us a better deal on our own than we have as part of the European Union. He has been asked that question over and over again, and he has refused to answer it. Now that we are only 44 days away, may I put the question another way? Can he name one country that he is so confident will give us a better deal than we currently have that if such a deal has not been achieved by 30 March, he will resign?

Dr Fox: I was not able even to follow all that question, never mind answer it. Countries have said to us that there are areas of policy on which they will seek an agreement with the United Kingdom that they cannot get with the European Union. Data localisation is one policy area where the attitude of a number of European countries makes it impossible to reach an agreement, and that is in fact holding up the trade in services

agreement. We will take a more liberal view of that and will be able to do things as an independent nation that we cannot do as a member of the European Union.

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): It is my understanding, and the Secretary of State has referred to this as well, that the EU has not permitted Turkey to engage in talks with the UK on continuity of trade post Brexit under the terms of its goods-only customs agreement with that country. It is the kind of arrangement that I understand we would fall into under the backstop. Will the Secretary of State please update the House on any progress in talks with Turkey to ensure smooth future trade with this important partner? Does he share my concern about limitations on our ability to negotiate freely with trade partners should we enter into a goods-only customs arrangement with the EU?

Dr Fox: There are issues with Turkey, which is in a customs union, although it is a partial customs union, so we can discuss our future relationship in areas such as agriculture and services. I refer in all humility to the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), who put it best. He said of a customs union that

“as an end point it is deeply unattractive. It would preclude us from making our own independent trade agreements with our five largest export markets outside the EU”.

That was then; it is not the policy today.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State will recall that last week I asked him to provide this risk matrix to the House, but he would not. Instead, he asserted that if only I listened to his contribution in the International Trade Committee, all would be revealed. I went back and listened to it and nothing was revealed about the content of the matrix. Why would he not make this information, which has now been leaked to *The Sun*, available to Members of Parliament in the same way that he was happy to make it available to businesses? Is it because he does not believe that we have a role in the scrutiny of his activities? Or was it simply to save him the embarrassment of Members seeing what lack of progress there has been on the 40 trade deals he said would be signed by one minute after midnight on 30 March?

Dr Fox: It is tedious to have to give the same answer, but if the same question keeps getting asked, I will keep doing so. The way that we get continuity at one minute after midnight is to have an agreement with the European Union so that we have continuity of the agreements. A number of the agreements are very close to completion, but there is a level of confidentiality around that. At the same time, the Government clearly want to give business an indication of where we think a trade agreement may not be able to be rolled over on time. I will do that in the coming days, following an assessment of where we are at the present time, and I will make a written ministerial statement to the House as well.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Is it not necessary for us to take lessons from the fact that we have failed to land a pre-Brexit trade deal with Japan or with most of the other 70 countries with which the EU enjoys FTAs, such as that actually we would be better

off being in a customs union or having some close customs arrangement with the EU, backed up by the firepower of 510 million consumers rather than 65 million?

Dr Fox: But we are leaving the EU. Were we to attempt to have a customs union relationship, which is what the Labour party says, we would have no say in that trade policy; we would actually be worse off than we are today in the European Union. The EU has made it very clear—and the European Union treaty makes it very clear—that a third country outside the EU cannot be involved in setting EU trade policy. At best, it is a fantasy, at worst, a dangerous delusion.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): On free trade agreements with Japan and South Korea, the Secretary of State for Business made it clear to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee last week that the deadline for companies exporting to Japan and South Korea is this Friday, 15 February, because shipments take six weeks to arrive. What advice would the Secretary of State give to businesses that are exporting to Japan and South Korea? If the Government get their deal through, will the free trade agreements with those countries roll over? If we do not manage to secure a deal, what happens to those shipments when they arrive at the end of March and the beginning of April?

Dr Fox: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. On Japan, the Japanese Government have said to us that if there were a deal with the European Union, they intend to roll over the Japan economic partnership agreement at that point, and the UK would continue to benefit. I have to say, though, that we have been trading with Japan for many years, but trading on World Trade Organisation terms. We have been trading under the Japan EPA for a matter of days. When it comes to British business continuity, firms are used to dealing on WTO terms, and I envisage our trade relationship with Japan to be largely effected by our potential membership of CPTPP, to which the Japanese Government have given enormous encouragement.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): But from whom were representations had to the effect that remaining in a customs union would be a disaster?

Dr Fox: It would be unparliamentary of me to use the same term as the shadow Secretary of State for some of Labour's tests that have led it to its policy today. It is nonsensical to say that we can be both in a customs union with the European Union as a third country and still have an effect on trade. Those tests would increase the chances of the UK remaining permanently as a rule taker, which would not be advantageous to the UK.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): There has been a great deal of focus on the number of trade deals, but, as the Secretary of State has outlined, the value of the trade in each deal varies significantly. He has indicated that many of the deals will go down to the wire. How many is he anticipating will be signed before that date? More importantly, what is their value as a percentage of our current trade value for the entire third-party free trade deals?

Dr Fox: As ever, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. On the UK's trade, 48% of our trade is with the European Union and 52% with the rest of

[Dr Fox]

the world. Of the rest of the world trade, around 11% occurs under EU FTAs. Of the 40 or so agreements, five represent 76% of the 11%, and the bottom 20 represent less than 0.8% of 1%. Therefore, there is very clear advantage in getting those larger agreements across the line first, and we are making excellent progress in that regard.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): There are two groups in this House who underestimate the value of free trade agreements. The first includes those Opposition Front Benchers who did not vote for them in the first place and whose leader believes that free trade agreements benefit only multinationals at the expense of everyone else. He should try explaining that on the workshop floor of some of the small and medium-sized manufacturers in my constituency of Gloucester that export around the world. The second group are some Conservative Members who believe that leaving the EU with no deal will be no problem. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in the event of no deal, the tariffs that will come into play with the EU will be devastating for farmers and manufacturers and all the rest of the 148,000 companies that export only to the EU and that the simplest way to take this risk off the table is for everybody to get behind the Government's withdrawal agreement Bill and make sure that all these deals are rolled over without problem?

Dr Fox: It seems that the country is caught between the irrational pessimism of those who fail to be reconciled to the referendum result and believe that everything to do with Brexit will be disastrous for the UK and those who are irrationally optimistic that it would be no problem whatever to leave the European Union with no deal. The truth is that we would be better off with a deal, which is why the Government want to get that deal with the European Union across the line. I still urge Opposition Members to support it. If we do not achieve it, we will end up with the uncertainties that they have identified today.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): As the Secretary of State rails against irrational pessimism, I assume that he will tell us that the rest of the world is looking at the United Kingdom right now and saying that Brexit is a great example that it must follow.

I wish to go back to the point that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) raised yesterday, which is that, under our current arrangements, UK businesses will be part of one of the biggest trade deals ever negotiated between the EU and Japan, but, under the Secretary of State's policy, UK businesses will not be part of that agreement and we will have to start again. We are told that Tokyo's trade negotiators are under instruction to extract every advantage possible, as we would expect them to do in a tough trade negotiation. Will he promise UK businesses that their market access to Japan under any deal that he manages to negotiate will be as good as it is under the EU-Japan trade deal, which has already been negotiated?

Dr Fox: As I have already said, the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Abe have both indicated that they want a close trading relationship for our countries after we leave the EU, but the Japanese Prime Minister has

been very clear that he is hugely encouraging of the UK's accession to CPTPP, which would then become a trading bloc of almost exactly the same size as the European Union itself. As for his first point, many people are looking to the United Kingdom and saying what a great example it is of democracy that a country wants to take control of its own constitutional future.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): And we buy a lot of goods from Japan anyway, particularly cars, and I am sure that it will want us to carry on doing that. Am I not right in thinking that, during the referendum campaign, David Cameron said that, by leaving the EU, we would be leaving the customs union? He recognised that that would be essential. Although a customs union would have the advantage of allowing all these deals to be rolled over, it would be a betrayal of what the people voted for in 2016 because we would still have to pay to access the customs union and there would still be free movement of labour. Furthermore, we would simply not be allowed to do those trade deals with countries such as China, the United States of America and, indeed, some of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Dr Fox: My hon. Friend, who has considerable knowledge from his work on the Select Committee, is quite right. If we were in a customs union, but a third country outside the European Union—I do not hear people say that we should stay in the EU and simply behave dishonourably towards the referendum—we would not be able to affect European Union trade policy and would become complete rule takers and would in fact be in a worse position than we are today. As a member of the European Union, we were able to affect policy. We have been given a clear instruction by the voters to leave the European Union, and that means leaving the customs union and the single market.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Manufacturers in Crewe and Nantwich have expressed very real concern about the lack of progress in this area. Does the Minister accept that committing to a new customs union as part of our future relationship with the EU would resolve this issue, allowing us to continue to take advantage of our current deals with all major global markets while allowing us the ability to strike our own deals for trade in services, which make up the vast majority of the UK economy?

Dr Fox: Just how would it give us greater certainty in the exercise of our own trade policy if we were a third country outside the European Union in a form of customs union that specifically prohibited us from having a say on that trade policy itself? That would diminish the ability of this Parliament to give certainty to any business in our country, rather than what the hon. Lady suggests.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that, if the Labour party really cared about the continuity of our trade arrangements, it would stop blocking the Trade Bill in the other place?

Dr Fox: I hope that we will see the progress of the Trade Bill, which the Labour party voted against in this House. Those involved in manufacturing, including in

the constituency of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), will note that the Labour party voted against the establishment of the Trade Remedies Authority, which is how we would protect our businesses from unfair international competition.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Home Secretary has said in this House on a number of occasions that international student numbers will be uncapped, that the number of skilled workers who are required for the economy will be uncapped and that our public services will be able to get the people that they wish for from all over the world to work in our those services. Can the International Trade Secretary tell us how many of these roll-over agreements—or how many of the post-Brexit agreements—will be rubbished or dictated by the fact that many of our partners that want bilateral trade deals want a lessening of the UK's hostile environment policy?

Dr Fox: The policy on students is to encourage them to come here, and many do so. For example, we are the No. 1 global destination for Chinese students—ahead of the United States. These students come here because they believe that the quality of education is high. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have no intention of limiting the number of students coming to the UK. Likewise with migration, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said, we look to ensure that the levels of skill required for the UK economy are available to us. In a modern, integrated economy, it makes sense that our migration policy gives priority to ensuring the skills needed for our economic growth.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I was thinking of asking the excellent leave Secretary of State how he managed to maintain such good humour and grace in a remain-dominated Parliament. However, I think what this House wants to know is whether, in the circumstances of no deal—that must be likely, given that the Government's withdrawal agreement was defeated by the biggest margin in Commons history—his Department will be prepared on 29 March for no deal.

Dr Fox: As I have said, our priority is continuity of trade. We want to ensure that we get the roll-over of as many of those agreements—and as large a proportion—as possible. Where that is not possible for other reasons, we will seek as much mitigation as we can. I make the case again that the best way to achieve full continuity is to leave the European Union with the withdrawal agreement. As for my hon. Friend's initial point, I take comfort from the fact that although this may be a remain-dominated Parliament, it is a leave-dominated country.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentioned Switzerland and the Swiss deal in his response to the urgent question. Could he explain why members of the International Trade Committee had to look on the Swiss Government's website to understand the detail of the trade agreement, and why members of the Committee were not briefed in advance? What will he do to improve the lack of clarity and the lack of a sense of working together across Parliament to achieve the best for trade?

Dr Fox: I am grateful for the way in which the hon. Lady continues to press the importance of this issue; it is a view that I share. We set out in our legislation that we would publish the text at the point of signature, not at the point of initialling, and that is what this House ultimately voted for. We also said that we would publish the explanatory memorandum, and that we would set out differences between the original agreement and any changes in a statement, given that the original agreement was already scrutinised by this Parliament when it was introduced as an EU agreement. The hon. Lady raises an important point, however, about future trade agreements that were not covered in the Trade Bill; and following the completion of the Government consultation, I will set out the processes by which we will ensure that both Houses of Parliament are able to get active and real-time scrutiny of the future trade agreements.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Is it not the case that, even if we roll agreements over, it is entirely possible to make further enhancements to those agreements in time as an independent trading nation?

Dr Fox: Those of us who have been involved in this process from the beginning will remember that it was initially known as transitional adoption—that is, we would adopt the EU agreement with a view to moving on to a more bespoke agreement later. That is still our aim. For example, in our discussions with the Swiss Government at signature on Monday, we talked about our ambitions to enhance that agreement once Britain has left the EU. Our aim for the moment is continuity; ambition comes later.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The UK Government would probably leave DFS with a full-price sofa. Ministers have already indicated that giving up our protected geographical indicators would be a price worth paying for trade deals, wilfully damaging Scotland's competitiveness in world markets. What guaranteed protections will the Secretary of State's trade deals offer Scotland's precious food and drink sector to compensate?

Dr Fox: That is so fundamentally wrong. The Government have said nothing of the sort about geographical indicators. We regard them as having the highest importance, not least in Scotland. On that point, I congratulate Scotch whisky on reaching almost £5 billion of exports last year—exports that we are very keen to protect.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Ministers have always promised that these trade agreements will mirror the terms that these countries have with the EU and which the UK currently enjoys. Has the Secretary of State achieved this in the provisional agreements with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and how does he propose to achieve it in respect of Turkey's trade relationship with the EU?

Dr Fox: We have said that we aim to replicate the terms as closely as possible. There are some issues that mean that it is not entirely possible to do so. The hon. Gentleman correctly raises the issue of Turkey, which is in a particular position because of its partial customs union with the European Union. This of course means

[Dr Fox]

that it is difficult to conclude what we are going to do with Turkey until we know the shape of our agreement with the European Union. Again, that simply raises the issues and complications of being in a customs union, rather than being a nation that is able to determine its own independent trade policy.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The fundamental point made by both the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) and the Father of the House was that the balance of power shifts when we are no longer a member of the EU. This is illustrated by the fact that one of the first agreements that the Secretary of State has achieved is with the Faroe Islands. Will he just tell the House what proportion of UK trade is with the Faroes?

Dr Fox: I will admit that the agreement with the Faroe Islands is a small one, but it is very important for people who work in the fish processing industry in this country because it provides the necessary continuity. Labour Members mock it, but they might want to go to places such as Grimsby and tell people there that the agreement has no value, when it clearly does. Countries that are much smaller than the United Kingdom have been able to get trade agreements. For example, Canada—a smaller economy than the United Kingdom—was able to negotiate a perfectly acceptable trade agreement with the European Union, as it has with many other places. It is the utter lack of ambition, optimism and confidence shown by the hon. Lady that I am happy was defeated by the optimism of the British people in the referendum.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has managed to reach agreement with the Faroe Islands, but not with Japan or Canada. Why has this crucial exercise proved so much harder than he said it would be?

Dr Fox: The process continues, but it is worth pointing out that we have reached agreement with Switzerland, which is by far the biggest of all the agreements under this section of our trade. The trade agreement that we have signed with Switzerland this week is, by value, more than 20% of all 40 of the EU agreements. If it is possible to do it with the biggest one, it should be possible to do it with others.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): In the unlikely event that the Prime Minister's deal is agreed, the EU is going to write to the countries that it has

agreements with and say, "Please could you agree to treat the United Kingdom as a member of the EU for the transition period?" Will the Secretary of State now admit to the House that there is no guarantee that all those third countries will agree to that request?

Dr Fox: All I can say is that I am not aware—nor, as far as I know, is the European Union—of a single country that has said it does not want to continue with the trading arrangements that it currently has with the United Kingdom and the European Union. Why would they?

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Secretary of State, in response to my right hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and for East Ham (Stephen Timms), has indicated that the Japanese trade deal will not be replicated at the level it is at now, except that we can join the Trans-Pacific Partnership. How long does he expect us to spend negotiating in order to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership?

Dr Fox: As I said, the Japanese Government have made it clear that in the event that we leave the European Union with the withdrawal agreement, there will be the roll-over. If we want to get continuity with that Japanese agreement, there is one way to do it, and that is to ensure that we back the Prime Minister's deal. It is also true that the Japan EPA does not come in quickly. A lot of the tariff liberalisation, for example, comes in over a period of years—up to eight years in some cases, which is much longer than I would anticipate it would take for Britain to accede to the CPTPP.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): If the Government fail to replicate existing trade agreements, we may end up finding ourselves having to rely on trading agreements with the USA. Can the Secretary of State reassure my constituents that he will not sacrifice NHS services or workers' rights to a deal with President Trump?

Dr Fox: This House agreed the agreement with Canada. If the hon. Gentleman goes to the Library and looks at chapters 23 and 24 and annex 2 of that agreement, he will see provisions there that make it against the law for us to water down the workers' rights or environmental laws we have in order to reach a trade agreement. Annex 2 sets out that we retain our rights to be able to regulate our public services, including the national health service. I would have thought that he would agree with those non-regression clauses. It is therefore sad that he and his party voted against this in the House of Commons.

Northern Ireland: Restoring Devolution

1.41 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on her attempts to restore devolution in Northern Ireland one year on from the collapse of the all-party talks in February 2018.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): As the House is aware, this Government remain steadfastly committed to the Belfast agreement and its successors. I am continuing to work tirelessly towards my absolute priority of restoring fully functioning devolved government in Northern Ireland. This is a very sensitive matter that requires careful handling. I last updated the House at my Department's oral questions on 30 January. I have no further update at this stage, but as soon as I have anything to add, I will of course come to the House at the earliest opportunity. I hope that will be soon.

Tony Lloyd: It is two years since we saw the collapse of the Stormont Executive and Assembly. It is 12 months since the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach visited Belfast in the hope of seeing restoration of the power-sharing agreements, but sadly—we all regret this—that led to failure.

Since that time, there have been many calls for the Secretary of State to show significant effort in bringing the parties together to restore power-sharing. However, it would be very hard for anyone to claim that we have seen the sustained action that could have prevented the kind of drift that has envenomed the relationship between the political parties in Northern Ireland and between the communities, or the drift that has seen the failure of political decision making that has led to the consequences in, for example, the health service. We now have a health service that is not delivering the same standards, as it ought to be. We know it needs reform. People are having their health options let down, and ultimately people will die earlier.

As for schools, headteachers have made representations to the Secretary of State and, most certainly, to me about the failure of political decisions, which has an impact on children's education. In policing and security, we are still upwards of 1,000 police officers short of the Patten recommendations, at a time when Brexit is causing real concerns about security on the Irish border.

But probably the biggest issue, beyond Brexit, where there has been no consistent voice across the communities of Northern Ireland has been reconciliation. Anybody who believes that reconciliation was achieved 20 years ago with the Good Friday agreement is simply wrong. The Good Friday agreement built new institutions that were needed to instil the belief that political change could deliver for the people of Northern Ireland rather than simply relying on the guns and the bomb. In the absence of those institutions, we saw the bomb in Derry. In the absence of those institutions, we see the paramilitaries still with a grip on organised crime in different parts of Northern Ireland. We need to see Stormont back. We need to see the North South Ministerial Council. We need to see the operation of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. All those Good Friday institutions are vital and fundamental.

The Secretary of State is now at a crossroads and this country is at a crossroads. We need to seize this time to put a sustained effort into making sure that we see the restoration of those institutions. Alternatively, this House will have to begin to make those decisions. The Secretary of State does not want that. I do not want that. I make her this offer: the Opposition will work with her consistently to see the restoration of those institutions. If she can begin that process of delivery, we will walk with her. We will do everything we can to support her. In that context, I look forward to a further update, in due course, to this House.

Karen Bradley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we want to see the restoration of the institutions that were agreed by the people of Northern Ireland, in a very brave way, in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and in subsequent agreements: St Andrews, Stormont House, Fresh Start and so on. We need to see those institutions back. There is nothing that the people of Northern Ireland deserve more than the politicians they elected locally making decisions on their behalf.

But I want to correct the hon. Gentleman on a few points. He talked about health reform. He is quite right: there is a need for reform of health, and that is why this Government put £100 million into the budget last year to ensure that work could start on reforming health services and health provision in Northern Ireland. This work needs to be done whether there is an Executive or not, and that money was put in by this Government.

The hon. Gentleman talked about policing. It is a great credit to the politicians in Northern Ireland that we have devolved policing and justice in Northern Ireland, given the difficulties, fragility and sensitivities in that area. This Government took steps to ensure that we could appoint members to the Policing Board so that there is proper governance of policing in Northern Ireland. We have also put in funding to ensure that the Chief Constable can recruit the police officers needed to deal specifically with concerns around Brexit.

The hon. Gentleman talked about reconciliation. I agree with him that reconciliation needs to continue. That is why this Government have consulted on how we progress the agreement that was reached at Stormont House in 2014 to set up new institutions to deal with the matters regarding legacy, which are of great concern to many Members of this House when they see their constituents directly affected.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. I remind him that that body has met twice in the past 12 months. This Government will continue to observe all our commitments under the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the incident in Derry/Londonderry a few weeks ago. I was in the city last week, and I met people who were directly affected, including the police officers. They did incredible work that night, working towards danger when others would run, and I pay great tribute to them. But they were very clear, as have been the Police Service of Northern Ireland and many others, that nobody should attribute anything that happened that evening in Derry/Londonderry to either the absence of institutions or Brexit. The only people responsible for what happened in Derry/Londonderry that night were the terrorists, and they are the ones we need to condemn.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's reply. I think there is complete exasperation in this House—and, in fairness, in Dublin and in Washington, where, for years, the two main parties respectively worked incredibly closely together to get the agreement and to get the institutions established—that for two years now these institutions have not been working. As the shadow Secretary of State quite rightly said, sadly, outcomes are failing now in Northern Ireland. Health outcomes are falling behind. There are ambitious plans to improve health, but they need political direction. There comes a point when we are all responsible for the lives of citizens in Northern Ireland. I ask the Secretary of State, although very reluctantly, whether she has begun to consider taking powers back into this House, for what one would hope would be a brief period, to deliver public benefits. At the moment, we are stuck. We come here time and again. We know that the main party in opposition to this, Sinn Féin, is not co-operating. The lives of people in Northern Ireland are falling behind. This would be a big step, but I wonder, reluctantly, whether she is beginning to consider it.

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend has enormous experience of matters in Northern Ireland. He did great work in Northern Ireland as both shadow Secretary of State and Secretary of State, and continues to take a keen interest. I share his exasperation that we have not been able to find a basis on which parties can come together. My priority is finding that basis, because there is no good long-term, sustainable way that decisions can be made for the people of Northern Ireland except locally elected politicians making them.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I do not doubt how difficult the Secretary of State's job is, but she said that restoring devolution is her top priority, yet the last round of talks was over three months ago. Surely the damaging perception, if not the reality, is that implementing Brexit against the will of the majority of people in Northern Ireland and keeping her government partners, the Democratic Unionist party, is her actual priority. Why has the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference not met more regularly, given the vacuum in Northern Ireland? Twice is not enough.

Appearing before the Brexit Committee this morning, former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern said that he believed Stormont would now be up and running again if it was not for Brexit. Does the Secretary of State accept his experienced analysis? What role has the strained relations between the British and Irish Governments caused by Brexit had on efforts to restore the Executive? Does she believe that her exclusive relationship with a minority party in Northern Ireland has prevented an inclusive process to restore devolution? Lastly, what progress has been made on reform of the petition of concern in the Northern Ireland Assembly—a reform that has the potential to unlock the contentious issues that arose during previous talks?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman made a number of points. Although the last round of formal talks collapsed 12 months ago, I assure him that there are continued discussions with all parties to try to find a basis on which we can get people back in a room. But

there is no point in my imposing a solution on the parties in Northern Ireland that they do not want to be part of, and there is no point in my demanding that people come to talks if there are no grounds to believe that they will be successful, because that would do a disservice to the people of Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. It is worth making the point that the BIIGC was established under strand 3 of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, and it deals exclusively with east-west matters, but of course there are regular bilateral discussions between Ministers from the Irish and UK Governments on a number of matters; they are not exclusively held through the BIIGC. We also have the British-Irish Council, which meets twice a year and which representatives of the Scottish Government attend.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the petition of concern. That needs to be decided by politicians in Northern Ireland. It is a devolved matter. It is not for Westminster to impose solutions on a devolved Administration because Westminster is not happy with the way that matters are being used in the devolved Administration. I am sure that he, as a member of the Scottish National party, would not wish to see this Parliament imposing solutions on Holyrood that we felt were right but with which he disagreed.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman alluded to the Government's confidence and supply arrangements with the Democratic Unionist party. I gently remind him that the institutions collapsed before the confidence and supply arrangements were in place. We are all working tirelessly to see those institutions restored.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Secretary of State will share my dismay at the stalling of plans for the Tyrone to Cavan interconnector—a huge infrastructure project that will have a direct impact upon lives in Northern Ireland. How does she think the guidance she is able to issue under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018 can be used to resolve that? If it cannot, is she prepared to determine the matter herself, since we cannot continue to kick this can down the road?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend gives an important example of why we need devolved government in Northern Ireland. He alluded to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act, which allows civil servants to make certain decisions but is no replacement for having Ministers in Stormont making those decisions. That is why I am determined to find a way to bring the parties back together, and I assure him and his Select Committee that I will update the House at the earliest opportunity.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's response to the urgent question. It will be vital that decisions are taken by Ministers in some shape or form once we get Brexit over the line, because we cannot continue in the current scenario after that has happened; the decisions required will be too great. I remind the House that the reason that devolution is not up and running is not that all parties in Northern Ireland cannot agree—four out of the five parties in Northern Ireland would enter devolution tomorrow. Preconditions are being set by one party,

which talks a lot about Brexit being an existential threat and yet boycotts this House, boycotts the Assembly and boycotts the Executive. We all see that as the major challenge. Health, education, police, justice and security are all far more vital than some of the preconditions being laid down by a minority party in Northern Ireland. The reality is that we need to get on with the job without preconditions, and therefore, along with all the other parties, I am up for any measures and discussions that can get that to happen.

Karen Bradley: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's comments. I hope we can find a basis on which to get the parties together, talking about and agreeing a basis for government, because he is right; the people of Northern Ireland deserve that.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I know that it may be legally difficult for my right hon. Friend to authorise payments to the victims of historical institutional abuse, but who in the future would object if she were to do so?

Karen Bradley: I think my hon. and gallant Friend is referring to recommendations from the Hart review, which are currently being consulted on as a process that would need to happen irrespective of whether there are Ministers in Stormont. We are ensuring that work is continuing that would need to be done in any event, so that when Ministers are back in Stormont, they can take the decisions necessary to see redress for those victims.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): There is nothing in the Secretary of State's analysis with which I take issue, but the fact is that we find ourselves in the middle of a quite remarkable period of drift. Surely now is the time for us to take more proactive steps and bring in somebody from outside the political system in Northern Ireland—hopefully one who is respected in the way that Senator Mitchell was—to free up this logjam. It cannot be allowed to drift on like this.

Karen Bradley: I agree that we do not want to see anything drifting on, and I am determined to ensure that it does not. The right hon. Gentleman suggests that an independent mediator or chair may be appropriate. There is not a consensus across the parties in Northern Ireland that that would be helpful, but I am open to exploring whatever the right way to do this is, because I want to see devolution restored and Ministers in Stormont as soon as possible.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): There is a party elected to this House that does not take its seats, and yet this institution does not collapse—it continues—but when the same thing happens in Northern Ireland, we allow the institutions to collapse. To follow on from the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), should we not look at the rules regarding the institutions? Should the Secretary of State not reluctantly set a deadline again for parties in Northern Ireland to take their seats, or perhaps get a group of experienced people in this place to come up with suggestions for how the rules might be changed, so that one party does not have a veto on the running of institutions in Northern Ireland?

Karen Bradley: I do not think it is any secret that sustainability of the Executive was one of the matters for discussion in the talks 12 months ago, and I am sure

it will be a matter for discussion if we are able to find a way to get the parties back together. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has made proposals for a more sustainable Executive. My hon. Friend has great expertise, as former Chair of that Committee, and if he would like to make any suggestions, I am happy to take them to the parties.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I retain the title of the last direct rule Minister of Northern Ireland, and with respect to the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), I hope I can keep that title in perpetuity. In that role, I took hundreds of decisions every week on behalf of this House and the people of Northern Ireland, and now those decisions are being taken without scrutiny. Can the Secretary of State bring together all the interested parties to look at how we can inject greater local scrutiny, pending—I hope—the restoration of those institutions in due course?

Karen Bradley: The right hon. Gentleman speaks with great experience and knowledge of this matter. The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act allows for transparency in decision making, but there is of course a constitutional issue when it comes to elected politicians scrutinising the decisions taken by unelected officials. Although I understand the desire to see more scrutiny, we must remember that when the institutions are restored—I hope sooner rather than later—those officials are going to have to return to taking direction from political masters, and having political masters who may have scrutinised their previous decisions is probably not a situation in which we want them to find themselves.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that the duty on her to set an election date for further Assembly elections will shortly become live again. Does she plan to extend that date, or will she set a date for those elections to take place?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend is right that the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act sets aside the requirement on the Secretary of State to call an election. That Act expires on 26 March, and we are considering the options.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Policing Board did not function for many months, as the Secretary of State knows. She recently made political appointments from my party and other parties, including Sinn Féin. Everyone entered without preconditions, and now the Policing Board is functioning. We need to ensure that Stormont and the education and health services do likewise. We have problems. I have issues about fairness, equality and integrity, but I will not put them in front of those services functioning for the education and health of our people. If everyone does likewise, we can get Stormont up and running next week.

Karen Bradley: I very much appreciate the hon. Gentleman's optimism, and I hope we can deliver.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): May I ask the Secretary of State if she really appreciates the deep sense of anger—continuing anger—among the general

[Lady Hermon]

public in Northern Ireland that Members of the Legislative Assembly continue to receive their salaries with only minor reductions? The last time I asked the Secretary of State how much it has cost the taxpayer to pay MLAs their salaries since the collapse of the Assembly two years ago, in January 2017, unfortunately the Secretary of State was not able to tell me. However, I am confident she has done her homework since then, and will be able to tell this House and the public whether £12 million has been paid in salaries to MLAs when they have not been doing their full job.

Karen Bradley: I was able to furnish the hon. Lady with the figure that she requested through a written question, but I would like to make sure that I have the most up-to-date figure before giving her further information. It would perhaps be better for me to write to her, unless such a figure should appear in front of me in the next few moments. I do understand the anger. I do hear that anger—I hear that anger every day in Northern Ireland—and I know that people want to see their politicians back doing the job they were elected to do.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that there is public frustration with the inertia and inconsistency, which means that on issues A, B and C, she says the Government cannot act because they are devolved, but on issues X, Y and Z, she says that even though they are devolved Westminster has to act? What we need from the Government—from the two Governments, actually—is not passive commentary, but a concerted plan to get the institutions restored. In the meantime, she should take some decisions, and if she does, she will have my support.

Karen Bradley: I am well aware of the frustration and anger that there is in the general public with the situation we have. As Secretary of State, I have ensured that we do what we need to do to ensure good governance continues in Northern Ireland, but there are of course difficulties, constitutionally, with taking new policy decisions in this place that had not previously been agreed by Ministers in Stormont. I have been very clear that the actions that I have taken—setting a budget, or public appointments, such as to the Policing Board, which was mentioned earlier—were on the basis of continuing existing policies and ensuring that public services can continue to be delivered, but without creating new policy areas or deciding on new policy areas in the absence of Ministers. The hon. Gentleman made the point at the end of his question: the answer is to get Ministers back into Stormont, and I am determined that we will do that.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Is the Secretary of State aware of the article published on “ConservativeHome” on 28 January by Lord Bew? He indicated that the backstop, which the Secretary of State supports, would undermine the Belfast agreement and that there is a better way out of the paralysis. Has the Secretary of State studied that article and looked at the better way out of the paralysis?

Mr Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman speaks, the noble Lord may of course be in our midst.

Karen Bradley: I have of course read the article, but the hon. Gentleman will know that there are differences of opinion, legally, on that matter. The Attorney General set out the Government’s position—his view on that matter—in this Chamber a few weeks ago.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In the absence of the Assembly, will the Secretary of State set out what progress has been made in dealing with the breach of women’s human rights in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to the Victorian law that criminalises women seeking reproductive health care?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady has done considerable work and at length on this issue. She has brought forward private Members’ Bills and other matters; I know how strongly she feels about this. She will know that the amendment was passed to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act about the law regarding abortion and same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland. I have already reported to Parliament on that situation, and I continue to monitor the situation.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Sinn Féin MPs attend this place and get their full wages, so will the Secretary of State at some stage look at that issue as well? There are many issues that could and should be processed because they have cross-community support—for example, in health and education. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is presently doing an inquiry on both those issues. There are indications in the press this week that more power could be devolved to the permanent secretaries of the Departments to enable them to make decisions when it comes to health and education. Has that been considered?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman made two points. First, on the pay and conditions for Members of this House, that is of course a matter for this House, not for the Government. On the decision-making power of civil servants, there is a very difficult balancing act—as I said on the question from the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson)—to ensure that we allow civil servants the political cover to make decisions without actually making them accountable for those decisions to political masters. We believe we have struck that balance in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act, but we are coming to the end of that period, and I will continue to review the best way in which that can continue to be delivered.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): What consideration has the Secretary of State given to the suggestion made by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association to look at the role and powers of local councillors as a way to address at least some of the democratic deficit that exists while the Assembly is not sitting?

Karen Bradley: Both I and my hon. Friend the Minister of State have met NILGA, and it does have some very interesting ideas. However, the powers it is looking at and that it considers may be appropriate to be devolved to local authorities clearly rest with Stormont. They are Stormont’s powers, not our powers to devolve, and it would be a matter for politicians and Ministers in Stormont to make decisions about that. It is probably

also worth saying that this Government continue to work with the local councils in Northern Ireland. The Chancellor has announced £350 million for a city deal for Belfast region, and we are working with Derry City and Strabane District Council for a Derry/Londonderry city deal, as well as with rural councils.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Due to Sinn Féin's ongoing boycott of the Northern Ireland Assembly—for two years now—we have lost the significant and important scrutiny and transparency of the budget process. The Secretary of State has indicated that she will set a budget. Will she outline to the House what she is intending to do to get transparency of that process and of both the decisions made by her and the recommendations and decisions taken by the senior civil service in Northern Ireland?

Karen Bradley: As I said earlier, it is quite right that, in the absence of Ministers in Stormont, a budget is set and properly set so that money can continue to be spent on public services. I followed a process last year that involved all the main parties and the Opposition to ensure that there was as much transparency as possible. It is a budget process, and without my having full Executive powers, there is clearly a limit to the amount I can do. However, I am determined that we will set the budget, and I will make sure that the hon. Lady's party and others are involved.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): One consequence of not having a functioning Executive is that there has been no political oversight of the scandal of Muckamore Abbey. I have raised this personally with the Secretary of State and written to her. She knows that we had a sanctuary for adults with learning difficulties, and that they were physically abused and assaulted by nursing staff. On Friday, the nurses had their suspensions overturned. Why? Appallingly, the Belfast Trust has not provided the evidence and the CCTV to the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

This is a scandal, but it has not had full consideration here and, without Stormont, it certainly will not receive it at home. The Secretary of State knows that, through the Inquiries Act 2005, she is the only person capable of calling a public inquiry. Without a Minister in Northern Ireland, she is the one person who can do it. I ask her to engage earnestly with the Department of Health in Northern Ireland and with the families and those who need answers on the failure we have seen in caring for those who need such significant care.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman has, indeed, raised this issue with me on a number of occasions. It is truly shocking and the reports that we have all seen from victims are ones that nobody should have to read. He makes the point that Ministers in Stormont would be able to make decisions and deal with this matter. I will continue to consider the points he has made and to review the position.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): Secretary of State, the outcome of the historical institutional abuse inquiry—the Hart inquiry—was to be tabled just prior to Sinn Féin pulling the rug out and bringing down the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is inevitable that people will pass away—indeed, people have passed away—in the interim. It is vital that we move ahead and get a decision across the table as to how we will recompense some of these individuals.

Karen Bradley: The Hart inquiry was raised by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). As I said in response, David Sterling, the head of the civil service in Northern Ireland, has commenced a consultation, which is ongoing. That would be needed even if there were Ministers in Stormont. The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the fact that the report was published after the Executive collapsed, and we have therefore had no reaction from Ministers to the recommendations. That makes life very difficult for all of us. We need to see Ministers in Stormont as soon as possible so that they can make the decisions when the consultation ends.

Points of Order

2.12 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This week, 12 Catalan leaders go on trial in Spain's Supreme Court on charges of rebellion and sedition. If found guilty, they face sentences of up to 25 years in jail. Their supposed crime was organising a democratic referendum on Catalan independence in October 2017. One of their number was the President or Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, Carme Forcadell, whom you graciously welcomed to our House when she visited us as a free woman. Her alleged crime was allowing a debate on Catalan independence in the democratically elected Catalan Parliament.

Mr Speaker, I know that you cannot comment directly on these matters and I wish in no way to put you in a difficult position, but will you confirm that it would be in order for you to allow a debate on Welsh independence in this democratically elected House and for me to take part, and that neither you nor I would be likely to face arrest or long-term imprisonment for so doing?

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving me notice of his intention to raise his point of order. Moreover, I am grateful for its substance, both because he raises an important point, to which I shall respond, and because it gives me the opportunity to say that I well remember welcoming Carme Forcadell when she came to this place—it was a privilege to do so.

On the substance of the matter, it is of course entirely orderly for there to be a debate in this House on Welsh independence. Members enjoy immunity for the words they utter in this Chamber and can come to no grief as a result of their freedom of expression. Moreover, I note in passing that as Speaker, I too enjoy immunity for the manner in which I preside over debates. Other people will fashion, and in many cases have done so, for better or for worse, their own arrangements. While ours are by no means incapable of improvement, and there are many people in this House who believe that there is

much by way of parliamentary reform that can be accomplished, I think that on the matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised and the importance of democratic principle, we are very content with our arrangements. They could perhaps, in important respects, be imitated by others who proclaim a commitment to democracy. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In the first urgent question on EU trade agreements, I stated that the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) had opposed all 40 of the EU trade agreements in the first place. Can I say, for the benefit of the House, that on closer inspection, he actually abstained on one of them: the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement? Nevertheless, his complaint that the agreements, which he himself never voted to make operable in the first place, might no longer be operable after Brexit day still stands.

Mr Speaker: I am sure that I am immensely grateful. It was not a point of order, but I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman feels that he has made an important point. If the right hon. Gentleman goes about his business with an additional glint in his eye and spring in his step, and feels that he has achieved a notable parliamentary victory—well, if that brings a little happiness into the life of the right hon. Gentleman, I must say veritably, I am pleased for the feller.

BILL PRESENTED

EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL) (No. 4) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Yvette Cooper, supported by Sir Oliver Letwin, Norman Lamb, Dame Caroline Spelman, Hilary Benn, Nick Boles, Jack Dromey, Mr Dominic Grieve, Stewart Hosie, Ben Lake, Liz Kendall and Clive Efford, presented a Bill to make provision in connection with the period for negotiations for withdrawing from the European Union.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 335).

Bus Drivers (Working Hours on Local Routes)

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

2.17 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to limit bus drivers on local routes to driving for no more than 56 hours in any one week and 90 hours in any two consecutive weeks; and for connected purposes.

The Bill seeks to harmonise UK legislation on bus driving and working hours. It is supported by the road safety pressure group, Brake, and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, as well as by many Members in this place. Its origins are to be found in the terrible tragedy that was the bus crash in Coventry in 2015, in which two members of the public lost their lives: seven-year-old Rowan Fitzgerald and 76-year-old Dora Hancox. Such a tragedy is unimaginable for any family. May I start by welcoming Rowan's mother, Natasha, and his grandmother, Barbara, who are here with us today? I thank them for their courage and encouragement, as I know this will be hard for them. The Bill has their absolute support.

I am not a specialist in transport legislation, nor on the working time directive, but avoidable tragedies such as the one that occurred on that fateful day in October 2015 must lead to the review of and changes to legislation. On that day, the bus driver was incapable of stopping his vehicle. His foot was pressed on the accelerator. Ultimately, it was the front of the Sainsbury's store in Coventry city centre that brought the bus to a standstill. Rowan Fitzgerald, who was a pupil at St Antony's school in Sydenham, Leamington, and 76-year-old Dora Hancox of Nuneaton were killed. Rowan was on his way home from watching his beloved Sky Blues—Coventry City. Dora was walking through the city centre on a shopping visit from Nuneaton. Several others, including Rowan's cousin Paige Wilson, were seriously injured.

It was a busy Saturday afternoon in Coventry city centre. A video that was shown at the inquest revealed that the tragedy could have claimed even more lives. In it, the bus careers across the main road, striking another bus and lamp posts, before hurtling down a pavement and ploughing into a bus stop and then the supermarket. Were it not for the brave actions of Teil Portlock, who managed to disperse the pedestrians outside the Sainsbury's, many others would have been killed or seriously injured.

What is most concerning is that it was an absolute inevitability that such a tragedy would happen. The driver that day was Mr Chander and the bus operator was Midland Red, which is part of Stagecoach Group. Mr Chander had been driving for the companies for several years and was retained as a relief driver on a casual contract. However, his hours were anything but casual. Although aged 77 years at the time, Mr Chander worked most days and had worked every day in the seven days leading to the accident. In the evidence given in court, it was confirmed that the company did not place any restriction on the number of hours he could work. As one of the controllers based at the Leamington depot put it:

"If there was a shift available and he wanted it, then he was given it."

In consequence, he worked long hours and often worked five or six days a week. In addition, in the year leading up to the fatal accident, Mr Chander worked an average of 47 hours a week. That statistic disguises the number of hours worked during busy periods, namely school term-time. At those times, he would frequently work an excess of 56 hours a week and could drive school specials.

In the four weeks leading up to the crash he had driven 62 hours, 76 hours, 76 hours and 72 hours respectively, an average of 72 hours a week over that period—this, despite his shocking driving record. Between 2012 and 2014, the company received 16 written complaints from passengers about his erratic behaviour and the innumerable incidents. By Stagecoach's own measures he should have been banned. The judge's report provides more insight into those failings and the level of corporate ignorance stating:

"On Saturday 3 October, Mr Chander agree to swap shifts with another driver, meaning that he was now due to work an 11-hour shift"—

what is termed a spreadover.

"He agreed to do that having just completed a working week of 75 hours. In the morning he was driving a single-decker bus and, significantly, the CCTV shows him repeatedly rubbing his eyes as if tired. At approximately 5 pm, Mr Chander was waiting to take charge of a double-decker bus. Another driver told him he looked knackered and that he should say no. Mr Chander ignored that advice and set off, eventually coming to a bus stop on Hales street in Coventry city centre. At no point during the 11-second journey that followed did the driver engage the foot brake, pressing instead only the accelerator."

In passing sentence, the judge concluded that the company was "highly culpable" and fined it £2.3 million.

This was a terrible tragedy, but of course there are many accidents every day. The data shows that there is a fundamental issue here. The fact that the driver had been driving so many long hours leading up to the crash was undoubtedly the critical factor that led to the accident. Currently, however, this is entirely legal under British law, as local bus drivers are not subject to the same working hour regulations as long-distance bus drivers or lorry drivers. Nor do the laws equate to those in the EU. Hours are clearly detrimental to passenger safety. British laws regulate bus drivers' hours on local routes—that is, less than the 50 km limit—to just 10 hours a day, with no weekly or fortnightly limit except that in any two consecutive weeks there must be at least one period of 24 hours off duty. This means that it is entirely legal for a local bus driver to drive 130 hours over a period of two weeks. Under EU law, however, a long-distance bus driver or lorry driver cannot drive more than 56 hours a week or more than 90 hours over two consecutive weeks.

I believe this tragedy could have been avoided if driving hours for local bus drivers were capped at 56 hours a week and no more than 90 hours over any two consecutive weeks, as they are already for long-distance bus drivers and HGV drivers. That is the primary purpose of the Bill. However, the Bill also includes proposals for a move to EU regulations including bus drivers' mandatory breaks, which would ensure a break of no less than 45 minutes be taken after no more than

[*Matt Western*]

four and a half hours of driving. The break could be divided into two periods, the first at least 15 minutes and the second at least 30 minutes, taken over the four and a half hours. At present, the entitlement to a 30-minute break after five and a half hours behind the wheel often results in drivers taking smaller breaks or none at all due to congestion or other factors beyond their control. Additionally, the changes should be introduced by employers at no detriment to bus drivers' pay.

The culture of long hours among bus drivers is accompanied by low wage rates, which places a dubious incentive on overtime. Over the past two decades, wages have fallen relative to average incomes. This is causing bus drivers to work nearly six hours a week more than average workers to sustain their incomes at a reasonable level. Regulations must prevent that, but must also ensure that bus drivers are paid properly for the essential public service they provide. This is important at a time when operators are cutting unprofitable routes and local councils are cutting funding to bus services.

There is also the need for regular independent health checks, beyond a driver's GP, to ensure fitness for work. I am not the first to propose that. Back in 2015, some months before the Coventry crash, my right hon. Friends the Members for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) proposed such changes in an early-day motion. Coincidentally, earlier that same year a report was published by the London Assembly Transport Committee, which looked into the reasons for bus crashes in London. It concluded that Transport for London should commission comprehensive and independent research into bus drivers' working conditions. There were reports that bus drivers could be doing 16-hour shifts without adequate breaks. This was followed up in its 2017 report, "Driven to Distraction", which noted high levels of stress reported among bus drivers caused by long shifts, inadequate breaks and irregular shift patterns. There have been up to 25 fatalities a year and thousands injured in bus incidents in London. It is now the time to legislate.

Way back in 2009, the Department for Transport conducted an extensive review of the effectiveness of the British domestic drivers' hours rules. Following that review, it was decided not to make any changes, concluding that any additional restrictions would risk imposing unreasonable burdens on the industry. Ten years on and the burdens now lie with the drivers, not the operators. A reduction in routes served and buses has led to a reduction of 8,000 bus drivers since 2010. At the same time, their wages have fallen behind their peers, resulting in drivers working longer hours and more days to try to maintain their monthly earnings.

It is clear that this issue affects drivers across the country. I received comments from far and wide about this. By way of example, one convenor reported that about a third of drivers were working more than 50 hours a week. Elsewhere, a bus driver in Cornwall drives on a route which is longer than the 50 km limit, so it should come under strict EU rules for long distance drivers. However, the company splits the route into three, so that the same driver can continue the route and does not have to comply with the EU working hours restrictions. In Liverpool, a driver who used to work for Stagecoach said that they were regularly forced to work 12-hour shifts day after day, which caused fatigue.

The Bill proposes to limit the working hours of bus drivers and seeks simply to harmonise UK legislation by bringing consistency of working hours and restrictions between drivers on local and long distance bus routes and lorry drivers. It cannot be right that we have different regulation for freight vehicles and passenger vehicles. We must harmonise. We must legislate. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Matt Western, Mr Jim Cunningham, Alan Brown, Grahame Morris, Ian Mearns, Mr Marcus Jones, Mike Amesbury, Jo Platt, Anna McMorris, Sir Peter Bottomley and Wera Hobhouse present the Bill.

Matt Western accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March, and to be printed (Bill 336).

Speaker's Statement

2.28 pm

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, imminently we will come to the motion on the retirement of the Clerk of the House and I will look to the Leader of the House to move the motion of congratulation to Sir David Natzler. Just before I do, I should like to record my own brief tribute.

People across the House will know that David Natzler has served without interruption in this House for over four decades. If memory serves me correctly, he began in our service in 1975. That service has been unstinting, selfless, formidable and, I think and hope all would agree, quite exceptional. Blessed with a brilliant brain, an understated manner, unfailing courtesy, and an absolute and undiluted passion for Parliament, he has given both of his skills and of his endeavours throughout his time here in a manner which I think is universally appreciated. I mention that he has served for over four decades. My own experience of him, I confess, dates back only just over two, but I would like to record a couple of relevant facts.

I got to know David when he served as Clerk of the Trade and Industry Select Committee. I was briefly a member of that Committee, from 1998 to 1999, and was on it with the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), and indeed, the now right hon. Member for Chorley (Sir Lindsay Hoyle), the Senior Deputy Speaker of this House. The now Chairman of Ways and Means and I, and the hon. Gentleman, worked with and hugely benefited from David Natzler's expertise—his procedural expertise and his ability to get to grips with the brief of the Committee and to offer us informed and invaluable advice on the vast miscellany of different inquiries that the Committee undertook.

As a Committee, we also travelled with David Natzler. Even if you are travelling somewhere very pleasant and staying in moderately salubrious surroundings, the camaraderie of the group, as I think all colleagues can testify, is important, and part of that is the contribution of our professional staff. David Natzler was a brilliant Clerk of the Committee. I am sure that that will be remembered, too, by its Chair for a decade, the former Member of this House and, between 1997 and 2005, the Member of Parliament for Ochil, now a Member of the

other place—namely, Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan, known to many of us as Martin O'Neill. David was superb and he made a big and decisive difference to the operation of the Select Committee.

As Speaker, I have been privileged to know David Natzler in four of the roles that he has discharged for the House—as Clerk of Committees, Clerk of Legislation, Clerk Assistant and, since 2015, as Clerk of the House. As he approaches retirement, he will of course mark four years as Clerk of the House, which is a very normal period to serve as our Clerk, in the final role that a member of the Clerks service discharges to Parliament.

There is much that David has contributed, but I have a sense that he will be particularly proud of the work that he did back in 2009-10 on, and in support of, the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons. Colleagues will recall that that Committee was chaired with great skill, courtesy and even-handedness by the former Member of this place for Cannock Chase, Dr Tony Wright.

I do not think I give much away if I say that David Natzler thirsted to clerk that Committee. He knew that it was the will of the House that reforms should be made to the running of this place—not only to the operation of the Chamber, but to the work, remit and manner of composition of our treasured Select Committees. David felt that he could input invaluable to that work, and I hope that colleagues will agree that he most assuredly did. That work had to be discharged, not least because of the proximity of a general election, with considerable dispatch, but with attention to detail and proper discrimination—I use the word “discrimination” in its best sense—between what was important and could not wait and what might be important but could. I think that if Tony Wright were in this Chamber now, he would agree that David Natzler clerked that Committee, to which I remember giving evidence, among many others, brilliantly.

David has been the most assiduous and dedicated servant of the House. He signalled to me, probably a year, if not 18 months ago, his desire to retire around now. I hope that all colleagues will join me—I very much look forward to what the Leader of the House has to say by way of tribute—in wishing Sir David and his wife, Hilary, a very long, rewarding and happy retirement.

Retirement of the Clerk of the House

2.34 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): I beg to move,

That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to Sir David Natzler KCB, on his retirement from the office of Clerk of the House, this House's gratitude for his long and distinguished service, for his wise contribution to the development of the procedure of the House and to modernising its practices, for his leadership and thoughtfulness in the discharge of his duties as head of the House Service, and for the courteous and helpful advice always given to individual honourable Members.

It is a real pleasure to move this motion in order to give the House the opportunity to pay tribute to Sir David Natzler today. I am sure that I speak on behalf of the whole House when I say that David has given outstanding service to the House of Commons. David began working here in 1975 and has held a variety of senior posts within the Chamber and Committees Team, incorporating the former Department of Chamber and Committee Services and the old Clerks Department. This has included his work as a Clerk to a range of Select Committees, including the Social Services Committee, the Procedure Committee and the Trade and Industry Committee. He was Principal Clerk of Committees, Secretary to the House of Commons Commission, Principal Clerk of the Table Office, Clerk of Legislation and Clerk Assistant.

David served as acting Clerk of the House from September 2014 and was formally appointed as Clerk of the House in March 2015, the 50th person to fill the role. David's commitment to this place is quite simply unrivalled. When he met his delightful wife, Hilary, at a party in London, he soon discovered that she worked for *Hansard*. They were married in 1988, and it proved an inspired choice. What a wonderful recipe for keeping a husband on his toes—a wife who can take down his words in evidence and use them against him!

David has been a source of procedural advice and parliamentary wisdom to many a Leader of the House, not just in his role as Clerk, but in many of the senior roles he has occupied. I know that he has relished working with a number of Leaders of the House, dating back to Geoff Hoon and Jack Straw, and more recently, as Clerk with William Hague and with my right hon. Friends the Members for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) and for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington). As Secretary to the House of Commons Commission from 2004 to 2006, David also worked closely with the shadow Leaders of the House, including, at the time, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), now the Prime Minister.

Since becoming Leader of the House in 2017, I have personally benefited from the advice and wisdom that David so readily provides to all who knock at his door. Over the past 18 months, David has worked closely with me and my office. We have been through thick and thin. I think it is fair to say that we have a mutually appreciated candour and a clear recognition of each other's viewpoint in turbulent times. I have a huge amount of respect for David and the work he does. In more than a decade at the Table of the House, among his many talents he has developed an impressive ability to convey a wide range of emotions with the single raising of an eyebrow—something that you often miss, Mr Speaker, as his back is turned to you, but I can assure you that it is very meaningful.

Throughout the highs and lows of the past four years, David has had the best interests of the House at heart, and during that time, he has stacked up a number of important achievements. I know that he was delighted to have secured Richmond House as part of the Northern Estates project, and then, at the start of last year, to see the restoration and renewal programme finally get the approval of both Houses in the form recommended by the Joint Committee. I share his enthusiasm and I am pleased that the Government have worked collaboratively with Parliament in the preparatory work for restoration and renewal and in bringing forward the Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny.

David has also overseen the introduction of the Parliamentary Security Department, as well as the Parliamentary Digital Service. He helped to bring in the governance changes, as recommended by the Straw Committee in 2014, which notably included the recruitment of the Director General.

In recent months, David has led the House service through the immediate aftermath of the Dame Laura Cox report. It was an uncomfortable read for many in the senior House administration and for anyone who cares passionately about this House. However, I want to pay tribute to David for the way in which he and his staff have acted to make swift progress on the Cox recommendations. I know that many staff in the House have appreciated the time that he has taken to get out and talk to them—for example, in town hall meetings—in order to show his personal commitment to getting the House through this challenging period.

Over the years, David has played his part in moving us towards a less antiquated House through a number of changes that have definitely not been without controversy. For example, he oversaw the replacement of vellum with archival paper for the printing of new laws, for which goats around the United Kingdom will be grateful.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I would like to correct one detail, if I may. Sir David was delicate in negotiating between this House and the other place over the matter of vellum and came up with a very nice compromise, which was that laws would be encased in a vellum folder, albeit printed on paper inside. It was a typical David Natzler way of doing things.

Andrea Leadsom: It was a good compromise indeed, but in that case I revoke the gratitude I expressed on behalf of goats everywhere.

Sir David has greatly supported the recent introduction of our new ground-breaking proxy voting scheme and has driven forward the removal of wigs and court dress for Clerks at the Table in the Chamber.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I am one of Sir David's greatest admirers, but the Leader of the House is beginning to say things that are moving in the other direction. Can we go back to his love of tradition?

Andrea Leadsom: I was actually about to say that some of Sir David's colleagues rather wish his clothing adjustments had extended to the scruffy white bowtie. David's own bowtie tends towards the off-white shades more commonly favoured by trendy interior designers. I am sure my hon. Friend has a strong opinion on that.

It was a different modernising move that was the high point of David's career. I am reliably informed that his personal high point was working with the Wright Committee on Reform of the House of Commons 10 years ago. This involved twice weekly extended private discussions—bordering on arguments—with a great number of Members about parliamentary politics and procedure. What more could a senior Clerk ask for?

As well as his official duties in the House, David has represented the Lords and Commons cricket team in their regular matches against the Dutch Parliament and played for parliamentary football and tennis teams. In his spare time, he is an ardent Shakespeare enthusiast, a founder member of the Richard Burbage Society and author of a scholarly essay entitled “The Two Gentlemen of Venice”—we can only speculate who they are. David's intellectual gifts are part of parliamentary folklore—many a Member, myself included, has asked him a question and then struggled to keep up with the sheer subtlety of his arguments—but he is also blessed with a kindly heart and a vivid sense of humour.

I want to say a personal thank you to David both for his service to the House and for the collegiate way he has worked with me and my office in my time as Leader of the House. After 43 years, he should be proud that he leaves the House in a strong position to face the coming challenges of the next few months and years. In particular, I would like to wish him a very restful retirement. Few deserve it more and I imagine he is very much looking forward to it. I commend this motion to the House.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Leader of the House very warmly for what she has said.

2.43 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for her comments and you, Mr Speaker, for your tribute to Sir David Natzler. The Leader of the House rightly paid tribute to his extraordinarily distinguished career in public service and to the range of roles he has occupied with such distinction, and I endorse her words completely.

I want to share with the House more personal reflections on Sir David. It is a slight twist of fate, but my predecessor as Member for Walsall South, Bruce George, was close to Sir David in a number of ways. For a while, David was Clerk of his Committee, and whenever Bruce made a minor comment on a draft report and David said loudly “Oh my God”, while clapping both hands to his forehead, the Chair knew he was getting frank criticism. You do it, too, Mr Speaker, at the Commission, when you say, “David, you are frowning.”

David and Bruce played together in the parliamentary football team. I think they were probably the Laurel and Hardy of the team. I am told that David boasts of being qualified to play for every football team in the former Austro-Hungarian empire. As those who knew him will remember, Bruce played in goal. He was quite large and actually quite a good goalie, but in a recent game they played in together he did not keep a clean sheet. Unlike poor old Gordon Banks—rest in peace—he was having an off day, and David stalked up to him and said, “You're allowed to use your hands, you know.”

As accounting officer for the House, Sir David has had to have a strong sense of value for money. When he was head of the Table Office, he used to take his staff down to Strangers' Bar, and there would be quizzical

looks on people's faces, because David's colleagues would have to whisper code words to the bar staff, such as “Borodino”, “Marengo” and “Leipzig”—he made his Table Office Clerks say the names of Napoleonic battles to bar staff so that no one else could use his tab! I wonder if the tab is still open.

The Leader of the House and you, Mr Speaker, rightly paid tribute to Sir David's work on the Wright Committee. I managed to speak to Tony Wright, now professor of government and public policy at University College London, and former Member for Cannock Chase, and he said this:

“The fact that David was Clerk of the Select Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons was indispensable to its success. He made sure that what we said was credible and carried authority. At that time the House was in a very bad place, following the expenses scandal, and David shared my belief that one way to restore its reputation was by making changes that would make it count for more, both in terms of elections for select committees and for backbench control of its own business. The fact that these reforms have become embedded in how the House operates is a tribute to the quality of the Reform Committee's report, and that is tribute to David himself. At a personal level, working with him was one of the most enjoyable periods of my parliamentary life. His combination of impish humour and formidable intellect made working with him a real joy. The House owes him a huge debt.”

As the principal constitutional adviser to the House and adviser on all its procedure and business, David has frequently appeared before Select and Joint Committees, and his evidence has always been highly valued. The Leader of the House mentioned the speed at which proxy voting was introduced. David did a lot of work behind the scenes to ensure that the first vote took place on 29 January. He is responsible—though not for much longer—for the 2,500 members of staff who make up the House service and Parliamentary Digital Service.

As Clerk of the House, Sir David has always striven to be helpful to staff and held several open meetings, including question and answer sessions. As well as going the extra mile himself in his daily duties, he has held tea parties to recognise staff who have gone the extra mile too. The staff have great respect and affection for him. One staff member, Dr Anna Dickson, said:

“David played an important role in setting up ParliREACH, the workplace equality network for Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage in 2013. From the name to championing it at board level over the last five years. From chairing events to opening his official residence to the network and, most importantly, he has been a critical friend of the Committee”.

David was one of the first volunteers to take part in the ParliREACH reverse mentoring programme, which allows junior BAME staff members to mentor a senior manager. The objective was to give senior managers an insight into the organisation and its policies from the perspective of BAME staff. He has had two such mentors, both of whom have now left the House service. He thinks he may be partially responsible.

Coming from an immigrant background himself, Sir David has always been a keen supporter of and speaker at all-staff events hosted by ParliREACH, in particular looking at the implications of Brexit for non-UK EU staff working in Parliament. He has made sure that all staff who currently work here feel confident that they will not lose their jobs. After one such event in 2016, he committed the House to supporting people financially with applying for citizenship—a bold step, as you know, Mr Speaker. David was also a regular

[Valerie Vaz]

speaker at ParliREACH's Holocaust Memorial Day events, where he spoke emotionally of the terrible effects of the holocaust on his own family.

Sir David has also been a champion of the House's talent management scheme, which aims to enable women and BAME staff to develop their potential within the organisation, and has never shied away from inconvenient truths, even when they have reflected on him. He would always find a way to help people, and to steer ParliREACH in the right direction. He has been a passionate, consistent and entirely approachable supporter. Ken Gall, president of the trade union side, has said:

"He is a decent man who has kept his humour and his humanity during some of the most challenging times in recent parliamentary history. I absolutely trust him to tell me the truth."

Many say that David's more detached and calm approach can be attributed to the influence of his wife, Hilary. David would be the first to pay tribute in saying that meeting Hilary, at the time a reporter for *Hansard*, changed him immeasurably for the better. Hilary was a daughter of the manse, and they were married at Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh in 1988, with Hilary's uncle, the Professor of Systematic Theology at Aberdeen university, officiating. Theirs has been a wonderful partnership, and they have three lovely children, Robert, Beatrice and Michael. Hilary has ensured that all David's latent kindness and decency have fully emerged. No one who encountered him in 1975 would have thought that he would end up as the DJ—sorry, sound engineer—at the Church of Scotland's Sunday services at St Columba's Church in Pont Street.

David's successor, Dr John Benger, said this:

"Very few can match his relentless intellectual curiosity and the breadth and depth of his knowledge. He has made an enormous contribution to public life and we will miss him."

Let me add, on a personal note, that he has always been supportive of me in my role, and, on constitutional issues and on any other matters, he has always striven to give a constructive answer. I have to say that he never sounded happier than when I spoke to him on the phone. He was overlooking the Bay of Naples, and was about to deliver a lecture to an international audience, but he still had time to deal with the matter that I had to raise with him. I must also say, on behalf of our Chief Whip and Luke and Simon in the office, that they all value his wisdom and advice at Commission meetings and at meetings with Members. He understands the nature of Parliament and the role of Members, balanced with the constitutional duties of the Clerks and the staff of the House. It was especially pleasing to see him at a "reverse mentoring" event: I actually saw him dishing out potatoes in the Adjournment dining room, wearing his pinny, while the chef, Terry, looked on in amazement.

I thank David for his friendship and his advice, and I thank him for devoting himself to the public service of the House. I thank him for serving democracy in our country, and for leaving behind the legacy of a functioning democratic institution and a legacy of investing in people, so that when others come after him, everything will be the same.

So, David Lionel Natzler, this was your life in Parliament. The whole House wishes you and your family a wonderful life outside Parliament.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Both the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader have engagingly captured Sir David's wisdom, warmth and wit. I too have benefited from all those qualities, and I thank them both for what they have said in leading our debate on this important occasion.

2.53 pm

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): My remarks will be brief, but no less heartfelt for their brevity. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), and, indeed, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

I have known Sir David Natzler for 35 of his 43 years in the House, and it has been a privilege to regard him as a friend and colleague. For 21 of those 35 years, I have had the honour to be a member of the Panel of Chairmen. All of us who serve on your Panel, Sir, know how heavily we have come to rely on the advice and the wisdom of all the Clerks with whom we work, and we all know—every single one of us—that without their assistance and guidance, the work would be very much harder, if not impossible. Those of us who have sat alongside Sir David Natzler in Committees and in Westminster Hall—and, on occasion, in Committees of the whole House in the Chamber—have benefited hugely from, yes, his advice and, yes, his wisdom, but also from his friendship and his persistently dry humour at all times.

On behalf of, I hope, all the members of the Panel of Chairmen, I say, "Thank you, Sir David, and we wish you and your wife a long and very happy retirement."

2.55 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to speak in this debate on behalf of the Scottish National party. My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) sends apologies for his absence. He, and all of us in the SNP, hold Sir David in the highest regard, and I echo all the tributes that have already been paid to him, particularly those relating to his role in the Cox inquiry and the introduction of proxy voting.

I remember that in the 2015 Parliament, when many SNP Members were first elected, Sir David had just been appointed, and I was described by you, Mr Speaker, as a "distinguished ornament" of the Procedure Committee. It was in that capacity that I had the first chance to interact with the Clerk, who was a regular witness at our evidence sessions, not least as the tortuous process of English votes for English laws was being introduced. I suspect that what you, Mr Speaker, have described as his "scholarly cranium" was put to considerable use throughout the devising of those procedures and, indeed, as they have been implemented with varying success in the months and years since then.

As if EVEL were not of enough constitutional significance, Sir David—as the Leader of the House said—also oversaw the reform of the use of vellum and the abandoning of wigs by the Clerks in the Chamber. That was not simply about dusting down stuffy old practices; it had the very practical effect of allowing a far wider range of Clerks to gain experience at the Table of the House, which will encourage the professional development of staff across the Chamber directorate. That, I think, is a testament to the ambition that, as we

heard from the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), Sir David has always held for the service of staff in the House.

Let me, on behalf of the SNP, express our thanks and gratitude for the advice and support that we receive from all the Clerks in all the various offices, and, of course, warmly congratulate Dr John Benger on his appointment as the 51st Clerk of the House. He is already a familiar and well-respected figure here in Parliament, and we look forward to working closely with him in the months and years to come. I cannot say for certain whether Dr Benger will end up in the same circumstances in which SNP Members have sometimes led Sir David to find himself—not least during a memorable session of Prime Minister's Question Time last year when he had to advise you, Mr Speaker, on the application of Standing Order 43 (Disorderly conduct) after my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) had attempted to invoke Standing Order 163 (Motions to sit in private). I think that we saw Sir David's arched eyebrow in overdrive during that particular session.

Sir David's long experience in the House meant that, on that day and in similar historic situations throughout these years of Brexit and minority government, he has been a point of calm, stability and neutral perspective. That, I think, has been appreciated by Members of all parties who have sought his advice. So after these turbulent years and his many decades of service, who can deny him the chance of a bit of rest and relaxation? We wish him and Lady Natzler every happiness for the years to come—although I suspect that we may not have seen the very last of him quite yet. All the best, and slàinte mhath.

2.58 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): You, Mr Speaker, and the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader have recited the encyclopaedic list of Sir David's achievements. I shall not repeat them, but they will appear in *Hansard*, and they will be worth reading.

Many of us did not recognise Sir David when we came into the Chamber, because he was one of the three “wigs” sitting on the bench, until the wigs were removed. As has been mentioned, however, a few of us have had the pleasure of working closely with him, either in Committees or individually. I am thinking particularly of the Commission, the Joint Audit Committee and the other Audit Committees. I, for one, always took Sir David's advice when I asked for it individually, but not everybody did. He is very exacting. One of my colleagues, to her great amusement, was recently informed, politely but emphatically, that a letter was a letter and an email was an email, but an email was not a letter and a letter was not an email. The bemusement was worth watching.

Sir David's humour keeps sneaking through, however, and anyone who had the pleasure of reading the letters between this House and the other place on the discussion—I will call it a discussion—of the role of the Pugin Room was in for a treat. Key members of staff retiring or moving on often had a thank you party in his rooms facing on to Parliament Street; his thank you speeches were a merciless delight. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and I had regular meetings with him in the office at the back; that was because he is a member of the Finance Committee and I am chairman of the

Administration Committee, not for any other reasons. However, it was his role to help the two of us put together an amendment for the restoration and renewal debate some months ago. His advice was that he would help, but it would not be carried. He helped, but he said he was so sure it would not be carried that he would put a bottle of champagne on it failing. I understand that on the evening of the debate he went home early enough to turn on the Parliament channel; that has to be devotion—or is it a case of “get a life”? Anyway, I am reliably told that when the vote went through he gave a cheer with raised arms as if England had won the rugby world cup—a pretty rare possibility—but I still await the champagne.

Like everybody in the House who has got to know Sir David, I wish him and his wife the very best for their retirement. Given his sense of humour, I hope he writes his memoirs, and I would like a signed copy.

3.1 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) and to say a few words on behalf of the Liberal Democrats in this House about Sir David Natzler, a man whose contribution will be enormously missed; he has been an exceptionally distinguished holder of a distinguished office.

As others have said, he entered the House service in 1975, and in 1981 he assumed the office of Clerk of Select Committees, where the early decades of his career were spent. His influence there is to be seen in the way in which the Select Committees have grown in stature as part of the operation of this House. It is difficult to remember now that in 1979 they were something of a radical novelty.

As a Minister and Chief Whip for my party and the former coalition Government, I often had recourse to seek procedural advice from him and his predecessor Lord Lisvane. Sir David's advice was always everything we would expect from the Clerks' office: candid, independent, trustworthy and always rooted in an understanding of, and respect for, the rules that govern this House. He understood that for the House to perform its functions as it ought to, it had to have respect for its own rules; indeed, if we do not respect our own rules, how can we expect others to respect the rules we make for them?

Sir David was, however, an enormously approachable figure in what is otherwise a very magisterial office. He was always willing to offer Members of Parliament a way to save themselves if they only had the wit and humility to take it. Indeed, humility was just one of the considerable attributes he brought to the role of Clerk, as seen when he was prepared to acknowledge previous failings that he and all of us have had in how we have carried out our business in the past. That was not easy, I am certain, but it was very necessary, and the fact that he was able to do it with style and gravitas says a lot about the man.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): As Mr Speaker alluded to earlier, many years ago now, he and the Chairman of Ways and Means and I served on the Trade and Industry Committee with Sir David and one thing always stands out in my mind about the Clerk of the House: anyone might have thought he was a bit of a Scotsman because he was certainly very frugal,

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

to say the least, about expenditure and paying expenses. Gordon Brown always liked to talk about prudence, and I often wondered whether they came out of the same nest. Nevertheless, he often gave me good advice and he will be badly missed in this House; it will probably be a long time before we see his like again.

Mr Carmichael: I am sure that is the case, and the hon. Gentleman tees up my next thought perfectly. I have been moved to consider what makes a good Clerk. I am sure that there are many qualities and influences that one must bring to bear, but when I consider those who served as Clerk in my time in this House, I think of Sir William McKay, Sir Malcom Jack, the now Lord Lisvane and Sir David himself, and in the lives of two of them, Sir William McKay and Sir David, there have been strong Presbyterian influences. The shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), referred to Sir David's membership and regular attendance at the Church of Scotland congregation in Pont Street, and it strikes me that to be a Presbyterian often puts one in a place where one has to be close to the establishment and to authority, and to understand it, but not necessarily be part of it. I do not think it would come as a surprise to any of us in these challenging times to think that anyone holding the office of Clerk of the House of Commons might have cause to have recourse to prayer, and I have mused whether in those moments of prayer in the magnificent surroundings of St Columba's, Pont Street, Sir David was seeking guidance from the Almighty or offering advice. Fortunately and happily, that is known only to Sir David and the Almighty. I venture the thought that of course offering advice to an omnipotent deity should not be undertaken lightly, as one risks incurring the wrath of God. I am sure if that were ever to be the case, Sir David would be able to meet the wrath of God with the good humour, equanimity and aplomb we would all expect from a man of his knowledge and experience.

I had always thought that Sir David had never offered an opinion with which I could disagree, but ahead of today's debate, I made the mistake of putting his name into Google, and I found an article on the website of the constitution unit of University College London where he is quoted, I hope correctly, as saying,

"most members of the UK parliament do not come to Westminster expressly to legislate, but to support their parties."

From that one sentence, it is clear that Sir David's considerable experience has been gained in the Clerks' office and never in the Whips Office. Now that perhaps his time might permit it, as Liberal Democrat Chief Whip I would be more than happy to offer him a work experience placement in our Whips Office for him to gain a slightly more rounded experience of how this place works. There is one further interesting sentence in that article:

"Natzler concluded with a suggestion for future research on rebellious opposition backbenchers."

I am not entirely sure why he restricted that to Opposition Back Benchers, but there is clearly a rich vein of future research and discourse to be had here.

Sir David leaves Parliament with an enormous wealth of knowledge and experience acquired over many years of distinguished service. I hope that last sentence from

the UCL website is an indication that this is not an end of his engagement with our Parliament and politics. He has had a long and distinguished service in this House, and I am sure all in this House hope he will have a long and distinguished retirement.

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he has said. Not for the first time, he has reminded us that he has served as his party's Chief Whip, but I hope that he will not take it amiss if I say that he has indeed served as his party's Chief Whip, and with distinction, but that since then he has been promoted.

3.10 pm

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I am sorry that I was late in attending the Chamber, Mr Speaker; the Procedure Committee was meeting.

Sir David has been an absolute brick to this rather gauche Chairman of the Procedure Committee. I bounce into his office on a regular basis, demonstrating the clear thinking of the totally uninformed. I am sat down, and he demonstrates the deep thinking of the totally informed. He never says no. He normally says, "Charles, brilliant idea—let's work together to make it even better." By the time I leave his office, we have the kernel of a good idea that we can take forward.

Sir David is a truly great man. His ethos of public service and his commitment to excellence and to this place reverberate around the corridors of the House of Commons. This is seen in all the Clerks who work with him and for him, from the most senior Clerks to those who are just starting on their journey—a journey that might take them to the highest office in this place over the next 40 years. I shall miss his wisdom greatly. He has been a fantastic friend. He is always willing to listen and, most importantly, he has always been willing to guide. In a sense, he is a bit like a father figure. Father figures love to hear the voices of their children and, in hearing those voices, they can often moderate them and direct them to great purpose and better things. He has been a huge influence on my time in this place, and as I have said, I shall miss him immensely.

3.11 pm

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): It is a great privilege and honour to follow the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and all the other right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken in this tribute to Sir David Natzler. I rise on behalf of my party colleagues and, I suppose, on behalf of the smaller parties in this House, to put on record our gratitude to Sir David for all the work, help and advice that he has given to us over many years and to Members before us who had occasion to work alongside him but who have now left this place. They will recall with fondness and gratitude his advice to them in times past.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) mentioned Sir David's Presbyterian background. Coming from the Presbyterian tradition myself, I know what it is—certainly now—to be close to the establishment's power and to understand it but not to be part of it. I have had to adapt to that. This reminds us that Sir David has had the great privilege, as Clerk Assistant and now as Clerk of the House, to be present in those distinguished positions at a time when we have had a full-blown coalition Government, then a

traditional majority Government and now a Government who are in office through a confidence and supply arrangement. Within eight or nine years, every type of Government possible under the British constitution has been in place here, which is unique in the history of this country. Given those changing circumstances, his advice, experience, wisdom and expertise have been even more vital and invaluable.

The expenses scandal of 2009-10 has already been mentioned. That was a very difficult time for the House and for the Members who were here. Sir David's wisdom and guidance at that time, and the work that he did on the reform of the House, were absolutely invaluable. His courtesy and his accessibility at all times to individual Members of our party and other parties are well known, and I want briefly but very sincerely to wish him and his wife and family a very happy and blessed retirement. I hope that they can enjoy it for many years to come.

3.14 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is presumptuous of a Back Bencher who has been here for less than nine years to join in paying tributes to a distinguished Clerk of the House, Sir David Natzler, who has been here for 44 years. It also runs contrary to the advice that I understand he used to offer on pieces of paper to junior Clerks in his Committees: "K.Y.M.S." This stood for "keep your mouth shut". I am glad that I have joined in this tribute, however, partly because I have learned so much more about David Natzler from the gracious tributes that have already been paid by right hon. and hon. Members, and partly because this has reinforced my belief, as an obscure Back Bencher, that one thing about this House—which, even for the most self-confident, can be a daunting place on arrival—is the ability to benefit from the kindly and wise advice of people who have huge experience here. When I have talked about David Natzler to other MPs, Doormen and other people working in Parliament, the one word—almost the leitmotif—that shines forth time and again is the word "approachable". That is something that we should all treasure.

Others have mentioned David's modest lifestyle, his dry wit and his personal kindness, but one thing I had never associated with the Clerk of the House was the concept that he might be a headbanger. In fact, I believe that he did bang his head on the table quite often as Clerk of the Defence Committee. We must hope that it had a more positive impact on the Select Committee than it did on his head or his health. Perhaps it will give courage to those of my colleagues who have been called headbangers that some of the most distinguished servants of this House have also banged their heads from time to time.

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): I was not here at the start of this debate because I was chairing a statutory instrument Committee. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the Clerk of the House is someone of immense courtesy who is respected across all the parties and who will be very much missed. Does my hon. Friend agree that, particularly during the past few months when the House has faced many different challenges, Sir David's wisdom, judgment and understanding have been absolutely superb, and that he will be greatly missed?

Richard Graham: Yes, I agree with everything my hon. Friend has said.

The Clerk of the House is a remarkable man, and I hope, given that his own father is still with us, that he has inherited that longevity and that he will have many decades ahead. I hope that he will be able to find the time to share some of his experience and wisdom with other Clerks of other Parliaments, not least through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, so that we may continue to benefit from the wisdom that my hon. Friend and many other Members have referred to today. It is his approachability for which I shall remember him most.

3.18 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It was with no small amount of trepidation that I, as a new Member of this House and already somewhat daunted by the complexity of parliamentary procedure and protocol, discovered that the most senior Clerk was my constituent. I rise this afternoon to say thank you to Sir David Natzler for his dedicated service to Parliament over four decades, for the kindness and patience that he has shown to me, for his answers to questions from me and members of my team, and for taking the time in the early weeks after the 2015 election to knock on my office door to see how we were settling in. That unfailing kindness and approachability are the hallmarks of David's service.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): My hon. Friend is describing David Natzler's character extremely well. Does she agree that one thing about him that is so nice for Members—it has not always been the case—is that he does not treat them like nursery schoolchildren?

Helen Hayes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know how much David's kind, patient and generous approach, as well as his intellect and immense knowledge, will be missed in this place, although I take some comfort from my recent discovery that the new Clerk of the House is also a resident of my constituency.

I am sure that David's retirement from this place will not be the end of his working life and that there are many spheres in which he will continue to contribute. David has many interests, both in our local community in Dulwich and West Norwood and further afield, that he will pursue after 1 March. They include Dulwich Picture Gallery, local history and, as he mentioned to me recently, a compassionate concern for refugees living in our community. I look forward to seeing him progressing issues and projects in our local area and further afield; he will make an enormous impact in many different ways. I know how much David's family, his wife Hilary and their children, will value having him around a bit more, and I wish David and his family all the very best for a long, happy and productive retirement.

3.20 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): As one of the few people who accepts the fact that wigs are no longer commonly worn in this place with a certain sad nostalgia tinged with tristesse, I can forgive Sir David that because of his unfailing decency, kindness and extraordinary characteristics in so many other ways. I first became aware of the depths of his intellect when I was on a plane journey with him going somewhere interesting—

[Stephen Pound]

probably Belfast. I was whiling away the journey by dipping into the *Viz* annual and he was reading an old annotated copy of “The Dutch Seaborne Empire”. As he sat there, it was almost as if the air around that noble cerebellum was crackling with the intellectual activity pulsing from that great brain, and I soon came to realise the depth, the breadth and the extent of that extraordinary knowledge.

One evening, the House was wrestling with the very tricky question of the illegal parking of skips on the streets of London, and we turned our minds and our collective consciousness—the intellect of the entire House—to working out how one would actually get rid of an illegally parked skip, and Sir David was sitting in his usual place. The next day, as I walked past his then study, where he was enthroned like the Master of Balliol, he beckoned me inside and said, “This morning at breakfast, my family and I were discussing that question, and there are a few things you should be aware of. Firstly, within the profession, skips are called bins. They are not referred to as skips. To use the expression ‘skips’ immediately identifies you as someone completely unfamiliar with the bulk removal of rubble and refuse. Furthermore, there is a mechanism for the removal of these illegally parked bins, which is well known within the profession. It is a dorsal elevation via lateral lugs.” He drew for me the mechanism, setting out the dynamics of how it could be done, and I thought, “I am in the presence of greatness, because not only is this a man who knows more about the procedure of this House than almost anyone and not only is this a man who has saved the reputations of many a humble parliamentarian by passing them a note—best not repeated on the Floor of the House—but this is a man who understands bulk waste, rubble and refuse removal and was prepared actually to share that with us.”

These occasions are often times of obituary rather than encomiums to those who are still with us. That makes this occasion all the more joyous and all the more joyful, because Sir David is with us and will be with us for many years to come. For however many years he enjoys his time outside and in Dulwich, with all its numerous pleasures that I may one day visit if I am ever allowed, no one in this House has not benefited from his kindness, his decency, his courtesy, his approachability and his wisdom. I cannot imagine anyone capable of doing that job better than he. That is not to put pressure on his successor; I am simply saying that Sir David Natzler is one of a kind. He is the Natzler of Natzlers, the Clerk of Clerks, and I will always be grateful to him.

Mr Speaker: We have already heard wonderful tributes from all quarters of the House, and it does seem fitting now to call a great parliamentarian. I call Hilary Benn.

3.24 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Thank you very much indeed, Mr Speaker. I join all those who have spoken so eloquently and beautifully in tribute to Sir David in rising to share with the House just two memories of him. It is a great pity that he is not present. I do not know whether it is natural modesty on his part or a tradition of the House that the Clerk is not here in person to hear the tributes. If it is the latter, there is an

act of modernisation yet to come, and I hope that those who lead on such things will take due and careful attention.

Reference has been made to Sir David’s wit, and I first encountered it one sunny morning when I arrived off the underground and came across Sir David getting off his bicycle in New Palace Yard. I greeted him cheerily and said, “So, how long does it take you to cycle in every day, David?” and he looked at me with a stern face and then his eyes twinkled and he said, “About a minute longer every year.” If my maths is any good, after 40 years that must be a hell of a bicycle journey into the House of Commons.

The second memory is of a much more sombre and sad occasion. It was the day after the murder of PC Keith Palmer. I think I was walking back from 4 Millbank, and I decided to come in through St Stephen’s entrance. There I found two of our wonderful staff who greet the visitors every day, and who else but David, who had come out to ask them, “How are you? How are you feeling?” Imagine being those members of staff, absolutely on the frontline, the day after one of our own had been murdered along with the tourists and others killed on the bridge. At that moment, the visitors who came by were directed, as the conversation was interrupted, and would have had absolutely no idea—we talk about the great and the good—that the man standing there in a raincoat with a slightly skew-whiff white bow tie, talking with care and compassion to our staff, was Sir David Lionel Natzler KCB, the Clerk of the House of Commons. That is typical of the man to whom today we pay such deep and heartfelt tribute in wishing him and all his family the very best for the future.

3.27 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): In the absence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), both of whom have served here longer than the Under Clerk, may I, as one who also came here in 1975, say that I think his title of Under Clerk of the Parliaments is one that should be remembered? His first predecessor in 1363 was paid £5 a year. If anyone looks at the 1824 Act about the Clerk of the Parliaments, who is up the other end of the building, they will see that it tends to defend all their emoluments, advantages and other ways of skimming off cash that are not allowed either on this side of the Palace of Westminster or, I hope, up there as well.

We must remember that in paying tribute to Sir David we are saying thank you also to all those who have worked with him. Not every Clerk can become the Under Clerk, but all of them work together seamlessly. That is partly down to leadership, but a lot of it relates to the community and to combined tradition and ethics.

We must also remember that, as the Under Clerk, Sir David is editor of “Erskine May” and if he is appointed to the House of Lords—I am not saying that he necessarily will be—I hope that he will last longer than Erskine May did. Sir Thomas Erskine May was dead seven days after he was appointed to the House of Lords—seven times longer than the shortest barony, which was that of Frederic Leighton, who lasted for only 24 hours—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) looks shocked, so I tell her to watch out if she ever gets sent up to the other place.

We must remember that, in the years leading up to his being Clerk of the House of Commons, Sir David went through many roles. If, like some of his ancestors, he lives to 100, that is another 35 years—rather a short time, given all the things he is capable of doing.

Let us hope that people recruited to the House service will look to those who have been Clerks and Assistant Clerks and say that serving the House, not as a civil servant, is as important as being elected to serve as a Member of Parliament. We look on him as one of ours, and I hope he looks on us as his friends.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, nemine contradicente,

That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to Sir David Natzler KCB, on his retirement from the office of Clerk of the House, this House's gratitude for his long and distinguished service, for his wise contribution to the development of the procedure of the House and to modernising its practices, for his leadership and thoughtfulness in the discharge of his duties as head of the House Service, and for the courteous and helpful advice always given to individual honourable Members.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, proceedings on the Motion in the name of Jeremy Corbyn relating to Securitisation Regulations 2018 (S.I., 2018, No. 1288) may continue, though opposed, for 90 minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of, and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) will not apply.—*(Andrea Leadsom.)*

Mr Speaker: I can usefully announce the result of the deferred Division. In respect of the question relating to intellectual property, the Ayes were 308 and the Noes were 267, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]

Securitisation Regulations 2018

3.30 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That the Securitisation Regulations 2018 (S.I., 2018, No. 1288), dated 3 December 2018, a copy of which was laid before this House on 4 December 2018, be revoked.

These regulations are not labelled as no-deal preparatory regulations, but they are being pushed through via a statutory instrument in the middle of a series of about 70 Brexit-related statutory instruments relating to financial services, including one relating specifically to the operation of the securitisation regime. The matters raised by this instrument require more debate and scrutiny than they have been afforded. It is for that reason that we asked for this debate on the Floor of the House.

As the Minister will be aware, the official Opposition also requested a debate on the Floor of the House about the transposition of the markets in financial instruments directive no-deal regulations via an SI. Those regulations were so complex that they required the production of a Keeling schedule, yet they were pushed through as a negative SI without any broader debate. This SI may be less wide-ranging than the other one but, like it, it is focused on the aspects of the financial system that precipitated and amplified the 2008 financial crisis.

Securitisation refers to the pooling of different kinds of loans or debts and their repackaging into a single financial product that is sold to investors. The use of complex, opaque securitisations—particularly those linked to the US sub-prime housing market—has been viewed as a key element in transporting the negative impact of the credit crunch through the financial system into the heart of major financial institutions. It is therefore essential that any legislation proposing changes to the regulation of securities be carefully reviewed.

The regulations have three main causes of concern. First, schedule 1 amends primary legislation—the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. Schedule 1(8) nullifies the effect of section 399 of the Financial Services and Markets Act and disapplies section 402. Delegated legislation generally should not be used to amend primary legislation. Otherwise, it would allow the exercise of what lawyers and judges have disparagingly described as Henry VIII clauses. Put simply, primary legislation that has been drafted and reviewed by Parliament as a whole should not generally be revoked through statutory instruments. It might be argued that these regulations are part of a broader package of delegated legislation bringing in a new regime, but any regime of financial regulation is best set out in primary legislation. The Opposition made that point only two days ago in the debate on the transposition of so-called in-flight EU financial services legislation.

The EU securitisation regulations are wide-ranging. For example, they impose a number of requirements on institutional investors to carry out due diligence before investing in a securitisation position. They relate not only to individual decisions about specified positions, but to the creation of new procedures for monitoring compliance and stress-testing. They also introduce numerous requirements for transparency for securitisation, requiring the originator, the sponsor and the securitisation

[Anneliese Dodds]

special purpose entity to designate one of their number to provide details of the securitisation, either to a repository or on a website. Finally, they provide preferential treatment to so-called simple, transparent and standardised securitisations, enabling them to be discounted for the purpose of allocating credit margins.

A core element of STS securitisation is the retention by originators, sponsors and original lenders of a 5% stake in the securitisation, described colloquially as “skin in the game”. Those involved must also follow certain transparency and due diligence requirements. As such, although the regulation does to an extent consolidate existing legislation, it also significantly loosens the burden of capital retention for banks using STS securitisations compared with the previous situation. Some stakeholders felt that reigniting the use of securitisation through this legislation would help to promote liquidity and boost economic activity, given that it, in effect, allows higher levels of borrowing by the economic actors whose debt is repackaged in the securitisation. However, many others point to the potential dangers this poses for financial stability if unsafe, non-transparent and overly complex securitisations are allowed to fall within the STS bracket. This is especially the case given the reduced capital requirements to balance off the default risk from STS securitisations. I hardly need to remind this House of the problems caused to the sustainability of financial institutions and the subsequent calls made on the taxpayer due to insufficient margin being held by the banks against the risks they held.

Secondly, these provisions amending primary legislation affect the criminal offences that are on the statute book. The legislation permits the use of sanctions for cases of negligence and intentional infringement, for example, fraudulent reporting of STS status. In addition, however, the provisions alter existing offences. The regulations appear to say that section 399 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, which establishes an offence of misleading the Competition and Markets Authority, does not apply. In addition, paragraph 8 of schedule 1 prevents the Financial Conduct Authority from instituting proceedings for money laundering and insider dealing. It is not clear why, on the basis of this statutory instrument alone, this needs to follow from the parent legislation. Why, if we are reading this complex statutory instrument right, does it abolish the offence of misleading the CMA and prevent the FCA from instituting proceedings for money laundering and insider dealing? What problem are these provisions addressing? Why are these changes being achieved through this piece of secondary legislation? We hope that we can receive some clarification on these points. If we cannot, these provisions would appear to be troubling. Because of the impact on people’s liberties and the overall balance of offences on the statute book, which surely should be as public and accessible as possible, criminal offences should not be altered by delegated legislation in this manner.

Thirdly, and finally, these regulations transfer significant powers to the FCA to supervise compliance. It might be said that the FCA is the orthodox body to develop financial regulation and to ensure compliance with it, but there is a need for full debate about the allocation of responsibility for supervision and compliance. The original EU regulation provides no obligation for the FCA to be designated as the competent authority, so this is a

political choice. It is also not clear, on the basis of this statutory instrument, whether the FCA has sufficient resourcing and capacity to carry out these tasks. It is not optimal or desirable for these powers to be transferred via a statutory instrument.

These powers are, of course, complicated by the interaction of this SI with the no-deal SI related to securitisation, which transfers the responsibility of the European Systemic Risk Board, for assessing and mitigating systemic risk, to the “competent authorities”. The latter are, as I understand it, here designated as the Prudential Regulation Authority, the FCA and the Bank, with systemic risk here identified as

“a material risk to the financial stability of a financial institution or to the financial system as a whole”.

Under this approach, the FCA would also be able to permit re-securitisation for specified legitimate purposes, an important exception to the general ban imposed from this legislation on re-securitisation. The general ban prevents the underlying assets of a securitisation from being themselves already securitised assets—this is one of many activities that produced the highly complex and opaque securitisations linked to contagion during the financial crisis. As part of these regulations, the FCA would be responsible for ensuring that those engaged in a securitisation complied with the relevant transparency requirements. It is especially important that these kinds of regulatory developments receive scrutiny, given the contention around elements of the securitisation package and, in particular, whether it is sufficiently stringent. What became known as “skin in the game” was set in the regulation at 5% of risk to be retained across each mode of risk retention, despite calls for a higher level from many quarters. Indeed, many actors within the EU questioned whether securitisation should be encouraged in the first place through the creation of the STS designation. Given that the resultant regulations were a balance between very polarised positions on this subject, it is essential that we properly scrutinise the transposition of these measures into UK law. For that reason, we have prayed against these measures being transferred purely through an SI process.

3.40 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

As part of our obligations while the UK remains a member of the EU, it is our responsibility to ensure that domestic law is compatible with EU legislation. That includes this statutory instrument, which will, as the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) said, ensure that the EU securitisation regulation is effective and enforceable in the UK. It is not an EU-exit statutory instrument through which functions are transferred from an EU authority to domestic authorities. The instrument that does that—the Securitisation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019—was laid on 23 January and will be debated in due course.

It might be helpful if I gave the House some background information. The securitisation market’s slow recovery after the financial crisis reflects concerns among investors and prudential supervisors about risks associated with the securitisation process itself. The EU responded by proposing in 2015 legislative measures to promote a transparent and liquid market for securitisation. There were 120 responses to the 2015 consultation that gave rise to the regulations, which evolved over two years of

EU discussions. They were then scrutinised in Parliament and were approved by the House of Lords scrutiny Committees in July 2017 and by the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee in February 2017.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The Minister mentioned the number of consultation responses; were they from throughout the EU or just from companies and organisations in the UK?

John Glen: I am not certain, but I would imagine they were from the UK. It was an extensive consultation that led to the evolution of the regulations, which were then scrutinised at different intervals by the Lords and Commons Committees before their final approval in 2017.

The UK voted in favour of the package of reforms in 2017 because it ensures high standards of process, legal certainty and comparability through a greater degree of standardisation of products. The new rules bear no relation to the securitisation of sub-prime mortgages created in the US that contributed so significantly to the financial crisis. Along with other legislation, including on the overhaul of the credit ratings agencies and more stringent rules for mortgage and credit granting, the proposals build on the lessons learned from the financial crisis by improving regulation and oversight, and they implement standards introduced by the international supervisory community.

The EU regulation, which the instrument we are debating implements, is derived from the new international standards set by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and the International Organisation of Securities Commissions. These two bodies worked to create a new framework of high-quality securitisations to introduce the degree of assurance around the information on securitisation that was necessary in the markets. Their work seeks to restore an important funding channel for the EU economy while making the market less risky and supporting financial stability.

At a time when bank lending is constrained, securitisation can boost credit and growth. It can help to free up banks' balance sheets so that they can lend to households and businesses. The good functioning of and access to securitisation as a funding tool allows investors to diversify their investments and supports the real economy. It is for that purpose that effectively supervised securitisation is actively supported by the prudential authorities, including the Bank of England, which supported the EU initiative as playing

"an essential role in de-stigmatising European securitisation, helping the market to develop on a sustainable track".

Let me turn now to the securitisation regulations. Although the EU rules themselves were agreed in 2017, the statutory instrument under consideration concerns empowering the regulators to effectively supervise the new securitisation rules that came into force at the start of the year. As the industry has prepared itself for the new regime, the Government are obliged to ensure that the new framework is operable. In essence, this SI simply gives effect to the directly applicable EU securitisation regulation and ensures that it is effective and enforceable in the UK.

The supervisory, investigative and sanctioning powers that this instrument delegates to the relevant competent authorities give effect to the EU framework. The hon. Lady mentioned the resourcing of the Financial Conduct Authority and the Bank of England. Both have been

instrumental in the development of these regulations and are primed and ready to take on responsibility for them. The instrument fulfils the necessary obligations of the EU regulation in designating roles to the domestic regulators and provides them with the powers that they require to effectively supervise the market.

To summarise, the Government believe that this instrument is needed to ensure that the new securitisation regulatory regime works effectively. This will support a sound and transparent securitisation market in the UK, bringing real benefits to investment, jobs and growth while enhancing long-term financial stability. The whole purpose of the EU regulation is to address the challenges of the past and to ensure that mistakes prior to the financial crisis in respect of securitisation are not repeated by keeping the measures simple in form and more transparent. The proposal to revoke the instrument would only endanger that and disrupt the market as supervisors would not be able to enforce infringements to the rules that seek to better regulate the market.

The hon. Lady raised a number of points. I have clarified that this measure is not related to a no-deal situation. A point was made about the amendment to primary legislation and the fact that criminal offences already on the statute book will be affected. Although the EU regulation is directly applicable, the Securitisation Regulations 2018 make changes to UK law to ensure that EU regulations are fully effective and enforceable in the UK. The power under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 makes it possible to give effect in national law to measures in EU law by secondary or delegated legislation such as statutory instruments. Importantly, such secondary legislation can amend an Act of Parliament—section 2(4)—as the delegated legislative power includes the power to make such provisions as might be made by an Act of Parliament. So the instrument applies and modifies certain provisions of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other UK legislation both to create the new supervisory, investigative and sanctioning powers required by the EU regulation and to ensure that UK legislation is compatible with EU regulation, including applying and/or modifying necessary offences pursuant to sections 398 and 177 of the 2000 Act. This instrument allows an approach consistent with existing enforcement regimes elsewhere in the sector and with other financial services implementing SIs.

The hon. Lady referred to preferential treatment of capital for banks and risk retention and needing to have skin in the game. These rules are derived directly from international standards, which are set by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and by the International Organisation of Securities Commissions. There is no attempt to develop some bespoke UK regime. These measures are completely consistent, which has been acknowledged during the significant scrutiny process to which they have already been subject. The hon. Lady also mentioned the CMA. The CMA was not designated as it does not have a role to play under the EU regulation.

I think that I have dealt with the points that have been raised. These are straightforward regulations that give effect to the directly applicable EU securitisation regulation. When Sub-Committee A of the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee looked at these regulations on 17 December, it cleared them without comment. This is an attempt to update the regulations appropriately to give more confidence in the markets. I hope that the

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House will join together in support of the continued application of this instrument, and to oppose the motion to revoke it.

3.50 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This debate is so well subscribed that I was not sure whether I would be called, so I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak. It is excellent to have the opportunity to talk about a statutory instrument on the Floor of the House, given that we tend to be relegated to the Committee Corridor. It is also delightful to see two Government Ministers on the Front Bench, as we only have the pleasure of one in Delegated Legislation Committees.

The case has been put excellently by the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. I want to talk about a few concerns that the Scottish National Party has about the regulations as drafted, and the reasons why the Labour party prayed against them. The hon. Member for Oxford East made the case that, although this is not an EU exit statutory instrument, its aims clash with the aims of the EU exit SI on securitisation. It is quite confusing for the House at this time to be dealing with the in-flight regulations coming from the EU, as well as the EU exit ones. The issues around Henry VIII powers are incredibly important and form the core of our concerns.

The Minister mentioned the consultation. I would guess that the 150 submissions were from an EU-wide basis, rather than a UK-wide one. In fact, it seems unusual for there to be that number of submissions on pretty much anything. Given the number of SIs that receive no formal submissions, 150 seems like a significant number. However, if that is the case, I am quite happy to retract those comments.

The Minister's comments on the consultation and the responses to it were very useful, but it was unfortunate that this information was not included in the explanatory memorandum. The explanatory memorandums that we normally see for SIs, particularly those dealing with EU exit, generally do not say that there has been consultation—and we generally criticise the Government for that—but they do usually say that there has been consultation with the Financial Conduct Authority, the Prudential Regulation Authority, the Bank of England or whichever authorities are relevant. However, the explanatory memorandum for this SI does not even say that that has happened. It is particularly concerning that, even if there were consultation on how the legislation was written, there has not been one on the implementation of the legislation as it is written into UK law and how it will be taken forward in this place.

My other concern is about the authority given to the FCA and the PRA. I have raised this concern recently, particularly in relation to the Bank of England. It seems that the Government are changing the powers that these organisations have, piece by piece, without any kind of overall strategy. It would be sensible for the Government to bring forward a White Paper or some sort of document on how they envisage the powers of the FCA and the Bank of England operating in future years. It seems that the Government are making policy changes by SI when they should actually be coming forward with an overarching position regarding how

they see both the policy and the powers of the Bank of England, the FCA and the PRA in the future. When they make these piecemeal changes, we end up with organisations that have to deal with powers that are not joined up in any way because there is no joined-up approach.

It seems to me, from conversations that I have had with the Minister, or possibly the Financial Secretary, on the amount of resource that the FCA has that this House has been giving it quite a lot of additional work and obligations in recent times. While I am not saying that that is necessarily a bad thing, the way that it has been done has not been helpful. My understanding, with regard to the FCA's requirement for resource in terms of spend, is that it will come to this House and request additional money if it has additional duties that it needs to carry out. Given that the Government are increasing the scope of and requirements on the FCA in taking action to monitor things and to have obligations in various places, has the Minister had an overall look at what its budget and powers will look like in future years? If not, it will be very difficult for it to say to this House how much money it is going to require in order to adequately ensure that it is fulfilling all the obligations that have been given to it by this House.

My main concerns were around the issue of consultation, particularly the fact that, as it says in the explanatory memorandum, consultation has not been undertaken on the implementation of this EU law within UK law, as well as the piecemeal nature of the way in which the Government are coming forward with this. It would be helpful if the Minister was able to clarify, or give us some idea of, the Government's direction of travel and say that there will be some sort of policy paper on these powers. It was particularly concerning that the Bank of England's powers were just extended without any sort of policy alongside that. We are regularly seeing the FCA's powers being changed.

It would be really helpful for this House, and we would be much less likely to raise concerns, if we had an idea of where the Government's decision making was going. We might disagree, but we would be less likely to raise these concerns about every single SI. I am sure that the Minister is absolutely fed up with us raising exactly the same things on these occasions and having to give exactly the same answer, which generally does not help us. I have not generally taken part in SI debates on the Floor of the House, so I am not sure whether the Minister is going to wind up, as is normal. I hope that he does, so that he can answer some of these points.

3.57 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman).

Not everyone appreciates the role that securitisation of loans and debts played in the financial crash of 2008, but it was a substantial role, with devastating consequences. To give some context, in the years prior to 2008, a calamitous decision was taken by executives in large US-based international banks to securitise sub-prime mortgages, which were mortgages given to people who had virtually no way of paying them back. Because of predatory lending, the number of these sub-prime mortgages continued to rise. They were then pooled together with other loans and debts and packaged as a

financial product in the form of mortgage-backed securities that received triple A ratings from the credit rating companies.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is surely arguing that sub-prime lending was mismanaged rather than securitisation itself. Do I understand him correctly, or is he suggesting that securitisation was the problem?

Bambos Charalambous: It was both. It was the sub-prime lending and it was also the packaging of these products into securitisation with other, better products that were then triple A rated.

Mr Jayawardena: But is it not true that securitisation is really helpful in recycling capital, thereby providing investors with a stream of income that is useful to them and allowing responsible financial institutions to direct their capital at new people who want, for example, to borrow money to buy a home?

Bambos Charalambous: If done properly, there is benefit in securitisation, but it was not done properly in the United States, and therefore we need to take extra precautions now to ensure that it is done properly.

Mr Jayawardena: The hon. Gentleman is very kind to give way again. I want to unpick that a little further, because it is helpful. Can he confirm that securitisation is a good way of managing risk across a portfolio of loans, so that those with worse credit ratings can be properly and openly matched up with those with better credit ratings, to ensure that investors have a blend that they can draw an income on in the long run and allow institutions to use the capital they have secured from investors to offer new products to new people?

Bambos Charalambous: But if credit rating companies do not give the correct ratings, as happened in the United States, it all falls apart. I am happy to carry on the conversation with the hon. Gentleman in Strangers' afterwards.

There was a big investment in mortgage-backed securities, with many financial institutions choosing to invest in them because of their promised high rate of return. When people started defaulting on sub-prime mortgages, the mortgage-backed securities lost their value, and the financial institutions that had invested heavily in them became exposed and suffered catastrophic losses. Since that time, steps have been taken to ensure that we never again experience the shockwaves of those failing giant financial institutions and the aftermath. We need a robust system of dealing with the risk of any such exposure due to securitisation, and that requires primary legislation.

As the hon. Member for Aberdeen North said, what we have before us are ill-conceived regulations that do not address the whole picture, and these changes are being made without the House having a chance to properly scrutinise them. Let us be clear: these regulations are not required due to the fear of a no-deal Brexit. They have conveniently been slipped in by the Government, under not the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 but other legislation.

The regulations give responsibility to the Financial Conduct Authority to supervise the compliance of people involved in securitisation practices and allow it to impose

certain penalties and take other steps to monitor securitisation. Such changes should not be made via secondary legislation. The complexity of these measures needs proper scrutiny. The very fact that the regulations change provisions in criminal law by preventing the FCA from instituting criminal proceedings for money laundering and insider dealing is a serious matter that is worthy of proper debate and scrutiny, which cannot be done via this debate. The regulations are wrong-headed, as schedule 1 amends primary legislation and transfers significant powers to the Treasury, the Financial Conduct Authority, the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Bank of England.

Mr Jayawardena: I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman's contribution, even if we come from different starting points. Does he support the FCA having such a role but object to the principle of how this is being arrived at, or does he object to the FCA having this role? If not the FCA, who should it be?

Bambos Charalambous: Those are exactly the sort of points that should be made via a debate on primary, not secondary, legislation.

Mr Jayawardena: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bambos Charalambous: I will not give way again, as I am almost at the end of my contribution.

These are important changes that Parliament needs to get right, due to the dire consequences of what went wrong in the past. These measures are opaque, unconstitutional and lacking in proper scrutiny. I invite the Government to withdraw the regulations and introduce primary legislation, to allow thorough and proper scrutiny to take place. Without such assurances, I will vote for the motion in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and against the Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Anneliese Dodds.

John Glen *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: I beg your pardon. If the Minister would like to respond, and it is the wish of the House that he should do so, he may.

4.3 pm

John Glen: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I feel it is appropriate for me to respond to the remarks of the hon. Members for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) and for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman).

The Treasury has not undertaken a formal consultation on this SI, as the changes to domestic legislation required are minor, and the enforcement approach taken is in line with existing enforcement regimes in the financial services sector. We have worked closely with the FCA and the PRA throughout.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North made some remarks about the resourcing of the FCA. It has additional resources through the onshoring programme, but this SI has nothing to do with that. This is a business-as-usual SI that would have happened anyway. There was certainly no attempt to slip it in amidst all the others that were taken through Committee. It was a consequence of these regulations being taken through the scrutiny process. I can confirm that there were 120 responses from across

[John Glen]

the EU as a whole in 2015 to the Commission's proposals, which were then iterated over the two years before they were approved.

I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate said about the aspirations of the regulations underlying this SI. This will bring in more stringent underwriting criteria for mortgage and credit granting. It will overhaul the supervision of credit rating agencies. We have updated international standards on the amount of capital that banks need to hold against securitisations. It responds directly to the work of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and the International Organisation of Securities Commissions. The process of consultation that led to the regulations being agreed in this House and through the Commission has lasted two years, from 2015 to 2017, and this SI is simply implementing them.

In conclusion, I believe that the securitisation regulations will enable the FCA and the PRA to supervise the new framework for securitisations agreed in the EU, which introduces stricter standards and makes securitisations simpler and more transparent.

Kirsty Blackman: On the point about the powers of the FCA and the changes that are being made to it—I am not suggesting that he is trying to slip out this particular one, but there do seem to have been various changes along the way—is it likely that the Government will come forward with something explaining how they expect the FCA to look in future and how we will get to that point?

John Glen: There are two or three things going on. There are 53 financial services SIs going through Committee in connection with no-deal preparations, which is certainly an additional burden on the FCA, and it has had the resources for that. The hon. Lady asked about the Government's holistic view of the role of the FCA. It is subject to a periodic review, having been formed under the legislation of five or six years ago, and that will happen in due course. We hope there will be more financial services legislation in future Sessions.

This instrument is necessary to enable the regulations to take effect. I hope that the House has found this afternoon's debate on this matter informative and will be able to join me in opposing the motion.

4.7 pm

Anneliese Dodds: If I may, I will start my remarks with a brief observation. Far too often in this House, I have heard hon. Members suggest that the financial crisis was somehow the result of the then Government's policies. I am very pleased to have heard the opposite from the Minister today. In fact, it was the correct interpretation of what precipitated the global financial crisis, which did indeed, as he intimated, begin with the sub-prime mortgage collapses in the United States and then spread through the financial system, particularly through the use of complex financial instruments.

John Glen *rose*—

Anneliese Dodds: I am very happy for the Minister to agree with what I am saying.

John Glen: I am very happy to draw the hon. Lady's attention to the fact that the default rate for triple A rated bonds in the EU was 0.6%, while in the US it was 16%. The key point that the Conservatives have always wished to stress is that the spending profile from 2002 and 2007 massively compounded the difficulties we found ourselves in.

Anneliese Dodds: The Minister—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. A short while ago, this was a very well behaved debate on very specific issues, but since the speech of the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), it seems to have become a very general and exciting debate. I know that Members are anticipating a Division, and they will be trying very hard to make up their minds on which side of the House they are going to vote, but they must listen to the hon. Lady.

Anneliese Dodds: I will not strain the House's patience, but I fear that the Minister, who is normally very clear in his remarks, is mixing apples and pears. He mentioned credit rating in relation to sub-prime mortgage-related securities in the United States. There was a relationship with the US state in that case, because of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, but there was not a connection between that process and the British state. I fear that there was a little bit of confusion there.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Perhaps we can clear up the mystery of whose fault it was, because the previous Chancellor said that it was not the fault of the Labour Government at all.

Anneliese Dodds: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an important, pertinent and brief point.

Mr Jayawardena: I wonder whether, on reflection, the hon. Lady thinks that the former regulatory structure under the Financial Services Authority was not fulfilling its duties, that it was right to break it up between the PRA and the FCA, and that that resulted in an improvement in regulation.

Anneliese Dodds: The overall regulatory structure for the financial services industry is surely not what we are talking about in this debate. We are talking specifically about the regulation of securitisation. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman appears to be suggesting that he was trying to make a point about the lack of stringent regulation at the time of the financial crisis. I remind all Members that it was, of course, the Conservatives who urged the then Government to deregulate further and to remove regulation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) set out the involvement of securitisation in the financial crisis very clearly. To respond briefly to the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), building on what my hon. Friend said, there has been a wide-ranging debate about whether it is appropriate to encourage additional securitisation, of which he may be aware. Of course, securitisation facilitates additional leverage, beyond what would already be there, because it makes liquid assets that are not already liquid. That may be appropriate in some contexts, but it can lead to inappropriate leveraging, particularly when it is conducted in a complex and

opaque way, as arguably was the case during the financial crisis. It is surely appropriate, therefore, that we question any new regulations that apply to securitisation in this House, as we have done in this debate.

I am grateful to the Minister for his opening remarks. However, I regret that he failed to respond to my detailed comments about the manner in which the EU regulation has been transposed. Our complaint is not necessarily with the overall framework, which, as he rightly intimated, came from the Basel framework through IOSCO and, latterly, the EU. The point is that the process has not been entirely without controversy. As a result, the decisions that the Government make about how to implement the framework are potentially delicate, as was underlined rightly by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman).

The Minister said that the statutory instrument is a simple empowerment of the FCA. However, I referred in my remarks to how the regulations disapply elements of existing legislation, including those relating to offences under the purview of the Competition and Markets Authority and to insider dealing. He did not make it clear why that was necessary. He said that the measures would make our statute book consistent with offences in other countries in respect of complex securitisation and so on. He did not indicate whether they were consistent with existing offences on the UK statute book. That, surely, is what is at issue.

For all those reasons, we will press the motion of revocation to a vote.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 306.

Division No. 330]

[4.14 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Carden, Dan
Abrahams, Debbie	Champion, Sarah
Ali, Rushanara	Chapman, Douglas
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Chapman, Jenny
Amesbury, Mike	Cherry, Joanna
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Coaker, Vernon
Ashworth, Jonathan	Coffey, Ann
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cooper, Julie
Bardell, Hannah	Cooper, Rosie
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Cooper, rh Yvette
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cowan, Ronnie
Benn, rh Hilary	Crausby, Sir David
Black, Mhairi	Crawley, Angela
Blackman, Kirsty	Creagh, Mary
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Creasy, Stella
Blomfield, Paul	Cruddas, Jon
Brabin, Tracy	Cryer, John
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cummins, Judith
Brock, Deidre	Cunningham, Alex
Brown, Alan	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Brown, Lyn	Daby, Janet
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Dakin, Nic
Bryant, Chris	David, Wayne
Buck, Ms Karen	Davies, Geraint
Burden, Richard	Day, Martyn
Burgon, Richard	De Cordova, Marsha
Butler, Dawn	De Piero, Gloria
Byrne, rh Liam	Debbonaire, Thangam
Cadbury, Ruth	Dent Coad, Emma
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Dodds, Anneliese

Doughty, Stephen	Khan, Afzal
Dowd, Peter	Killen, Ged
Drew, Dr David	Kinnock, Stephen
Dromey, Jack	Kyle, Peter
Duffield, Rosie	Laird, Lesley
Eagle, Ms Angela	Lake, Ben
Eagle, Maria	Lammy, rh Mr David
Efford, Clive	Law, Chris
Elliott, Julie	Lee, Karen
Elmore, Chris	Leslie, Mr Chris
Esterson, Bill	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Evans, Chris	Lewis, Clive
Farrelly, Paul	Lewis, Mr Ivan
Fellows, Marion	Linden, David
Field, rh Frank	Lloyd, Tony
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Lucas, Caroline
Fletcher, Colleen	Lucas, Ian C.
Flint, rh Caroline	Lynch, Holly (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami</i>)
Fovargue, Yvonne	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Foxcroft, Vicky	Madders, Justin
Frith, James	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Furniss, Gill	Marsden, Gordon
Gaffney, Hugh	Martin, Sandy
Gapes, Mike	Maskell, Rachael
Gardiner, Barry	Matheson, Christian
George, Ruth	Mc Nally, John
Gethins, Stephen	McCabe, Steve
Gibson, Patricia	McCarthy, Kerry
Gill, Preet Kaur	McDonagh, Siobhain
Glindon, Mary	McDonald, Andy
Godsiff, Mr Roger	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Goodman, Helen	McDonald, Stuart C.
Grady, Patrick	McDonnell, rh John
Grant, Peter	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Gray, Neil	McGinn, Conor
Green, Kate	McGovern, Alison
Greenwood, Lilian	McInnes, Liz
Greenwood, Margaret	McKinnell, Catherine
Griffith, Nia	McMahon, Jim
Grogan, John	McMorrin, Anna
Gwynne, Andrew	Mearns, Ian
Haigh, Louise	Miliband, rh Edward
Hamilton, Fabian	Monaghan, Carol
Hanson, rh David	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Hardy, Emma	Morden, Jessica
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Morgan, Stephen
Harris, Carolyn	Morris, Grahame
Hayes, Helen	Murray, Ian
Hayman, Sue	Newlands, Gavin
Healey, rh John	Norris, Alex
Hendrick, Sir Mark	O'Hara, Brendan
Hendry, Drew	Onn, Melanie
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Onwurah, Chi
Hill, Mike	Osamor, Kate
Hillier, Meg	Owen, Albert
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Peacock, Stephanie
Hollern, Kate	Pearce, Teresa
Howarth, rh Mr George	Pennycook, Matthew
Huq, Dr Rupa	Phillips, Jess
Hussain, Imran	Phillipson, Bridget
Jarvis, Dan	Platt, Jo
Johnson, Diana	Pollard, Luke
Jones, Darren	Pound, Stephen
Jones, Gerald	Qureshi, Yasmin
Jones, Graham P.	Rashid, Faisal
Jones, Helen	Rayner, Angela
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Reed, Mr Steve
Jones, Sarah	Rees, Christina
Jones, Susan Elan	Reeves, Ellie
Kane, Mike	Reeves, Rachel
Keeley, Barbara	Reynolds, Jonathan
Kendall, Liz	

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
 Sheppard, Tommy
 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
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo

Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Wilson, Phil
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and
Bambos Charalambous

NOES

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
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor

Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 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
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 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
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 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
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 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
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil

Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 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 Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 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
 Pritchard, 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
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 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, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 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
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 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
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Rebecca Harris and
Amanda Milling

Question accordingly negated.

Communities: Charities and Volunteers

4.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Mims Davies): I beg to move,

That this House has considered connecting communities by supporting charities and volunteers.

I am delighted that the House has this opportunity to discuss a subject so close to the nation's heart: charities and volunteers. I am sure that everyone across the House will agree that these incredible people and organisations are the bold, brave, beating heart of our communities. And they are not alone. They work alongside the social enterprises, mutuals, community groups and socially responsible businesses that help to make up our civil society.

This country's civil society is a force to be reckoned with. It has a proud heritage and is admired across the globe. It is everything from a voice for the voiceless to an incubator for innovation. It provides a space for us to display the very best of ourselves and a desire to help and support others. We all know of superhuman efforts that people have made in our constituencies and communities on behalf of charities—running, skydiving, sponsored swims, sponsored silences, with groups, individuals and children all raising millions, thousands or hundreds of pounds for causes they care about.

Only a few years ago, the eyes of the world were on London for the Paralympic and Olympic games. People were amazed by the athletic achievement, but what also made an impact on millions of people were those who came from our shores: our volunteers, the games makers, selflessly giving their time, energy and expertise so that others could have a brighter and better future and an enjoyable time.

We will see that again: with Birmingham 2022, the Commonwealth games, on the horizon, we have a chance to do it all again. Our experience, in London 2012 and beyond, has shown that we can create the right opportunities and environment for volunteers. They will come and step up to the challenge. That energy and that sense of momentum are vital if we are to continue to have a happier and healthier society.

What is the Government's vision for civil society? Three elements are particularly important to me as we chart this new path. The first is the building of communities that are connected: tackling loneliness, helping people to feel attached to the places where they live and empowering people of all ages to build an even better society. The second is the establishment of a socially responsible business and finance sector that can act as an even greater force for good in our society and tackle, creatively, some of its most entrenched problems.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does the Minister agree that charities should remain autonomous and should not be interfered with politically? I am greatly concerned about a charity in Morecambe that is undergoing that process at this moment.

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for referring to something that is happening in his community and may be a worry. The Charity Commission plays an important role in giving us comfort in that respect. It is an independent registrar, and it is the regulator of charities. The Government

[Mims Davies]

have recognised the demand for its services by granting it an extra £5 million a year to help our charities to be at their best. If my hon. Friend has any concerns about that specific case, I shall be happy to meet him.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The Minister has rightly paid tribute to the hundreds of thousands of volunteers—long may they continue, and I pay tribute to the volunteers in my own constituency—but does she think it right that voluntary organisations, including charities such as the Trussell Trust and other food banks, are in effect replacing statutory services, although they are not equipped in the same way as a statutory service?

Mims Davies *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I have just one second to help the House? There are 17 speakers besides the Front Benchers, so may I encourage Members to try to help each other?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for raising the importance of working across communities to support people in need. It is absolutely right for food banks to play their part, as they have for many decades through churches and local organisations. It is absolutely right that when people are in need, we have the opportunities and the partnerships to reach out to them.

I was talking about my vision, and the Government's vision, for civil society. My third focus is on harnessing the energy of our young people and ensuring that there are plenty of opportunities for them to contribute in their communities. We want to create the conditions for a bold and bright future in which civil society is able to play an even greater role than it does today. Those themes are captured in our civil society strategy, published six months ago. I will briefly update the House on how we are pursuing our vision, but let me first thank my team of officials for their incredible outreach and dedication in supporting the sector and connecting communities through the strategy and for working so well.

The United Kingdom is already one of the most generous places in the world. Last year, the public donated £10.3 billion, and we have heard about millions of people who volunteered in our communities on each and every day of that year. Gift aid is now worth more than £1.2 billion to charities. Since 1990, when John Major was Prime Minister, £15 billion more has been given to good causes. That is the most successful charity tax relief in the world, and I am delighted that the Treasury has announced that the small donations gift aid limit has been raised to £30.

To support even more people giving back to their local area, I am today awarding a further £3 million to communities that need it most. Some £770,000 is going to six places to boost fundraising directly to local good causes. This investment will unlock funds for Britain's most deprived communities, improving social mobility from Bristol to the Yorkshire coast. Some £2.3 million will go to 10 more places to put community at the heart of tackling local issues, from the Onion Collective in Somerset addressing skills gaps in the county to Lincoln's hometown football club building on cohesion in the community. This investment in communities the length

and breadth of the country will help even more people take action on the issues they care about most, including helping more volunteering, giving more money directly to local causes that people feel connected with in their community and supporting even more simple neighbourly acts, which can mean so much.

The Government are also helping connect communities by tackling loneliness. We are the first country in the world to have a Minister for loneliness, and I have had interest from Governments, businesses and charities around the globe—from places such as Canada, the USA, Australia, Sweden to Japan—that want to learn from us. To help tackle loneliness across England, we have secured £20 million of new grant funding for brilliant projects that are directly connecting communities, such as the Rural Coffee Caravan in Bury St Edmunds. The Care Leavers Association is also included; it is helping to develop a digital platform to connect care leavers of all ages so they can share, learn and support one another.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Can the Minister comment on any discussions she has had with the devolved Administrations specifically about loneliness?

Mims Davies: I have had conversations with the devolved Administrations on sport and connecting communities, but I have not directly had any on that issue. I am however very happy to take that up and co-operate with colleagues across the House to work with the devolved Administrations. As a Wales Minister, I was very aware that there are particular communities that we need to make sure Westminster and Whitehall are reaching.

We are breaking down barriers to volunteering for everyone, and we are focusing on those at risk of loneliness and looking to the long term to help those people who might want to get involved and who might need a new direction and feel isolated. I am backing that again today with cash: £250,000 for new funding to do exactly that.

When communities are facing their moment of greatest need, a connected community is what matters most. We saw that in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Local charities at the heart of the community stepped up, working in partnership with national organisations and emergency services to provide support for those in need. The public responded, too, by raising over £29 million. That was unprecedented, and it highlighted that we are at our very best when we come together and help each other. This community support was invaluable in helping the Government reach the Grenfell victims and their families quickly, and we will continue to support them. We are working with our experienced charity partners to further strengthen the response and be ready for any future emergencies.

How can business help our communities? Society's needs are at the heart of good decision making. The private sector is a great force for good, and this is a chance to address society's most pressing issues by encouraging innovative public services to work alongside private investors, socially responsible businesses and social enterprise. From tackling homelessness to helping young people reach their full potential, business and finance can and must play a crucial role.

Through social impact bonds, we are bringing together investors who want to make a difference with charities who have the expertise to make real change. This successful model is already having a positive impact on people and

communities across the country. Charities such as St Mungo's and Thames Reach are working with the most vulnerable rough sleepers in London to help them rebuild their lives. This social impact bond gives charities the financial safety net to do this important work, and I was struck by the passion and commitment of the staff I met last week and the results they have achieved. Since the project was launched in 2017, it has helped more than 150 people to find homes. We know that this funding model works, and that is why we are investing £80 million through the life chances fund to give more support to social impact bonds that create people-focused results. People matter, and we are delivering for them.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I worked on social impact bonds prior to entering this place. One of the big barriers that social enterprises face in drawing down social impact bonds is the lack of expertise in unlocking these complex instruments. What support will there be within the fund to ensure that that money can be drawn down by social enterprises?

Mims Davies: In my new role in this Department, I have found nothing but complete expertise to absolutely make this work. If the hon. Gentleman would like to raise a particular issue relating to his experience, I would be happy to hear from him directly.

There is more that we can do to help vulnerable people across the country. We are working with the banks and the building societies to unlock millions of pounds from dormant accounts. Instead of gathering dust, that money is being invested in helping our young people into employment and in tackling problem debt. In 2018 alone, £330 million of dormant assets funding was announced, and by 2020, the total distribution from dormant accounts will reach more than half a billion pounds. We will expand that scheme further to help more vulnerable people to benefit. This funding is changing lives for the better, with £90 million helping the most disadvantaged young people into employment and £55 million tackling problem debt. These initiatives are led by two independent organisations.

The Government want an economy that works for everyone in every part of their life. We are building a strong foundation for social impact investing, which is bringing more capital funding to social enterprises and charities in the UK, alongside traditional forms of funding for these organisations. I am mindful that lots of people want to speak, so I shall try to commute my remarks, but I want to get these key messages out. This works in practice. Since its launch in 2012, Big Society Capital has committed more than £520 million and leveraged more than £1.2 billion of additional co-investment into this space.

The Government are building on these successes and will be using a further £135 million from dormant accounts to help further charities and social enterprises. In addition, the Government have commissioned an advisory group, and the Prime Minister has personally asked for an industry-led implementation taskforce to deliver its recommendations. We also have an inclusive economy partnership, where we work with businesses such as O2, Landsec and Accenture and with social innovators to find practical solutions and to unlock the issues on the ground. We also have the This is Me programme, an inclusive workplace programme that focuses on mental health issues, and it is working with

Landsec. This is an area in which we are working with business and the community to ensure that we can deliver on the ground.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My hon. Friend is keen to speed on, but I should just like to say that she has already made a great impression on the House and on the sectors for which she is responsible in the time that she has been a Minister. In that spirit, will she take account of the rural areas such as the one I represent with regard to the things that she has said? They sometimes miss out, and it would be great if we found some means by which we could get her to come to places such as Lincolnshire to evangelise the case that she has made so powerfully today.

Mims Davies: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we should not forget our rural communities. We should work on this through the loneliness fund and the building connections fund, and I have more to say on that. I absolutely must speed on, but we need to make sure that we can cater for everyone across the land.

Moving on to youth opportunities, we need to harness the energy of young people and ensure that they have the opportunity to contribute to their local area. Volunteering provides young people with many of the skills that they will need later in life, and we are reaching out to the next generation to give them more opportunities to get involved.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mims Davies: I will give way quickly, but I need to speed on.

Chris Elmore: I am extremely grateful to the Minister. Will she join me in paying tribute to the guide and scout movement, which does an enormous amount of work to try to ensure that young people understand the value of volunteering? It was refreshing to have scouts and guides approaching me as their local Member of Parliament to engage in National Democracy Week last year, so that they could begin to understand the wider process of democracy, which is linked to volunteering.

Mims Davies: The £5 million that the Government invested in creating new places for disadvantaged young people through uniformed youth groups, including Girlguiding and St John Ambulance, shows that we are committed. We also have half a million participants in the National Citizen Service. Working with the National Lottery Community Fund, we are investing another £80 million to help young people be active in their communities. We want our young people to have a voice in decision making, and we are creating two new groups to involve them.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): May I share one slight concern with the Minister? The public sector, including the health service, sometimes leans on effective charities a little too heavily. I was at Whitby and District Community Transport on Friday, and its worry is that the criteria for patient transport are changing, which is increasing pressure when it already has trouble getting enough volunteer drivers.

Mims Davies: It is right to work with local authorities and community groups so that we do not stop people volunteering. We should be actively encouraging people and giving them a chance to shine.

Finally, on youth services, the civil society strategy included a commitment to examine the guidance given to local authorities to provide appropriate local youth services. Through such efforts, we will help people to be more active in their communities, and we have promised a review.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mims Davies: I am going to conclude, because I will be in trouble otherwise.

Despite the challenges in our growing and changing communities, as Members will know from their constituencies, civil society represents an opportunity to come together. The British people are the most generous, enterprising, imaginative and downright determined people in the world. As a Member of Parliament and a charity trustee and fundraiser, I know what it takes to be part of that, and I salute people across all constituencies, including Eastleigh, for what they do. I look forward to hearing from people about what is going on in their communities. Civil society is the best tool we have to connect our communities, to boost the economy and to make us happier, and we can work together to connect our communities further.

4.47 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I listened with interest to the Minister's warm words, but I suspect that we will hear much this afternoon about the gap between the rhetoric and the reality in the Government's approach to civil society. Ever since they were elected, this Government's method has been to underfund, undermine and sideline the sector at every opportunity. That is a tragedy, because civil society, including the charities, volunteers and community groups that are part of it, play a critical role in reconnecting the communities that this Government have divided.

There is a real mistrust of politics and politicians in our country, which is not surprising. A decade of austerity has ripped the heart out of communities and seen the destruction of shared community spaces. Good jobs have been lost to automation. Once thriving industrial towns have been left to decline. Inequality has grown wider while the economy has grown bigger, because a few at the top have grown richer at the expense of everyone else.

The politics that did all that needs to change. People want back control over their own lives. It is no longer enough for any group of politicians to stand up and tell people to trust them to have all the answers. Trust cannot be a one-way street. People will not trust politicians until politicians show that they trust people enough to open power up to them directly. We need a new politics that is big enough to meet the challenges of our age and responsive enough to meet the specific needs of every community.

At the heart of that are questions about power. Who has it? Who does not? How do we open it up to everyone? In this digital age, with a world that is changing so fast, it is clear that we cannot solve tomorrow's

problems with yesterday's thinking. That is where civil society comes in, because it offers a way for people to participate on their own terms. It connects communities so that they can exercise the power that lies latent within them. Community-led organisations are a key part of how we can make our system more responsive and more democratic by rebuilding politics around people and putting real power in people's hands. It once felt like the Conservative party was on to that with its big society agenda, but it withered before our eyes into a crude attempt to replace paid professionals with unpaid volunteers. Now, the Conservatives do not talk about it at all.

Let us look at how much has vanished under this Government: 428 day centres, 1,000 children's centres, 600 youth centres, 478 public libraries and countless lunch clubs, befriending services, community centres and voluntary groups. Those places where communities came together to act have all gone.

Rushanara Ali: Does my hon. Friend agree that the cuts in youth services have been particularly devastating? Although the interventions to support the National Citizen Service have been welcomed in many areas, the reality is that the £1 billion or so that has been spent in that arena has not been matched by support in other areas to help young people get on to successor programmes, to meet their needs and to ensure that they have genuine opportunities to take part in positive activities, rather than get caught up in crime and other risks.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said, 600 youth centres have closed, and all the activities that could have gone on in them have been taken away. That is a crying shame.

Sadly, the Government have not finished with that agenda; there is worse to come. Their new so-called fair funding formula will remove deprivation levels from how funding is calculated. It will take even more away from the very poorest and will weaken the very communities in which the need to tackle poverty, youth crime and homelessness is greatest. Communities cannot organise, act or assert their voice if the Government keep ripping away the resources they need to do those very things.

The Government passed a lobbying Act that gags charities and prevents them from campaigning. Ministers individually have put gagging clauses in contracts to silence charities and prevent them from criticising their personal failures as Ministers. The Government have discouraged volunteers in the UK by not recognising their work for national insurance credits. They announced a plan for paid time off work for volunteering, but it fizzled out into absolutely nothing.

We are a month and a half away from Brexit, but the Government have still not told us how they will replace lost EU funding for charities or how the shared prosperity fund will work, despite the fact that the Opposition have been asking about it for months. The Minister trumpets the new funding—she did so this afternoon—but she fails to acknowledge that it is a tiny drop in the ocean, compared with the billions that the Government have cut. They can work out the huge financial value of what they have taken away, but the social value that they have destroyed is incalculable.

Despite the cuts and the Government's failure to open up power, people are doing amazing things in their communities, and are stepping in to help the victims of Government funding cuts. I pay tribute to the food

banks and homeless shelters which, in such a wealthy country, we should never have needed. There is a wonderful, rich, emerging practice of sharing, co-operating, collaborating and participating in this country. People's ingenuity and the creativity in our communities cannot and will not be beaten back, but it is fragile. It needs support and protection. It is clear that the Conservatives will never offer that, but Labour will.

Alex Sobel: My local council for voluntary service, Voluntary Action Leeds, wrote to me. It said clearly that volunteering is not part of the benefits system, and that people are being sanctioned if they refuse to volunteer. That is not volunteering; it is forced labour. Universal credit is affecting the amount of time that people have to volunteer, so the Government's own welfare policies are decimating the voluntary sector in this country.

Mr Reed: I agree. It is outrageous that the Government are actively penalising people for volunteering when we need to be encouraging volunteering. In particular, it helps people who are looking for work to develop the skills that they need to gain employment. I hope the Minister will take that away and look at it.

People are connecting in neighbourhoods and on social media to collaborate and bring about the change that we desperately need in this country. The digital revolution has opened up data, information and connectivity in the most extraordinary ways. It offers the potential to renew our democracy, making it more open, responsive and participative. This is the new civil society. It is a force for change of the most incredible potential, if only we had a Government with the vision and ambition to support it, like the very best Labour councils already do.

Barking and Dagenham's Every One Every Day initiative has launched spaces and projects across the borough that bring people together in their neighbourhoods to solve the problems they face. It has dramatically increased participation, with projects as diverse as shared cooking, community composting, play streets and even a listening barber. It is a great example of asset-based community development—a model that is proving its power in communities across the country.

In my borough of Croydon, the Parchmore medical centre in Thornton Heath has spawned a network of more than 100 community-led projects that keep people healthier, and it has dramatically reduced the number of people who need to see a GP. There are sessions on healthy cooking for young families, mobility classes for older people and coffee mornings in the local pub, before it opens for customers, for people isolated in their homes. All of it is free, and all of it is run in and by the community. It has had an extraordinary impact on people's wellbeing simply by getting neighbours to know each other better and to speak to each other.

Plymouth has set up the country's biggest network of community energy co-ops to generate energy sustainably and plough the profits back into the local community. Stevenage is pioneering community budgeting, involving local community groups. Preston is leading on community wealth building by focusing council procurement on community organisations. In Lambeth, the council has set up, with the community, Black Thrive, a new social enterprise that gives the black community greater oversight of the mental health services that the community uses. In all these cases, existing or new community groups,

charities and social enterprises have shown they have the power to transform lives. They open up decision making to the creativity and innovation that lies untapped in too many of our communities.

Sir John Hayes: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would consider the dichotomy at the heart of his argument—I used the word “argument” in the most generous spirit. The dichotomy is that he is arguing that this increase in digital communication is beneficial to community, but he must know that online shopping is destroying local shops, online media is destroying local newspapers and the virtual relationships he has described are not comparable with real relationships. Clearly, he is doubtful about his own relationships in Croydon, because he has already told us that people do not like politicians. Perhaps he should get out into the real world and leave the virtual world for a few minutes.

Mr Reed: What is destroying our high streets are the right hon. Gentleman's Government's business rate hikes.

The community and voluntary groups that are part of all of this innovation are pointing the way forward, not only to a better society, but to a new politics—not the centralised state or the marketised state, but the collaborative state, enabling an open, participative and hopeful approach. This new people-powered politics will help us find a way to tackle the great social ills of our time, one of which the Minister referred to; loneliness in this country has now reached epidemic proportions. Loneliness is the product of the breakdown of the family, the fragmentation of communities and the cuts that have taken away support services. The Local Government Association now points to an £8 billion funding shortfall in social care services, but we also see long working hours, low pay, investment and jobs deserts and the hollowing out of communities. All of that has contributed to this situation, but, sadly, no single piece of legislation can put a problem that complex right. The answers lie in our communities, in strengthening the bonds between people instead of atomising them, and in building up community assets instead of closing them down as the Government have done. Communities are already doing much, but if we had the courage to open up power and resources to them, they could do so much more.

Our country is at a crossroads. The Brexit debate has crystallised the deep divisions that separate us from each other and the anger that has driven it. We need to come back together, but that will not happen from the top down. We need a new, more open politics, one that is more participative, embracing the collaboration and kindness that all of us, as MPs, see in our constituencies. For that we need a Government who recognise and celebrate the central role of civil society and communities, and are ready to invest in them, not cut them to the bone. That is how we can genuinely let people take back control, so they can build the compassionate country we have the potential to become.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We will be starting with a six-minute limit. Hopefully, I will not have to lower it. Let us aim for that for everybody.

4.59 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): It is a great joy to speak on this subject, to be an MP who has the privilege of visiting charity and voluntary groups whenever I can, and to represent a part of the country where community and voluntary groups are such a rich part of the local fabric of society. Following the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), I shall enjoy talking up the great work these groups do. The last thing they need is for us politicians to get more involved. We should allow them to get on and do the work that they do, while recognising that the state has the responsibility to create the environment that they need.

As I said, one of the joys of being an MP is to meet and support voluntary groups, which I do as much as I can but particularly at the beginning of the year. Since I was elected, I have been putting on Big Thank You events over a few weekends in January and February. They were inspired by the work of the loneliness commission and the sad loss of our colleague Jo Cox. Getting groups together to share their experiences and what they do is so valuable. I wish briefly to name-check a few groups that I met just a couple of weeks ago, to celebrate what they do and their great offer to my constituency. The events took place in the three main towns in my constituency—Penzance, Helston and St Ives—and are examples of how charities are connecting communities and addressing loneliness and isolation.

First, I hosted an event this year at Helston bowling club. When I met members of the club last year, they were so inspired by the opportunity to work with other charities that they started Saturday morning community bowling. They opened bowling up to the community, and now people can do indoor or short-mat bowling and outdoor bowling. Lots of people turn up—they do not always bowl; they drink tea and coffee and eat cake—and they have seen a large growth in members and numbers, just because they are able to offer some sense of community to people who are otherwise on their own.

I had the great joy of going to an event to meet the group that runs Tea Love and Cake, or TLC, which brings together large numbers of mainly older people. A lovely bunch of lady volunteers go around picking people up, bringing them into a community room in Marazion and entertaining them for the afternoon through various—dare I say—lightweight exercises, along with tea and cake. They came to an event and shared a bit about the incredible work they have done to encourage lonely people.

The St Ives community bus was funded by the Department for Transport, as has been the case for several other community organisations in my constituency. The volunteer drivers from the bus service talked about how they pick people up every day of the week, running them to and fro between different organisations and groups so that they can be part of the community in which they live.

I met some young mums who run a breastfeeding support group for mums who struggle in that area. It is a voluntary group that gets together to help other mums.

The Saturday Gang is a group of volunteers who bring together people with learning disabilities on a Saturday. Again, they have tea, cake and coffee. They help people with learning disabilities with some of the challenges they face.

The National Coastwatch Institution started in my constituency, and I was glad to meet its volunteers. There are huge numbers of well-organised volunteers who spend all the daylight hours, all year round, watching our coastline, keeping people safe and reporting it if people are at risk of getting in trouble. It is an amazing organisation that gives people the opportunity not only to have friendship and community but to do the vital job of keeping the people in the waters along our coastline safe.

Around the time of Parliament Week last year, I had the privilege of going to so many different groups over two or three weeks. The guiding and scouting group came along to the events and talked about their fantastic work to support young minds suffering from a bit of anxiety. That is a fantastic piece of work.

We are doing a really interesting piece of work by bringing together some of the groups I have mentioned to take from supermarkets food that is not out of date—it is perfectly okay—but surplus to requirements. They are processing that food into good, healthy, nutritious meals. The plan is to teach parents how to cook using raw materials, which is a skill that many of us have lost—including, I am afraid, myself. They provide vacuum-packed meals—fantastic, healthy food—that can be warmed through quickly. I do not know of anywhere else in the country that is doing this. They slice and freeze-dry bananas. If Members know anything about bananas, they will know that they do not freeze, but when they thaw these ones, they are exactly as they were when they cut them up. It is pretty impressive and I think they should patent the process.

Age Concern, a fantastic organisation across Cornwall, does a great job of connecting communities and providing some sensible ideas about how we can support older people at home and how we can help them avoid going into hospital. It highlights the fact that the state does not have all the answers—it should never have all the answers. The voluntary community does something that we cannot do, and we should encourage it, support it and give it the freedom to do a great job. I am so proud to be an MP of west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly where many, many people find fulfilment in volunteering, supporting each other and helping some of our most vulnerable people.

5.5 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who detailed some of the work that is going on in his community. Let me make a non-pecuniary declaration of interest: I was the national policy adviser for Volunteer Scotland, the national body for volunteering, before I came to this House. I have also worked for West Dunbartonshire Community and Volunteering Services—Members will know it as a CVS and volunteer centre—for over a decade.

I thank the Government for bringing forward this general debate today. I am sure that there are those in the Chamber who have been seeking such a debate for quite a long time. I commend the work of the all-party parliamentary group on charities and volunteering, of which I am a member. I see the redoubtable chair, the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), in their place. I do hope that, when they sum up, both Front-Bench speakers will pay tribute to the

work both of that all-party group and of the chair who has been a doughty campaigner since coming to this House.

Although much of the policy framework for charities and volunteering is fully devolved to the Parliament of Scotland, there is a range of overlaps that needs to be highlighted so that Members can be aware of the distinct nature of charities in Scotland, the number of which, according to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, now stands at 24,466 in total.

Stephen Kerr: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that these issues are devolved and rightly so, but where there are opportunities for co-operation across the United Kingdom, we should surely grasp them. Why, for example, is it not possible for young people in my constituency, because of a decision by the Scottish Government, to participate in the National Citizen Service? There is a demand for that in Scotland.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I will come on to answer that question at the end of my contribution. There is a big discussion to be had about the legislative process of the UK Government and a distinct understanding of what volunteering actually means, but I will come back to the hon. Gentleman's point further on in the debate because he raises a very important point about the difference between volunteering and being told to do something. Volunteering is a free-will activity.

It is essential to understand that, as in England, Wales and Northern Ireland—although I do not see any Members from Northern Ireland in the Chamber—the vast majority of voluntary organisations are small, with no employees; they are founded, organised and able to connect communities solely through volunteers. As a sector, both charities and the many unincorporated voluntary organisations play a central role in the delivery of people-centred services and in ensuring that communities, through a whole host of avenues, are able to inform and shape our nations. We have already heard about how the sector informs participation and democracy.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a good point about the role of voluntary organisations. In the past year, two new food banks have opened in Inverness to cope with the demand caused by the failures of universal credit. Those volunteers are working not just there, but in initiatives such as the hungry lunches project at Inverness Cathedral and MFR Cash for Kids, which provides help and advice. Does my hon. Friend agree that they are not just providing help for people, but actually saving them?

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I could not disagree, and that is replicated not just in Scotland, but across the whole UK.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Like the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), in Coventry we have volunteers who not only collect, but distribute, the food; and a lot of people are very thankful to them. Another issue is loneliness. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that every amount of pressure should be put on the BBC to revoke any plans it has to charge the licence fee to over-75s. Finally, there is another voluntary organisation

in Coventry that is totally run by volunteers who help the blind using modern techniques. Has the hon. Gentleman come across anything like that in his constituency?

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I could not disagree with the hon. Member on a range of matters, and I do not on the over-75s licence fee issue. It is incomprehensible to me why the BBC would even consider such a thing, given that social isolation is a profound issue across not only older age, but a whole gamut of ages. I may come to that point in a moment.

The right to form voluntary organisations—charities or unincorporated organisations—is a fundamental pillar of a modern, liberal democracy. Such organisations are founded on the lived experiences of communities, on geography, on choice and on need. Nevertheless, charity is no replacement for good government. Maybe that is what many have found with issues around food banks and services having to be replicated by volunteers.

The unincorporated organisations and charities challenge policy makers and Governments in general, campaigning on issues on conscience and locality. I think of the Women's Aid organisations in my constituency, which—with the new local authority administration—are addressing specific targeted issues such as domestic abuse and violence, and access to services. They are also raising the matter of three-year funding strategies, rather than constantly having to come back to the local authority or Government Department year in, year out for the same type of funding scheme.

These organisations deliver public services in ways that are too numerous to mention, including by supporting people through drug addiction. This includes the Dumbarton Area Council on Alcohol in my constituency. Organisations such as Tulloch and Y Sort-It in West Dunbartonshire enhance the lives of young people through group activity and individual support. Importantly, the unincorporated organisations across all our constituencies run groups of all shapes and sizes, such as Clydebank's Morison Memorial lunch club, which offers friendship and wholesome food every Thursday; I can testify—I am sure that Scottish Members will recognise this—that it has the best and finest tablet in Scotland.

Charities and voluntary organisations connect and enhance our communities socially and economically. In Scotland, the investment from the Scottish Government has again increased to £24.9 million, with additional resources and support from a range of other funding bodies and groups, such as local authorities and NHS boards. Indeed, voluntary organisations are seen as an essential part of shaping public service through community planning in each of the 32 councils of Scotland.

From a Scotland-wide perspective, the voluntary sector covers every facet of Scottish society, and I am grateful to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations for the following figures. There are over 45,000 voluntary organisations—on top of the charitable sector—in Scotland, employing more than 106,000 paid staff. That is 3.5% of Scotland's workforce. The workforce is dominated by women, who make up 71% of it; this is significantly higher than in the public and private sectors. The sector also employs more people with disabilities than the public and private sectors. Over 1.3 million people in Scotland volunteer, and over 30% of women, people from rural communities and those aged 16 to 24 volunteer. There are over 250,000 charity trustees, many of whom

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

will never actually see themselves as volunteers; and that is a clear point about many trustees and those involved in the governance process.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab) *indicated assent.*

Mims Davies *indicated assent.*

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I see that the chair of the all-party parliamentary group and the Minister agree. It is a fundamental point that we need to reinforce.

The sector in Scotland has a combined turnover of £5.8 billion. For the record, that is higher than the whisky industry. Some 78% of charities in Scotland are locally based, and four out of five Scots used a third sector organisation last year.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): In my Falkirk constituency, I have the great privilege to support Strathcarron Hospice, which this month holds its Snowdrop appeal. Princess Anne is also a great supporter of the hospice. The volunteers who support this superb charity and many other organisations are appreciated, but I have looked at some of the salaries paid to the chief executives of national charities. Does my hon. Friend agree that that the salary of those at national charities should be capped?

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I think that might be above my pay grade. However, I do believe that pay must be commensurate with the working activity undertaken. It is up to the board members of charities to make sure that they hold their staff, especially their senior staff, accountable in terms of the wages that they are paid.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the hospice movement. I have two hospices in my own constituency: St Margaret of Scotland, which is well known across the west of Scotland; and CHAS, or Children's Hospices Across Scotland, which assists children who are terminally ill from all over the UK. They are to be commended for the sterling work that they do.

Although not perhaps enjoying the same attention and understanding as other sectors with regard to Brexit, the sector is no more or less immune to the uncertainties generated as a consequence of leaving the European Union. Alongside concerns about protecting human rights, participation in European networks and pan-European programmes, and the future workforce, the issue of funding is paramount. Over the 2014 to 2020 funding period, Scotland has secured €941 million in European structural investment fund money, a significant proportion of which was to be channelled to third sector organisations in a diverse range of communities. This funding enables third sector organisations to access funds under the following interventions: employability pipelines, social inclusion and poverty reduction, and growing the social economy. I believe that the UK Government are developing the UK shared prosperity fund as a successor fund to replace the ESIF when the UK leaves the European Union. Yet despite repeated promises of a consultation, the launch has been delayed several times. Therefore, charities are yet to have their say on how this fund will evolve and operate, and they have had no clarity on what it will fund, how it will be designed, who can access it, how much it will be worth, or who will manage it. I hope that the

Minister will clarify issues around the consultation and inform the House of what progress will be made in this area.

The Minister referred to the Dormant Assets Commission, which was set up in March 2016, building on the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act 2008. It had the expanded objective of looking at a much wider range of financial assets such as life insurance, pension products and so on. The commission published its final report and a series of recommendations in 2017. It identified some £2 billion-worth of dormant assets that could be freed up and distributed to good causes, for want of a better term. This is considered to be a conservative estimate, much as the value of dormant accounts was undervalued. More assets will also fall dormant in the years ahead, meaning that the fund can deliver in perpetuity.

In 2011, the dormant accounts money was made subject to the Barnett formula and devolved nations were able to set their own spending priorities, with the Big Lottery Fund taking responsibility for distributing money through the Young Start programme, which aims to create opportunities for children and young people. I am sure that Members would hope and expect that the new fund will follow a similar model. However, there has been little detail available about how funding will be allocated and distributed. Future consultation will give the sector an opportunity to ensure that this money can be secured for good causes and successfully targeted to produce the best outcomes. Again, I hope that the Minister can clarify the situation.

The essential elements of voluntary organisations in connecting communities are those who, either individually or collectively, volunteer to run charities and voluntary organisations. In Scotland, this is even an essential element of the nation itself. For instance, as I am sure that Members on both sides of the House from Scottish constituencies will know, the national Church, while it has ministers, is a charitable organisation facilitated by volunteers. Like many other faith-based organisations, it is a cornerstone of national life. Its role in the distinct nature of the Scottish nation is volunteer-led. Yet for volunteering to flourish, we must recognise that it requires investment.

In its report “Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing”, Volunteer Scotland—the national body for volunteering—highlighted the substantial evidence to support the contribution of volunteering to policies where health and wellbeing has an important role to play. That includes key policy areas such as health, education, employment, young people, older people, criminal justice and community engagement. The Minister mentioned isolation and loneliness. Last year, the Scottish Government brought forward their first ever draft strategy, “A Connected Scotland: Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections”, with an additional £1 million of investment, and that is only for the first two years.

Through those policy areas, we understand that volunteering is essential to healthy behaviours and improved daily life—critically, for those who are isolated due to a range of factors, from income to age—and it has the real benefit of allowing people to cope with illness. It is well evidenced that volunteering has a profound positive impact on all our mental health, and the work of so many local groups across these islands,

including Stepping Stones in my constituency, is a testament to the positive impact of volunteering on our mental health.

Yet we face challenging volunteer geography across western society, with a decreasing number of people volunteering. Even in rural communities, where the number has been traditionally high, we are seeing a marked decrease. There is no simple answer to growing volunteering. Our societies are evolving, and as I said, there may be people who do not even recognise that they volunteer.

The Minister mentioned the London Olympics. There were also the Glasgow Commonwealth games, and in a few years the games will be in Birmingham. While large sporting events see spikes in volunteering, there is yet to be substantial evidence that that investment brings a long-term increase in volunteering.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) mentioned the National Citizen Service, an issue on which he and I disagree. For me, my party and the Government of Scotland, the call to have a National Citizen Service only detracts from investment in existing infrastructure in Scotland. There are many national youth organisations; the exact same type of organisation exists and is already funded. Rather than asking for a London-based system, we should look to the systems that already exist in Scotland, as a lot of work is being done by YouthLink Scotland and other organisations.

For me, big society is like Big Brother. It is a threat to individual and collective community action, undermining volunteering in its most basic and fundamental form. It is a society where we have, in the words of Robert Dahl, “an effectively enforced right to form and join autonomous associations”, rather than ones brought about by Government.

5.22 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): My parents were dedicated to voluntary work. Whereas other children played cricket, as you did, Mr Deputy Speaker, or played mummies and daddies or shops, my sisters and I used to play “holding a meeting”, and it was invariably a charity meeting. So it is not a great surprise that, all my adult life, I have tried to work at least one day a week for charity. That has enabled me to move from charity to charity locally, helping to buy a bus for Leonard Cheshire and selling cushions for Fine Cell Work—good golly, that was difficult; nobody likes giving money to prisoners, apart from those involved in the criminal justice system. I also raised money for the urology department—try that, guys; a urology ball, anyone?

There are two things that I am most proud of. First, along with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), I set up NorPIP, as a founding trustee. Our by-line was “Two is too late”, which is not quite true, but it focused strongly on the attachment issues between parents who are struggling and their very young babies. Secondly, I set up the benefactors’ board for my local hospital trust. We described that as the icing on the cake. What we were adding to the NHS, which we all really supported, were the bits that the NHS could not fund, such as new bits of equipment that it could not take the extra leap to fund, nice duvet covers for the children and equipment for the hospital school. I am proud to have set up that fund and

chaired it for many years. I am also proud that my predecessor’s wife took it over when I was elected to this place. She is a great lady, and he is a great man. He has had a knock-back in his charitable experiences today as Age Friendly Banbury has not received the funding it went for, but I know that will not set him back.

I am trying to say that charity work is a great background for someone to be a local MP. It means they know people locally—leant-in people locally—and they know what is going on in their local area. It is of course a great background for everybody. As the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) said, it is really good for everybody’s mental health to volunteer. When our son died, my work for Save the Baby helped me to get back to playing a part in society. We can get positive things, as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, out of tragedy.

To put it politely, volunteers are so much more powerful and good, at fundraising in particular, than paid charity workers. People give money to people. We know that, and we have proved it time and again.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): May I commend two organisations—the Lions and Rotary—to my hon. Friend? I am lucky in my constituency to have Burton Rotary and Uttoxeter Lions. Both organisations raise tens of thousands for good causes in my constituency and, I am sure, across the country. Does she agree that those organisations play a huge role in our communities?

Victoria Prentis: I do. Those are fabulous local groups, and we are lucky enough to have them in my area too. My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to them.

We are not just talking about formal charities today. I would like to tell the Chamber about Tony, my next-door neighbour. He not only takes my children to the bus, reduces the local rat population, uploads new photos on the village website, takes other families’ dogs for walks, and opens and checks the church daily, but he does all this by 8.30 every morning. We all know people like this and, quite frankly, we want to grow into such people. It is great that, as the Minister told us earlier, 30% of adults are doing some volunteering. I would like her to measure not just the money that is given, but the time that is spent by stalwarts of our communities, such as Tony, who do so much for us.

I could not let such an opportunity pass without mentioning Singing for Syrians, which I set up soon after my election in 2015. I heard on the radio that Syrian doctors were working unpaid, and I thought we would have a bit of a whip round. Everybody I asked said yes and tried to help. It is my dream charity. We encourage people to do the work for us and to do their own thing—inspired slightly, I must say, by the Macmillan annual coffee morning. Everybody can get involved in the singing, or in eating at the fabulous Syrian supper clubs. This year, our flagship will be on 10 December in St Margaret’s, and a marvellous cross-party choir of MPs will be taking part. Others do the work; we just receive and distribute the money, and there are events all over the country.

We need the money more than ever. The Hands Up Foundation, which we fund, is one of the very few charities still donating into northern Syria, as the big players have pulled out. Our prosthetic limb clinic was flooded two weeks ago—all the equipment is kept in the

[Victoria Prentis]

basement to protect it from aerial bombardment—and we are trying to raise £10,000 to re-home the limb clinic, which provides such essential services to those who have lost limbs in the war. We are still about £4,000 short of that target, so if anybody would like to give me a cheque afterwards, it would be gratefully received. I encourage everybody present in the Chamber, perhaps if there is a boring moment later, to google “Singing for Syrians” and watch our very short clip, “Sing like they can hear us!” If they have three minutes and want a good laugh, they can google, “Singing for Syrians Flashmob” in Marylebone station, which is fantastic.

I would like to thank everybody who volunteers for all our local and national charities. I especially want to thank those who volunteer in north Oxfordshire. I am particularly proud that we have national bases locally for the Child Brain Injury Trust and for Adoption UK. I am inspired by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), who has a “Volunteering Week”, during which it appears that he does a lot of gardening. I am going to do “Victoria Volunteers” from 23 September for a week, when I am looking forward to cooking for Banbury Young Homelessness Project, eating cake at Restore, making tea at the Royal Voluntary Service and reading to children with the indomitable women of ARCh—Assisted Reading for Children—which is just a fantastic organisation. If I am allowed to, I will also do some volunteer driving for the people who volunteer out of the citizens advice bureau, but they may not want me and I may not pass the check. It is fantastic what is done by people all around our country, and I cannot praise them highly enough. I thank the Minister for all she does.

5.29 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who spoke so passionately.

There is much that makes me proud of the communities I represent across Barnsley East, especially our local charities and community groups, many of which I have had the privilege to visit in recent weeks.

Everyone who cares for a loved one with dementia knows of the immense emotional strain the condition imposes on those who live with it and those who care for them. I know that I speak for many people across Barnsley when I thank BIADS—Barnsley Independent Alzheimer’s and Dementia Support—and Butterflies, two fantastic community groups that provide outstanding support, help and comfort for those living with dementia in our community.

I cannot deny the sense of shame I feel in telling the House that today, in 21st century Britain, after years of austerity, there are children going hungry and families—many of them in employment—who are unable to put food on the table without resorting to a local food bank. Our community came together 30 years ago to feed the families of men who had no option but to go on strike to defend their industry and their way of life. Again, our community is coming together to feed families who face the most desperate conditions because of universal credit, the low-wage insecure economy and wider austerity. I have nothing but praise for our food

banks—for the volunteers who give their time and their heart to run them, and for the generosity of all those who donate.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech. Does she agree that the Trussell Trust provides fantastic leadership with its food banks across the country, and that very often it is people from faith groups, particularly churches and chapels, who do so much to support this really important work?

Stephanie Peacock: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point, and one that I was about to touch on.

In the coming school holidays, food banks will again be busy. I cannot help but ask: surely it must be possible to create a society where children do not go hungry.

Just as our food banks battle want, our churches battle the scandal of homelessness. A man died sleeping on our streets last year, simply because he had nowhere to live. The homelessness he experienced is a situation that far too many people face. I praise the Barnsley Churches Drop-In, which provides support to those who are sadly homeless. But again I say: it does not have to be like this.

Every time I visit charities and community groups, I see the amazing work they do and the real difference they make in our community, but there is another side to the story. Many of our brilliant local charities and community groups in Barnsley have been affected by this Government’s austerity since 2010. Cuts to public services have forced them to take on extra work and have put them under increasing pressure. Cuts amounting to 40% make Barnsley Council the worst affected in the country and have left it struggling to support those local charities and community groups.

What the Government do not seem to understand is that cuts have consequences. Luminar, a Barnsley charity where volunteers helped children and families affected by domestic violence, has been forced to close. The Barnsley Bereavement Support Service, which supports those struggling with the shock of losing someone close to them, is short of funding and faces closure. That is shameful.

Despite the many difficulties, so many fantastic groups—far more than I can mention here today—continue to support local people. They do so thanks to the efforts of the brilliant volunteers who work for them. They are passionate, determined and dedicated to helping others. They give so much of themselves in supporting our community. It is time that the Government supported them and gave them the proper funding that they need and deserve.

On one visit to a local community group, I saw a sign that, more than anything else, sums up the local volunteers in my constituency. It simply said, “Volunteers are not paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.” I could not have put it better myself.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Unfortunately, I have to take the time limit down to five minutes to get everybody in.

5.34 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Everybody here has interests to declare, so I shall rattle quickly through mine. I may mention some of these organisations: I am a recently retired trustee of the Gloucestershire Community Foundation; the current chair of the Gloucester History Trust; a joint patron of the charity HaVinG a Voice in Gloucester, which helps the homeless on to pathways; and a joint patron of the Discover DeCrypt project at St Mary de Crypt church and school. Every year, I volunteer with Gloucestershire Royal Hospital.

Today is a very good time for this debate and I congratulate the Minister on her introduction to it. She is quite right to focus on what is such a big part of such a big society. She is quite right to say that volunteers and charities are at the heart of every community in all our constituencies, and she is inspired to highlight some of the new awards that have been given to projects about deprivation and community. I would have loved to have seen at least one of those come the way of Gloucester, but there may be opportunities for that shortly. The more she is able to do on this front, with the help of the Chancellor, the more difference it will make to local pride, local people and local potential. Let me share some thoughts from almost 12 years of focus on community and its role in the regeneration of Gloucester.

The first point is that pride matters hugely. England and Britain's characteristics include an attractive self-deprecation and a not always so attractive approach to not appreciating ourselves, our cities, our towns and villages enough. How do we measure pride and what does it mean? There is no index, but there are various indicators we can use. I often use Centre for Cities' research as a snapshot of how our city is doing relative to others. The employment rate immediately tells me that Gloucester is working. We have the fourth-best employment rate of any city in the nation. Then there are the less tangible things, such as the amount of volunteering.

Can any of us truly say that we know how many people are volunteering and how many hours they give to our city or our county? It is very hard to tell, but when we look at the different ingredients it is there for us to see. For example, Gloucestershire Royal Hospital has over 400 volunteers, not including the 30-plus in the chaplain's office. The Gloucester Civic Trust has hundreds of volunteers who play a crucial role on Gloucester Day and on heritage open days, which are one of those wonderful things that have grown and grown.

We then have the community groups themselves. The Redwell Centre in Matson is a fantastic success, with programmes, projects and activities for everybody from the very young to the very old, including the cross-faith and denomination Together in Matson. There are community groups, such as Chit Chat within St James's church in Quedgeley, which involve the community. There are the festivals, which all our communities have. I would like to talk about the Gloucester History Festival, which I started eight years ago and which now has 24,000 visitors.

We have groups who help the homeless and rough sleepers. The George Whitefield Centre incorporates Gloucestershire care services, the Gloucester City Mission and the food bank, which has lots of volunteers. It is

not just Christian charities either. Islamic groups in Gloucester are raising funds for good causes. There are immigrants who are giving back to the society that has looked after them since they left their own country. I want to single out Babu Odedra and Ash Chavda. They own the Olympus Theatre, where there is a great project to regenerate culture and drama in the heart of Barton in Gloucester. There are the Rotary Clubs. We now get all the Rotary Clubs in Gloucester together and we have our community awards every year, with some £10,000 going to about 20 different groups. These little things matter and it is a way for charities to highlight what they are doing to a group of people who are very charitably minded. The Barnwood Trust nearby, a mental health-focused charity, now interprets mental health in a much wider way. There are lots of things that help. The Gloucester Pride festival every year attracts many times the numbers it had when it started, as does the Lantern festival, which ends up at the cathedral.

What works? What transforms communities and cities? I think often, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) mentioned, out of sadness can come determination to change. Charities are formed from disasters in families, such as: the Hollie Gazzard Trust which is about to celebrate its fifth anniversary; Charlie's Cancer Support group; and the Nelson Trust, which does great things for women in trouble. All of these things boost pride. Success breeds confidence and success. Buildings help. As Churchill said, we shape buildings and then they shape us. Above all, it is about the potential in our societies and things that are good for mental health. The role of volunteering and charities is absolutely critical.

5.39 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I am really pleased to speak in this debate and to talk about my experience of 23 years both as a volunteer at and manager of a local citizens advice bureau. People volunteer for many different reasons. I volunteered because I was at home with a young baby, and I wanted to get out and do something else other than sing "The Wheels on the Bus" for a while. I was really glad I did, because when I was left alone with that baby, I realised that CAB was in my blood and I wanted to stay there, and I got a paid job there.

Volunteers include young people looking for work or people who are retired. There are many different roles within even one charity, with many different demands—advice, reception, admin, media, specialisms, social policy and trustees—and it is the job of the manager or the volunteer co-ordinator to ensure that everyone is in the right role and that they are trained, supervised and reviewed to check that we meet their aims and that they meet the organisation's aims. They are perhaps even given targets for improvement and sometimes even brought to recognise that they are perhaps no longer in the right place and could move on. It is obvious that volunteers take considerable management to provide a service within the charity's aims. Volunteers give their time freely; they are not free.

We had 50 volunteers and 29 paid staff working full time, with a full-time volunteer co-ordinator, as well as the chief executive officer and deputy. Volunteers do a great job. They have a real stake in their organisation, but sometimes, as demands change, they need taking

[Yvonne Fovargue]

through the change process. This perhaps needs someone to take them through the process differently than they would with paid staff. I would never have wanted to change to having all paid staff. There is a value in the diversity of volunteers—there are people who are rooted in their communities, who really want to give their time. Sometimes I used to find that people wanted me to give far too much time, wanting me to stay till 7 o'clock every night when my daughter needed putting to bed, but that was my problem.

There have been changes in the charity environment. Many charities now have to be business-focused, particularly those providing public services, and they are moving to having contracts, not grants. I think that is a good thing, as long as the key performance indicators are right and are not just focused on outputs, and the charity looks at its charitable objectives and does not just go for anything. That is where the trustee board comes in. There is a need for a mix of specialist and local skills in accounting, business planning, and grievance and disciplinary procedures. As charities grow, they need to regularly reassess their trustee board, just as much as their management. They need to check that it has the skills to manage the chief executive—I have to say that as a chief exec, that was not always an easy job.

Citizens Advice is a shining example of a charity that uses the experience gained on the ground in local communities to try to effect national change through social policy work. We see the unintended effect of legislation and must be able to speak out. That is not party political—heaven knows, I have criticised every Government since 1986.

I want to move on to my local community and the charities there. Not all charities need to be big; many start from local need. I will mention a couple. Embrace is a user-led charity for people with disabilities. To me, that exemplifies the importance of users being involved and empowering people. It is about asking, “What do they want?” rather than asking them just to take what they are given. There is also the Abram Ward community co-operative, which has projects combating loneliness by bringing young and old together to make items such as go-carts. Wigan Council has a deal whereby it works with charities and community groups and provides small grants and trains volunteers. It has really invigorated the local community so that people feel like a community, not just a collection of individuals who happen to live near one another.

I would not be here today without having volunteered at my local CAB. It led to a career spanning 23 years. That was not my intention when I walked through the door into the manager's office at Sale CAB. I worked with volunteers and enjoyed and valued their commitment, diversity and humour. I feel that it has really enriched my life, and I hope that it has contributed to improving the lives of those in the local community.

5.44 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): We in this House are all grateful for the dedication of charities and volunteers in our constituencies and impressed by their achievements. As the Government's civil society strategy states, global Britain is rooted in local Britain, and I am pleased to say that my constituency has many

residents groups, community charities and local branches of national charities. I want to place on the record my thanks for the incredible work done by all volunteers in our communities.

Celebrating civil society is a recognition that it is not good enough to expect the state, whether national or local government, to do everything. Far too often in the past, it has fallen to organisations such as city councils to be responsible for everything, when in reality they cannot be, and even if they could, it would disempower communities. Supporting charities and volunteers is a recognition that organisations outside the state are often better able to tackle certain challenges and provide certain social goods. What matters is that these parts, across public, private and civil society, work together to create something greater than their sum.

Over the summer, I was pleased to host funding workshops at Blurton community hub, in my constituency, with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the People's Postcode Lottery. Both events were well attended by community and charitable organisations, and I hope that from them we will see more successful bids and the investment we need in our local communities.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council recently empowered communities by creating a community investment fund focused on investing in equipment and assets with a longer-term impact. Since it started two years ago, £1.7 million has been invested, with a further £1.3 million to be announced soon. The council also recently set up the Potto Lotto, a Potteries-based lottery, where 60% of the ticket price goes to local charities and players can nominate a good cause to fund. This shows the proactive and innovative approach being taken in partnership locally that is empowering communities and charities to deliver great returns.

Another excellent local example of joint working is the North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership, which promotes the north Staffordshire line—for example, by helping to create more welcoming station environments for passengers, including at Longton in my constituency. I have no doubt that its efforts over the past decade have helped to double local rail usage, which I fully expect the new franchisee to reflect with improvements on the line. That highly localised work at Longton has had a knock-on effect in the form of a bronze medal at the Britain in Bloom festival in the first year of its taking part, thanks to the hard work of volunteers at Longton Community Partnership.

All this contributes to much-needed footfall, as do the charity shops that occupy what would otherwise be empty premises on our high streets. Some people complain about the number of charity shops, but it is always better that these shops are occupied, and of course the future high streets fund will help further. Local charities, such as Dougie Mac and Bethel church, are putting funding straight back into the local area. Furthermore, following the successes of Longton and Blurton at Britain in Bloom, it is fantastic to see the local community in Fenton coming forward with a Fenton in Flower competition.

Many local sports clubs rely almost entirely on volunteers. I think of clubs such as Hanford, Meakins Fenton, Longton and Hem Heath cricket clubs, Longton and Trentham rugby clubs, and Foley football club, alongside Stoke City football club, of course, which is involved extensively with local charitable work, especially with young people, through its community trust. Longton

rugby club, which was visited by the Prime Minister herself, is mainly run by volunteers. Its website stresses that none of what the club does behind the scenes and on the pitch would be possible without the dedicated work and support of volunteers.

In Meir, local partners, including the YMCA, are working to combat some of the challenges we are experiencing with antisocial behaviour and gangs. Critical to this is improving sports facilities for the community to ensure a distraction for those young people. Recent visits to charities in my constituency have shown me the breadth and vitality of the important work being done by these volunteers. The Grocott Centre, for example, which I visited in January, is a local independent charity based in Fenton that promotes the welfare, wellbeing and social inclusion of vulnerable groups. It does incredible work with people with dementia, elderly people and adults with learning or physical disabilities.

I was delighted that Blurton Farm residents association received the Queen's award for voluntary service in 2018, owing to the huge commitment and tireless work of volunteers, especially its chair, Christine Pratt. Other charities I have visited recently include Landau Stoke, Father Hudson's Care, the Gingerbread Centre, Deaflinks and Temple Street Methodist church community café. I am hugely grateful to them all for the excellent work they do in the community. The Donna Louise children's hospice and the Douglas Macmillan hospice also do phenomenal work to support families at their most harrowing and difficult times, and staff and volunteers—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am sorry but the hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5.49 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton). You have presented us with a challenge, Mr Deputy Speaker—to say everything that we want to say about connecting communities by supporting charities and volunteers, and to do it within five minutes—but I will have a go.

The House has been discussing charities for a very long time. The Charitable Uses Act was presented here in 1601. I venture to say that charities seem to be rather more popular than politicians. A recent survey by the Charities Aid Foundation found that 80% of adults in the United Kingdom think that charities play an essential role. Can we imagine a positive rating of 80% for any politician?

Another Member paid tribute to the work of the all-party parliamentary group on charities and volunteering. Let me now pay tribute to my fellow officers in the group: my noble Friend Baroness Pitkeathley, Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) and Lord Shinkwin. I also pay tribute to our secretariat, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and—most important of the lot—the large number of affiliated members of charities and community groups.

We all have amazing community groups in our constituencies. We can always argue here, as we do, about what is the role of the state and what is the role of voluntary groups, but that is not the debate that I want to have today. I want, for instance, to pay tribute to the amazing work of WINGS Wrexham, which works against

period poverty in the borough of Wrexham. It deals with the lack of access to female sanitary products by providing collection points and fulfils a vital advocacy role.

I have five main points to make in slightly under three minutes. First, the Minister mentioned sustainable finance. That is important, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield said earlier, volunteering does not come free and should not be done on the cheap. I urge the Minister and, indeed, all decision-makers to look back on some of the good work that resulted from the compact between the Government and voluntary sector. Let us aspire to longer-term funding, strategic planning, and—yes—full cost recovery.

Secondly, we know that volunteers, charities and community groups have a huge advocacy role. It was said in the Government's civil society strategy that simply being in receipt of taxpayers' money should not inhibit charities from making their voices heard on matters of policy and practice, and I welcome those words, but I want to see that always happening in practice. Charities have been, small p, political and have undertaken advocacy since the Royal British Legion campaigned on the rights of soldiers returning home after the first world war. I urge the Government to look again at the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 and to take on board some of the recommendations of Lord Hodgson on that.

Thirdly, I believe that we need to rethink philanthropy. The Minister mentioned the development of gift aid, which is indeed very positive, and the gift aid small donations scheme, but we should also take account of the new philanthropy whereby people make donations that are backed up by supermarkets and other stores. There is no Treasury support on top of that, but consideration should be given to providing such support as part of the small donations scheme. That could work in much the same way as the donations of furniture to the British Heart Foundation.

Fourthly, the Minister mentioned the revival of deprived areas by means of dormant cash. I hope that she takes on board many of the ideas that have been advanced by voluntary organisations. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has referred to the need for a revolution in community ownership and participation.

Finally, let me make a point about trustees. The Minister mentioned that she was a trustee. I hope that she will support the ten-minute rule Bill that I will present on 6 March. According to the Charity Commission, at least 100,000 new trustees are appointed every year. I think that it is time to give them a status in law similar to that of school governors, local councillors, magistrates and those in other categories when it comes to time off for their duties—unpaid time off. I should be grateful if the Minister looked into that because it is time that we changed the law.

5.54 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones).

During my time as a fire officer, Strathclyde fire and rescue was, as it still is, supported by volunteer firefighters. Indeed, in many remote and rural areas and islands, these dedicated individuals provide the first, and sometimes

[Bill Grant]

the only, response to emergencies in their own communities. Another public service, the NHS, experiences increasing demand for patient transport, and patients are seeking to minimise their time spent at hospital. Free transport tailored to an individual's needs is provided by charities such as Ayrshire Cancer Support, and they are to be applauded for their good work. I also want to mention Maxine Allan for the Whiteleys Retreat, which provides rural respite facilities for children living with cancer. Some charities, such as the British Heart Foundation and Ayr's SeAscape, are fortunate to have volunteers with the specialist skill to upcycle furniture and can so PAT—portable appliance testing—on electrical items for use by those given accommodation, particularly those who have been homeless.

A ladies lunch club held in aid of Ayrshire hospice recently helped to fund a new spa room for the patients; that was a remarkable achievement by these ladies, and there are many such groups throughout my constituency. On a visit to Alloway guides, I found them collecting items to pass on to others less fortunate than themselves and the seed of caring and sharing being planted at an early age with the project Citizen Girl. Volunteers also ensure the continuation of many annual events in my constituency, such as the Boswell book festival and the Cumnock tryst. Even Ayr's famous Gaiety theatre is reliant upon the contributions of a team of volunteers, and the Belleisle conservatory was saved from dereliction to a delight by a group of dedicated volunteers.

However, there does not need to be a material or financial contribution, but simply people giving their time. The Rotary clubs have been mentioned for the good work they do, and I joined the Alloway Rotary just last Saturday for a litter pick in its community; that is most welcome.

By helping others, people might also help themselves get on to the employment ladder. Many life skills acquired while volunteering are transferable and often prove to be impressive on a CV. Many individuals who started out volunteering with the Prince's Trust and other organisations have succeeded in finding permanent work placements.

Finally, I want to mention the most wonderful volunteer group and charity we have in the British Isles: the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, not just at Girvan but throughout the British Isles, and those who volunteer to serve at sea to save the lives of seafarers or those who are enjoying themselves on our very pleasant beaches, and equally those who are land-based who raise the charitable funds that wholly support the RNLI. As a nation we should be extremely proud of the volunteers who go to sea and those who raise funds on the land.

Although it is important that volunteers are properly vetted on sensitive matters, we must ensure that this valuable resource is neither exploited nor burdened by unnecessary regulation in what is a potentially litigious society. I hope that the Governments will continue to recognise the value of volunteers, and the contribution they make to their fellow citizens and their communities.

5.58 pm

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): It has been said that volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy: we vote in elections once a year perhaps, but when we

volunteer we vote every day about the kind of community we want to live in. I am sure I speak on behalf of many Members in saying it is a privilege to see and support the fantastic charitable work taking place in my constituency of Colne Valley, across Kirklees and across the country. Volunteers are people who through their actions make a commitment to the kind of community they want to be a part of: a community that is a friend to those facing isolation, that advocates for those without a voice, and that helps to feed families in need at the most difficult times. The dedication and commitment these volunteers and charitable workers have to this vision of a better society is invaluable.

I want to use my time today to thank just a few of the people doing brilliant work in Colne Valley and throughout Kirklees. I recently visited Clare House, a development aimed at tackling homelessness by providing accommodation and supporting residents with complex needs. In addition to providing a safe environment, Clare House offers the time and resources to help people to rebuild their lives. It is supported by Kirklees Council, but many volunteers also support it by donating their work and time.

A number of groups are also working to ensure that those in need have enough food for their families, and I have seen at first hand the wonderful work being done by the Welcome Centre, the Mission, the Women's Centre, Holmfirth food bank and the Fit and Fed programme. The warmth of the Colne Valley people is also seen in the local groups aiming to tackle social isolation, including Clem's Garden and Friend To Friend. In the true spirit of our local community, people are reaching out to one another to share experiences and to form friendships. Destitute Asylum Seekers Huddersfield, where I was once a volunteer myself, has turned around the lives of many who have experienced displacement and trauma. Ruddi's Retreat and Waves are both charities supporting vulnerable children and their families. There are too many others to mention, but I am grateful to them all for their hard work and community spirit.

All these charities, and the work they do, help to provide a safety net for vulnerable people. I have seen this need grow and grow in the past eight years as austerity has pushed more and more people into poverty and difficult circumstances, but here's the thing: I actually do not believe in relying on charity. If the Government are doing their job properly, people should not need to rely on voluntary support. These groups should not be stretched beyond capacity, and workers should not feel pressured to provide support when the Government fall short. Food bank usage should not be at its highest rate on record, homeless people should not be dying on our streets, and over 4 million children should not be living in poverty. A Government should provide access to quality education, healthcare, social care and housing for every citizen; that is their right in a civilised society. That is what I believe in, and it is what I will continue to fight for. In the meantime, I will continue to admire and support those who give up their time and resources to help others.

6.1 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): A week past Monday, the Minister, who spoke so well at the start of this debate, was reported in *Hansard* as saying, "thank goodness for Stirling!" I hope that she will feel compelled

to say something similar when she sums up at the end of this debate. Much has been said today about how communities become connected by volunteering, and I cannot let this opportunity pass without saying, with no little pride and a great deal of humility, that Stirling is an epicentre when it comes to volunteering. Stirling was the UK's sole contender for the European volunteering capital for 2020, and it was shortlisted to the final two.

The latest Scottish household survey shows that 39% of people in Stirling volunteer, compared with the national average for Scotland of 28%. This means that 30,000 people are enlisted as volunteers, working to improve the quality of life in so many aspects of the Stirling constituency. They are young and old, male and female, and people of faith and no faith. They are the people who keep our community centres open, who provide vital care for vulnerable people and who are working to enhance and protect our environment. It is the volunteers who are the backbone of Stirling district citizens advice bureau, and of Start Up Stirling, which runs Stirling's food bank and mobile food bank. They do so much to support and help people who are in difficulties and distress for any number of reasons, and they do so in a way that is entirely focused on helping people to get back on their feet, whether that involves a short-term or a longer-term commitment. Those organisations have my deep and abiding appreciation and admiration, and I am glad that my office works closely with both of them.

Let us take the Trossachs search and rescue team as another example. They won several prestigious Scottish and UK-wide awards last year and, more importantly, they have won the gratitude of the many communities from Strathblane to Strathyre who were cut off and isolated as a result of the "beast from the east". The Braeport memory cafe in Dunblane and Town Break in Stirling do a magnificent job in helping and supporting those with dementia and their families. With new initiatives being planned in other parts of my constituency, the work of those volunteers is inspirational. Many of their families have been affected by dementia, as indeed has mine.

The Doune Community Woodland Group has recently completed another successful path project at Doune ponds. It was officially opened just last Saturday, and it is physically connecting communities as well as encouraging health and wellbeing in this historic rural community. Then there is PLUS Forth Valley, which is based in Stirling and works with children with additional support requirements and their families. Its motto is "disabilities are no barrier to fun" and the hard work of its extraordinary volunteers makes that statement come to life. They have my full admiration.

I was recently privileged to attend the annual Killin Drama Club panto. Not only was it a superb production, but it was very funny and brought the whole community together, enhancing everybody's wellbeing. I want specifically to mention Gordon Hibbert, who has written and directed the pantomime for the past 24 years. I look forward to his 25th production this year.

Volunteering is the fastener that brings our communities together and then keeps them together. As parliamentarians, when we see a societal need or a social injustice, it is always tempting to reach into taxpayers' pockets to fund an imposed remedy. However, when we do that,

often inadvertently creating governmental agencies and complex bureaucracies, we must be very careful. Communities that work together can not only bring about sustainable change, but be strengthened and uplifted in the process. They provide the service, but they also give love and receive love in return. That is the enduring thing which binds us all together, come what may.

6.6 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I start by declaring an interest, because I will refer to organisations in which I am involved. I am a patron of a charity called Futureversity, co-founder and chair of the Uprising leadership charity, and co-founder of the One Million Mentors initiative.

We need a lively, independent, vibrant and innovative civil society sector, as many Members have said. Volunteering and charitable activity is a critical foundation of our society and the hallmark of a healthy society and economy. The sector must be underpinned by both Government and philanthropic funding and donations encouraged by incentives such as Gift Aid, which was introduced by the Labour Government. I hope that this Government will consider other imaginative ways of encouraging donations.

No society is truly healthy if the high fiscal rewards for entrepreneurship or investment are not matched by a strong sense of social responsibility and bonds of reciprocity. Charities and volunteers work tirelessly, especially in the current climate, to create a fairer society, to address environmental challenges in our communities, to tackle poverty and inequality and to address social justice challenges. The Charities Aid Foundation found that 80% of UK adults think that charities play an essential role in their local community. Britain is a better place thanks to philanthropy, charity and voluntary activity.

My constituency is famous for volunteers, community organisations and old institutions, such as Toynbee Hall, which employed Clement Attlee before his entry into politics. He became mayor of Stepney in my constituency, then a Member of Parliament in the area, and later one of the most successful Prime Ministers of the past century. The east end of London has a great heritage of charitable activity and entrepreneurship, and that has continued. London's Air Ambulance, which serves people across our capital, is based in my constituency, and many people do not realise that it is a charity. We have the Osmani Trust, the Attlee Foundation, the Young Foundation, City Gateway, Muslim Aid and many others. The ones that I am not mentioning will be offended, but there are hundreds of them, so I am unable to name them all. The fact is that charities should not replace the functions of the state; what they do must be complementary. They should enrich our society, not put plasters on the wounds inflicted by the Government.

This week, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions finally admitted that the Government's universal credit policy has led to an increase in food bank use. We know that food banks do amazing work, but in a civilised society they should not have to do it. Their funding could be invested elsewhere if the Government addressed those issues. The Government should support charities, but not expect them to substitute for what public services should be doing.

[Rushanara Ali]

I want to draw on my experience of starting up charities. I had the good fortune of working for the author of the 1945 Labour manifesto, Michael Young, in his later life. It was the best kind of apprenticeship in politics and social entrepreneurship. I saw that we can be imaginative in addressing the big social challenges in our country by using insight, observation and research, but that means that the Government must fund innovation. I appeal to the Minister to do that.

I also appeal to the Minister to address some of the issues relating to unspent or ineffective funding, such as the £10 million provided to the National Citizen Service for unfilled places. We need more effective spending in the charitable sector, which desperately needs support. It was promised that £425 million that was invested in the Olympic village would be returned to the charitable sector. That money could be used immediately by charities that desperately need help to address issues such as youth crime.

I was able to set up charities to help young people. I hope that this Government will continue to support them. If they do, there will be direct benefits to our economy. I am grateful that we are having this debate, and I hope the Government continue to invest in that very important sector.

6.11 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali). I join her in praising the valuable contribution that charities and volunteers make to our local communities.

Modern lifestyles mean that we often do not interact with our closest neighbours as much as we used to. Some people may not even know the name of their elderly neighbours, who are perhaps alone and vulnerable to doorstep crime, such as rogue traders and scams. Although there is no substitute for personal contact with our neighbours, our busy lives sometimes make that difficult so we should look at other ways to keep people connected. Technology in the charitable sector can empower volunteers and enable people to address crime in their community.

In my constituency, people want to see more officers on the beat, and I welcome the Government funding to address that. However, the residents I speak to also highlight the lack of community awareness and cohesion. If we are truly to tackle that and address vulnerability and crime, people need to know how to get to know their neighbours and work with the police and their local authorities.

As part of the coalition Government's localism agenda, Baroness Helen Newlove was appointed Government champion for active, safer communities. In 2011, she published a report that argued that there is a public appetite for greater involvement with neighbourhood watch and other activities. It said:

"Being actively involved in your community and helping to keep it safe needs to become the norm rather than the exception."

The Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network has been successful in connecting people. There are 170,000 neighbourhood watch schemes across England and Wales, supported by 173,000 dedicated volunteer co-ordinators,

covering 3.8 million member households. It is the UK's largest voluntary crime prevention movement. Every week, tens of thousands of residents and volunteers share information to keep themselves and their communities safe from crime.

In my borough of Stockport, the neighbourhood watch association is helping the Greater Manchester police's economic crime unit to tackle scams by providing free training sessions to make residents scam-aware. The borough of Stockport has the highest percentage of residents aged over 65 in Greater Manchester and the highest number of recorded scams in the region. I hosted a similar scam smart event last autumn, which brought together Greater Manchester police and charities such as Age UK and Citizens Advice. Although it was distressing to share stories of criminal fraud, there was a real appetite among the attendees to learn how best to protect themselves. By harnessing technology we can encourage active community engagement, which will have the knock-on effect of helping to address urban crime and strengthen local bonds.

People really are starting to get connected; social media and mobile phone apps have been adopted by some neighbourhoods to distribute and discuss information in an informal way. Sharing information in this way can make people feel that they are part of a wider network, working together to keep their community safe. Mobile phone apps also generate a sense of community, through feelings of collective safety and information sharing. Indeed, some Cheadle residents having been organising and engaging in neighbourhood groups for some time. The challenge is in connecting such groups with local police forums in order that there can be an exchange of information, but it can be overcome. A national roll-out of a neighbourhood watch app could be an invaluable tool in joining up volunteers spread across different force areas. If successful, it would enable charities and volunteers, working together with residents, police and local authorities, to make a real difference to the wellbeing of the community.

That is why I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State's commitment to establish the charity digital skills partnership, to help charities build their digital skills. That fund is investing up to £1 million in upskilling civil society leaders so they are able to embed digital into their organisations. I hope that money will also filter down into organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch. It is essential that those working in the charity sector are equipped with the skills they need to fully embrace the potential of new technologies and empower communities. This debate has enabled us to show our appreciation for the tireless work of volunteers and the third sector, and I look forward to the advancement of new technologies in the charitable sector, too.

6.16 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate, because volunteering is the life-blood that flows through our communities. It is what keeps the heart of our communities beating throughout my constituency, the whole of Scotland and the whole of the UK. My constituency is particularly blessed with many charitable and voluntary groups and organisations, such as the Beith Community Development Trust; Promoting Kilwinning; Largs Community Garden;

Café Solace, in Kilbirnie and in Ardrossan, run by Recovery at Work; the Scottish Centre for Personal Safety, in Ardrossan; the Ayrshire Community Trust; North Ayrshire Cancer Care; the Arran Community and Voluntary Service; CLASP—the Community Led Action and Support Project—in Stevenston; the Opportunities in Retirement groups across North Ayrshire; the Ayrshire Hospice volunteers; the North Ayrshire food banks; the RNLI—Royal National Lifeboat Institution—Largs; and of course the committee that keeps the heart of Whitlees beating by running the Whitlees community centre in Ardrossan. I should also mention all of those who work in each of our towns to provide gala days such as the Saltcoats Sea Queen festival and so many other events. There are far, far too many people and groups to mention, but they all provide a range of services throughout the community, for our young people and not so young people.

We can be proud that 27% of adults in Scotland, more than 1.2 million people, have volunteered formally through an organisation or group in the past year, and this figure has remained relatively stable for the past nine years. Some 30% of adults living in North Ayrshire, an estimated 34,000 people, volunteer formally, which is above the national Scottish figure of 27%. In recent years, it is estimated that volunteers living in North Ayrshire contributed 4.5 million hours of help and £62 million to the local economy—the figure for the whole of Scotland is believed to be £2 billion contributed to our economy by volunteers. The future looks bright, as research on participation and attitudes among young people aged between 11 and 18 found that youth volunteering participation had grown to 52%, which is nearly double the adult figure of 27%. As we have heard, volunteering can lead to enhanced job prospects as well, as new skills are learned and confidence grows for the volunteer.

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations tells us that the third sector is made up of a variety of organisations, such as registered charities, housing organisations, sports and art clubs, and so on—the list is very long. These organisations do fantastic and important work, such as delivering employability services, supporting people with health challenges, bringing people together through social activities, forming self-help and support groups, and, of course, improving our environment through conservation, heritage groups and regenerating our communities.

If Members speak to volunteers, they will always tell us about the satisfaction and fulfilment that they find in the work they do. Of course, not only does each volunteer often make more of a difference to their community than they may ever even know, but the whole army of volunteers that populates our communities has such a profound effect, and they are so woven into the fabric of our streets and towns, that they are part of our daily lives.

Interestingly, the London School of Economics found a clear relationship between volunteering and happiness: the more people volunteered, the happier they were—and they were much happier than those who did not volunteer at all. Throughout my constituency I have met some wonderful people who selflessly give up their time to help others and to add value to their community in ways that cannot be measured in pounds and pence because their value is much more profound than that.

Studies also show that volunteering is an effective tool against depression and anxiety and is an excellent confidence booster, on top of the fact that such volunteers enjoy a wider social circle.

It is the basic, human, fundamental desire to help others that drives our army of volunteers in towns across the UK, Scotland and North Ayrshire and Arran, and throughout our communities. They are the too-often unsung heroes who perform such valuable work in our communities, day in, day out, and upon whom our communities rely and could not well do without. It is right and fitting that today we celebrate and recognise these unsung heroes, which is why I am delighted to have spoken in this debate and why, in common with everybody in the Chamber, I am sure, I want to take this opportunity to say, to each and every one of them, thank you.

6.21 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), who gave a fantastic speech.

I have been volunteering all my life—it is truly in my DNA. I started when I was around seven, taking children from inner-city Birmingham to camps in the countryside. I continued at university, doing a stint as a counsellor answering the Nightline service, and then with a long-standing role with the National Childbirth Trust. Finally, I spent 15 years with the scout movement. I have also taken an active role at my local church throughout my life.

In my business life, I have seen the massive value and benefit of volunteering and community activity for my businesses and other businesses that I know about. I was proud to be a founding trustee for the LoveBrum charity, which helps to empower small charities that do not have Government funding—true grassroots charities working across Birmingham, where my business was based—to make a real difference and receive funding. It is fantastic to see those charities now going from strength to strength. I have seen how leaders throughout the business community have embraced volunteering for their employees, because they know that it helps to build stronger employees and a stronger work culture. Ultimately, it makes businesses attractive places to work, so it is truly a win-win.

I have been privileged and fortunate all my life to have taken part in such activities. I have made friends for life, developed new skills and learned more about myself than I could ever have imagined. Such opportunities have truly changed my life. In particular, if someone can stand up in a room full of eight-year-old cub scouts and get them to be quiet and say their prayers, it is just a small step to standing up in this place.

In common with other Members, I wish to pay tribute to some of the fantastic charities in my constituency. I have been blown away by the compassion and commitment of local people in Redditch. I cannot mention them all, but I wish to highlight the Repair Café; Carers Careline; Men in Sheds, the recent recipient of a £10,000 Big Lottery grant; Redditch Nightstop; Boys2Men, a charity that recently won the inspirational mentor award from the Kids Count charity here in Parliament; Your Ideas; the YMCA; Home-Start; Where Next; the Sandycroft Centre; and, of course, the League of Friends of the Alex hospital in my constituency.

[Rachel Maclean]

In the time I have left, I wish to focus on the impact of the National Citizen Service in my constituency, which I have visited and supported. Volunteering is a fantastic opportunity for young people to develop confidence as they go on to tackle the challenges in their lives. In particular, the NCS scheme enables them to get out from behind the technology and screens that so often dominate the lives of young people today. It puts them in situations outside their comfort zone, and they have to work together in groups with young people they would not normally meet in their neighbourhoods or school classrooms. They are learning vital life skills at a really early age. NCS builds their confidence and helps them to develop resilience to tackle some of the problems that they face in this day and age. I really want to congratulate the Minister on the work that the Government are doing in that regard.

I want to highlight the role that social prescribing can play in this really important arena. I have heard Members say that, often, those who volunteer get more out of the process than the people who are the recipients. Surely, this is a fantastic opportunity to harness this power for good to contribute to the health of our nation as a whole. We need to connect our communities—there are people who need help and who need volunteering—in a systematic and widespread way. That would be a massive and encouraging step forward. The Health Secretary has recently outlined such a plan, which, I am pleased to say, will be backed up by Government funding in the future.

I must just mention the Commonwealth games. Redditch is obviously very close to Birmingham where we will be holding our Commonwealth games in 2022. I am the vice-chair of the all-party group for the Commonwealth games. I have been leading a campaign in my local area to ensure that there is legacy and an active contribution from Redditch to this fantastic event. We want to play a part and we are looking forward to the games.

We are a nation of volunteers. I will finish with one quote. The recipe for happiness is very simple. What we need is, “Someone to care for, something to do, and something to look forward to.” Volunteering addresses all three of those things.

6.26 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It is really great to get the opportunity to speak in this debate. There are so many charities and organisations that I could mention, but, with just five minutes in which to speak, I clearly do not have the time to do so. I could easily speak for a number of hours about the different organisations that I have seen in my constituency, as I am sure could Members across this House. I echo those who have said thank you to our volunteers, particularly to those who are genuinely involved in charitable organisations and charitable activities across Scotland and across the wider UK. Our communities would be incredibly different without them.

I shall start on a slightly negative note, but I promise that the rest of my speech will be positive. When talking about the number of people volunteering, I have to say that I have a real concern about millennials and their ability to volunteer given that they are working in jobs that are lower paid than in previous generations, given

that their housing costs are increased, and that, in some cases, they are having to work more hours than those from previous generations. Finding time to volunteer in that stramash of everything that has been going on since the financial crisis is really hard for them. Anything that the Government can do to help, such as increasing the minimum wage, would be great as it would give people that breathing space so that they can have time to go out and volunteer.

I have one more general point in relation to corporate social responsibility. When I sit down and speak to organisations that want to put forward corporate social responsibility, I say to them, “Most people can paint a shed or do something like that, but if you are an IT organisation and you can bring your expertise to help people improve their IT systems or to help people fill in funding applications, that would be absolutely vital for some of our frontline charities.” I encourage companies thinking about corporate social responsibility to go down those routes if they possibly can, especially if they have that expertise within their organisations.

Let me talk about some of the charities in my constituency. There is an organisation called Lighthouse in Tillydrone, which was co-founded by John Merson. This man has had an amazing life. As a prison pastor, he found that there was almost a revolving door for people coming out of prison, and he wanted to help them. His church was in an affluent area of Aberdeen, but he started to work in one of Aberdeen’s more deprived communities. The difference that his project has made to people coming out of prison in that community is absolutely unbelievable. The work was totally taken on by him to begin with, but he now has an army of volunteers and paid workers. He planted the seed of that project, and it could not have been better for that community.

Newhills Parish Church has a Living Well Café and a dementia outreach service. It has a befriending project, which provides support for people who are lonely. The café is linked in with dementia services, and it is a brilliant place to go along to. Music 4 U is another organisation in my constituency. It is a stage school that does shows. People with physical and learning disabilities attend the school. Everyone is supported in that organisation to reach their potential. It is just how I think life should be, with everyone supported to reach their potential and overcome barriers. I could not be more supportive of Music 4 U and Debbie Kirkness, who runs that organisation.

Aberdeen Muslims does excellent work in supporting the local community. For example, the beach in Aberdeen was an absolute mess after flooding a few years ago; there was stuff everywhere, and the Aberdeen Muslim community rallied round and organised much-needed beach cleans.

There are so many more groups in my area. I will briefly mention the uniformed organisations such as the Guides, the Scouts, the Boys’ Brigade and the Girls’ Brigade. I started my journey in the Guides at Rainbows, and my daughter has now started her journey in Rainbows. I was a Rainbow, then a Brownie, then a Guide and then a Young Leader. [Interruption.] How things have changed—not necessarily for the better. I have also helped to run a Rainbows group. The volunteering hours are a brilliant experience. These organisations are so good for bringing people together from all the different

corners of communities, and giving them the opportunity to socialise with people who they might not normally socialise with.

I have said before that I am not religious, but I could not have more respect for the amount of volunteering that our religious and faith communities do. My city would be very different if it were not for people who attend churches of all different types, and who volunteer and try to improve their communities. I thank them all.

6.31 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests regarding my position as a councillor for Thorniewood on North Lanarkshire Council.

In all our communities, charities carry out work on a voluntary basis, from supporting the elderly to assisting families who have fallen on hard times. In many cases, they are only able to do so because of the dedication of volunteers and the generosity of the public. I often ask myself where we would be without volunteers. I look at the work that charities do in my constituency for the good people of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, and it reaffirms my belief that they are a key part of the very foundations of our society.

I look at the fantastic work and dedication of the volunteers at Coatbridge food bank, which I helped to grow. It exists because of the Tory austerity and welfare reforms like universal credit. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions herself now accepts that there is a link between the increasing use of food banks and the botched roll-out of universal credit. Isn't it a shame that some volunteers are getting sanctioned for helping?

Considering the work of local charities, I am not surprised that the Charities Aid Foundation found that 80% of the public believe that charities play a vital role in the UK. It saddens me that our charities are now facing difficult circumstances because of the actions of this Government; just look at the way they are handling Brexit. The charity sector currently relies on £250 million of funding from the EU—funding that the Government said they would match through the UK shared prosperity fund after Brexit. Just like so many other promises made by this Government, it has been broken, leaving the charity sector in a state of deep uncertainty about its future funding.

Charities find themselves gagged because of the Government's lobbying Act—the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. Charities do important work in highlighting issues within our society and across the world. They campaign, build public support for a cause and take their arguments to MPs to seek change. The lobbying Act prevents charities from speaking out and doing this important work. Indeed, the Government have used gagging clauses to prevent charities from speaking out—otherwise they risk losing contracts from Government Departments. The Charities Aid Foundation found that 67% of people felt that charities were best placed to speak for the disadvantaged, yet they are being denied the chance to do so because of the lobbying Act. It should be abolished, and the next Labour Government will ensure that it is consigned to the dustbin of history.

It is worth reflecting on the increasing need for charities in our society. Charities are assuming greater responsibilities in providing support for our elderly, the disadvantaged and others who would once have used services offered by the Government. But the Government's continued pursuit of austerity has led to a loss of local services and charities having to plug the gaps with decreasing funds at their disposal. In England, we are seeing council cuts of 60%, and Scotland is no different. We have austerity in Scotland. We are losing community centres, volunteer groups, libraries, and other much-needed services. This year, my own council has been asked to find £30 million. It saddens me that the Government have cut vital local services without pausing to think of the consequences or of whether the charity sector would be able to step in to cover the gaps in public service provision.

As I said, I am the councillor for Thorniewood on North Lanarkshire Council. I receive a salary that I donate to local charities, groups, associations, and anyone I can help in their hour of need. In a time of austerity and increasing pressure on charities, I want to do my bit to ensure that their vital work can continue across my constituency for the good people of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill. I have been pleased to help many charities—in particular, Bumblebee Babies, which does so much work to support parents of stillborn children. That group nearly closed and finished because of a lack of funding.

I will continue to support charities whenever I can. I call on this Government to provide the support that our charities need nationally as well. It is time to stop the cuts to their funding. It is time to stop gagging them in their campaign efforts. It is time to stop leaving them in uncertainty about their future after Brexit. It is about time that our charities were properly supported so that they can continue the vital work that they do in all our communities. As I said earlier, where would we be without the volunteers?

6.36 pm

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): There is widespread consensus that charities and volunteering organisations are an integral part of our society. Research from the Charities Aid Foundation has shown that 80% of UK adults think that charities play an essential role in their local communities.

My constituency is an excellent example of why this is the case. The community has an amazing network of voluntary organisations who carry out wonderful work to ensure that support is there for those who desperately need it. Locally, we have a whole range of different groups and organisations that provide information and support, helping people to find what they need to get back on track. Acts of generosity and compassion from local volunteers and charities in my constituency provide lifelines for people in need. These volunteers are critical to the functioning of our communities. They represent the very best of us.

In Britain, we have a proud tradition of generosity and helping those in need. The voluntary sector is a cornerstone of that tradition. But the Government must build on this by supporting initiatives to help people of all ages and backgrounds to volunteer. There is little evidence to suggest that they are committed to doing so. In 2015, the Conservative party announced

[Faisal Rashid]

plans to introduce volunteering leave for workers. Little effort has been made to follow through on this pledge, and it appears to have been quietly put to one side.

After more than eight years of Tory austerity, there is an over-reliance on the generosity of local people as a substitute for properly funded local services. Volunteers should not be expected to pick up the pieces when swingeing Tory cuts shatter our local communities. Despite their best efforts, voluntary organisations are seriously struggling to step in to replace local services. Cuts to local government have led to the closure of 428 day centres, 1,000 children's centres, 600 youth centres and 478 public libraries. Make no mistake: cuts to these services are cuts to the very fabric of our society. Without proactive local services and a well-supported voluntary sector, loneliness, isolation and social division will rise. If the Government are serious about connecting communities by supporting charities and volunteers, they will make good on the Prime Minister's promise last year that "austerity is over". It is high time the Government put an end to austerity before the damage done is irreparable.

I thank, commend and salute all volunteers and everyone working for charities and community groups. I am proud to be the MP for Warrington South and to represent this country, where we have such people in our society, making a huge difference.

6.39 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): This has been an inspiring debate. The world is a cynical place at the moment, and all the Brexit debates highlight just how divided this House can be, but when we talk about the fabric of our communities and what makes them the places they are, there is a real glow from MPs.

I pay tribute to all Members who have spoken today, and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), who talked about the great work in her constituency to support people with dementia, as well as the human cost of austerity and cuts, with children going hungry. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) is a champion for Citizens Advice, and her expertise in that field really adds value to this place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), as chair of the APPG on charities and volunteering, lives and breathes the charity sector and goes above and beyond; she shows that every day in this place. My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) talked about the real price of austerity, how the cuts feel on the ground and how desperate it is that so many people are turning to food banks as a direct result of austerity and deliberate choices that the Government have made. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) has been a champion of volunteering for a long time, going up and down the country and building a network of volunteers with real commitment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) talked about austerity and the direct impact of cuts on charities. It is not just that charities are picking up the pieces after public sector cuts. Charities themselves have faced cuts, and on top of that, when they are contracted by the Government,

they are told that they cannot speak out on the issues that affect them and the reason they exist. He made that case passionately. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid) talked about the importance of charities in Warrington and how they are part of the fabric of that community.

The backdrop of this debate cannot be ignored, and it has been mentioned a number of times. The charities that do this fantastic work, that go above and beyond, that we all take inspiration from, that we all visit and that we all thank today are, by and large, picking up the pieces where the Government have decided that they are not responsible, walked away, taken the money and left communities to sink or swim.

Many examples have been given today, including food bank activity; the work that communities are doing to self-organise and respond to crime and antisocial behaviour in their area; people taking on the local library because the council money has been taken away, and to keep it open, they have to self-organise; and community volunteers on estates who are stepping up because they recognise that young people do not have the facilities they used to have to keep them out of trouble and give them a positive focus and hope.

We hear all these stories, and they are inspiring, but this is about transferral of responsibility. I remember a former Prime Minister, who I think is in a shed somewhere writing his memoirs, talking about the big society and this big idea of an emboldened civil society where charities are supported. The truth is that charities have just about kept their head above water. In the way that councils, the police service and the fire service have seen cuts, charities have also seen severe cuts.

In my town, we used to have an area-based grant, which was directed to areas of high deprivation, to support the community infrastructure that was so important. When the coalition Government came into power in 2010, they cancelled that with less than a year's notice. The staff of community groups and charities that were set up to provide that support were just thrown on the scrapheap, as though the work they did in the community did not matter.

Given that it is customary for MPs to mention charities in their area, I want to pay tribute to the fantastic work of a range of charities in mine. There is a danger, when we do this, that we please a handful and really annoy a long list of people who we do not have time to mention. I want to mention Dr Kershaw's hospice. Whichever community someone comes from in Oldham, they will be connected to that hospice at a time when they are at their most desperate, feeling pain that they never thought they would have to go through and not being sure how to cope when it hits. The hospice has given people who are nearing the end of their life the support, courage and confidence to get through that very painful time, and it is genuinely part of the community.

Like many places, however, we have community groups that, if we are honest, we would wish did not exist. I wish that Oldham did not need a food bank, and I wish it was not a thriving food bank, but it is. I wish that the Andy's Man Club did not have to support people who feel suicidal, but it does. There are lots of other examples.

I could not help but notice that quite a big chunk of money was announced earlier, and we had a taste of some of the areas that are likely to receive some of the funding. Given the Members who have contributed

here today and the work they have highlighted in their communities, I just hope that the funding, when the list is finally published, is fairly distributed by geography. I hope that it absolutely targets areas of need and deprivation, takes into account that some areas have been hit harder by public service reductions than others and really supports places where there is genuine working together across institutions.

This is not about good Government or bad Government, with charities over here and the community over there. When this works well, in the way we have heard about today, it is because everyone comes together. When a council works well, it is the community; when a charity works well, it is the community; and when a next-door neighbour checks up on an elderly relative—collects the post and does all the things we have talked about—that is the community. The fabric of our community is under great strain at the moment, and it really requires us to make sure that we begin to reinvest in it.

The Prime Minister made a promise that austerity was over, recognising that the pain had been very deep, knowing that it was a big factor in the referendum result and wanting to address that. Unfortunately, she was undermined by her Chancellor who had the opportunity in the autumn statement genuinely to end austerity and decided, “Well, to hell with it. Let’s just carry on.” They must have been quite enjoying the journey that they were taking. I would say that most people in this Chamber, if they are honest, are looking at their own local authorities, regardless of political complexion and geography—whether rural or urban, north or south—and wondering how on earth that council will be able to survive over the next couple of years.

Why is council funding so important? Because the council, which is democratically elected and of the community—people themselves elect who they want to be their voice in their town or city—comes together and brings people together, and it is often the first port of call. We cannot have thriving civil society if we have underfunded and starved local government; we cannot have thriving local government if we have not got thriving civil society; and none of that works if we have not got decent people. Whatever our view today, we should all be very proud of the country we live in. We are a mixed, diverse, vibrant country full of wonderful people who, every day, do amazing things.

6.47 pm

Mims Davies: With the leave of the House, I want to respond by picking up on a few points. I thank the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon)—and thank goodness for men’s sheds. I thank the 18 speakers from across the House who have contributed to this really positive debate this afternoon. We have heard about some incredible organisations and incredible individuals and about what we are doing in our communities to support and connect people.

I want to pick up on some of the challenges for and concerns of charities. Charities hold assets of about £260 billion, and their total income has gone up from £52 billion in 2009 to £77 billion today. We have heard about charity trustees. There are over 700,000 unpaid charity trustees, and charities employ over 1 million people. I will come on to say a little more about trustees in a moment.

We heard about some of the amazing charities, and I completely agree, particularly about the citizens advice bureaux. There are the RNLI and independent lifeboat charities; our hospices; those who volunteer to support the NHS; yes, the men’s clubs; neighbourhood watch; our air ambulances; and Singing for Syrians. There is diversity and resilience in our charities and social enterprises through our trustees, patrons and organisers. I completely agree that they all need support because of the difference that they make. Our civil society is a force to be reckoned with, as we have heard today. This Government are committed to supporting growth in civil society to make sure it continues to have an impact for many years ahead and truly helps us to build a country that works for everyone. As we heard today, we never meet an unhappy volunteer. Volunteers often give because it helps them have great self-esteem.

I will briefly mention some organisations in my patch: the Countess Mountbatten Hospice Charity in West End, the Hamble lifeboat and One Community, which received the Queen’s award for voluntary service. We heard today what that means for those amazing charities that do so much. I could spend quite some time thanking all the charities in my area. People have done well to lever in so many this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) spoke about having to pick up the pieces of austerity. I want us to recognise that the sector has shown itself to be strong. There is a growing number of charities, as I said earlier. They are an important part of our community and they have continued to thrive.

On the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, it is an important role of charities to speak on behalf of their beneficiaries. That is their role. As I said in my first remarks to the NCVO in December—indeed, the Prime Minister has written to Sir Stuart Etherington about this—we want it to be absolutely clear that we are not stopping providers standing up for what is right. It is absolutely right that charities can continue to advocate for the community.

On EU funding, we know that access to future funding is a concern for civil society organisations. My officials are working with colleagues across the Government to inform our plans about future funds, and I will keep the House updated.

I am very keen to mention the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), as was the Scottish National Party spokesman, the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes). Her APPG does vital work to support charities and volunteering, along with the NCVO, which of course is in its centenary year. I have offered to come to the APPG for social enterprise as well. It is vital that we talk about the challenges for unpaid trustees, and I am happy to meet the hon. Member for Clwyd South to discuss her Bill. We should empower and help trustees. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) spoke about the need to support skills such as accountancy and people management among volunteers.

On dormant assets, we will talk further about that issue. We have a group of industry champions who are working on a blueprint. They submitted their report in December, and we are considering the proposals on extending the scheme. We know how much money is there and how much good it can do. There is great news

[Mims Davies]

for people in the charities sector, because there is so much thriving locally and we can all share the best practice.

I just need to say thank goodness for Stirling. We heard today that it is better than average when it comes to volunteering. That gives everybody else an opportunity to match Stirling. Looking around the Chamber this afternoon, we have heard what it means to our communities when people stand up and get involved.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) how sport can help. Sport is the other side of my portfolio. Some 6.3 million people volunteer in sport. When one person volunteers in sport, eight people benefit. I thank all those who step up.

The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) raised concerns about school holidays and food banks and about children being fit and fed. StreetGames has launched a campaign on that idea, which incorporates holiday activity sessions for communities that need them, with a nutritious meal every day, free of charge. The national lottery is funding that fantastic initiative through Sport England.

As the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) said, we need to recognise our volunteers. We have the Points of Light awards, so please nominate people. We can nominate people for an honour. Of course, there is also the Queen's award for voluntary service.

We heard about the NCS and the challenge of getting youth volunteers. Actually, I think people get so much out of volunteering. I have been to NCS sessions, and if our young people find time to give back to their communities, they feel much more connected as a result.

The Government are very concerned about knife crime, which was mentioned in the debate. Knife crime is devastating for our communities, and we are determined to tackle it. We set out a comprehensive programme in the serious violence strategy, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a youth endowment fund of £200 million to support interventions for our children and young people who are at risk of getting involved in violent crime.

We have had a great afternoon highlighting the bold and bright future that lies ahead for charities, civil society and volunteers. We are living through a difficult period of change, but there is huge potential to do more to connect communities through innovative ideas. We heard how new technology is providing one such opportunity. We are investing close to £4 million to support civil society, through the tech sector, and the Government are coming together to solve social challenges in this way. We know that it can help to tackle loneliness in particular.

We have a vision for the future where charities, social enterprises and good business practice work together, so that we continue to have charities that are well-regulated, independent and self-sustaining, reflecting the communities

and the causes they wish to serve. That includes addressing the issue of safeguarding, where again we have an opportunity to be a world leader. It is important that we get the safeguarding and protections part of charities right, so that civil society can continue its important role of supporting our public services and local partnerships. I will be giving an update on that next month, six months on from the civil society strategy.

It is clear from this debate that we should all have the opportunity to support and encourage our wonderful local charities and volunteers and that we should continue to work together to provide opportunities for young people. Charities and social enterprise can connect communities, encouraging further social responsibility and social finance so that together we can build a connected community that improves lives and society. Working together, we can realise that collective ambition to make our country the very best it can be: a country that works for everyone and supports everyone.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered connecting communities by supporting charities and volunteers.

PETITION

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the selling of personal data

6.57 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituents regarding the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the selling of personal data. This is quite an interesting issue. Under the 2002 regulations, the DVLA may provide, free of charge, information to the police and local authorities for use in connection with an offence, but it may also make it available for a fee to any person who can show to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State that he has reasonable cause for wanting particulars to be made available to him, and reasonable cause is not defined. This clearly appears to be an anomaly that should be rectified.

The petition states:

The petition of the residents of Linlithgow and Falkirk East.

Declares that the petitioners believe that it is immoral that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency are allowed to sell personal data to the third parties, irrespective of whether or not the Treasury gains financially; believes that most members of the public will not be aware that this practice is permitted; further believes that the DVLA should only be permitted information to the police and local authorities for use in connection with an offence.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to review the existing Data Protection legislation and that consideration be given to prohibiting the DVLA from selling personal data to third parties.

[P002420]

NHS Menopause Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jo Churchill.)

6.59 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I thank the Members who have stayed behind for this important debate.

Every woman will experience the menopause at some stage in her life. When she does, she will embark on a journey that will throw up some of the most pernicious taboos that still exist in our society. The toxic combination of ageism and sexism that exist around the menopause, piled on top of the often debilitating symptoms, can cause mental health problems, relationship difficulties, problems at work, anxiety and depression, and much more. While menopause is a natural stage of life and ought to herald new freedoms and opportunities, for too many, it turns out to be the opposite. I know this from the menopause work that I have been doing in my constituency, including a Menopause Café, where we get together to drink tea and coffee, eat cake and talk about the menopause.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): To speak from my own perspective, I organised a Menopause Café in my constituency in the Stan Ball Centre, and I was delighted to see a number of women from right across the constituency. Quite a broad range of age groups came to that event, so I will be arranging more in future.

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend so much, both for his work locally and for supporting me in this work in the Chamber and the House. He is an absolutely fantastic campaigner for the menopause and for women.

Psychologically, none of us likes to be reminded that we are growing old. For women, however, the menopause provides irrefutable evidence that our biological clock has ticked. While men can, and do, continue to reproduce into their old age, we cannot. With that loss, we face a grieving process. Our species has evolved to reproduce itself, and women's bodies have evolved to carry out childbirth and child-rearing. Aeons of our cultural norms have been built upon that basic and irrefutable fact. Despite advances in all areas of medicine, I do not see men being able to conceive children or breastfeed any time soon, so the loss of those capabilities comes weighted with deep-seated and unexpected emotions. At the same time that we are attempting to grapple with those emotions, we find ourselves beset with a huge laundry list of symptoms and facing at best, indifference and ignorance, and at worst, downright hostility, mockery and discrimination while we attempt to help ourselves.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Like the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), I have much interest in this, not only because it involves health issues that I am responsible for, but because sometimes things are pretty close to home. Does the hon. Lady not agree that the support that is needed for women who are going through tremendous changes in their bodies is not readily and sustainably available at GP surgeries, and that funding needs to be allocated to support groups, like the ones that the hon. Lady and the hon. Gentleman referred to, to ensure that the mental and physical health of ladies going through the menopause is readily available? That is very important.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for making that valid point. I will talk about some of those issues, and he makes the really good point that these issues also affects men who are living with women as they go through the menopause.

I became a campaigner for the menopause by accident. For me, the start of the menopause came as I took my seat in this place. I attributed the almost constant migraines, the exhaustion, stress, insomnia, and the more than usual irritation with my ever-stoic husband, down to the new job, and the fact that my parliamentary accommodation was just over the bridge from Big Ben. I was probably the only Member to rejoice when Big Ben ceased to chime all through the night, because believe me, I heard every single bong.

It was only when I started to seek treatment for the unbearable migraines that I discovered the link with the menopause, and I started on a process that led me to understand that, very sadly, I was far from alone. I hesitated before speaking out about this personal issue, because I feared that in this place I would be regarded negatively by some colleagues or gain an unwarranted stigma attached to me as a menopause campaigner. However, when I realised how many women are affected by this issue and how many fail to get the help they need, I realised that it fell to me to speak out—to speak for people who cannot be here. And if I did not do it, who would?

I am pleased to say that this campaign, as we have just seen, has been universally welcomed by Members from across this House, including in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who has just left the Chamber, my hon. Friends the Members for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) and for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), and the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield).

Outside our four walls, this debate is being followed with a keen interest, and I thank everybody—I know that they are watching and that they are heartened to see that this issue is receiving the attention that it deserves, although there is much more to be done. There are too many people for me to mention them all personally, but I particularly thank Dr Louise Newson—the menopause doctor—for her advice and knowledge on this matter. She operates a specialist menopause clinic in Stratford-upon-Avon and is an expert in this field. Her help has been invaluable.

Almost all women will be affected by the menopause at some point in their life. Most will experience symptoms between the ages of 45 and 55, but early menopause can also occur. For one in 100 women, this natural ageing process can begin before the age of 40, and early onset menopause occurs in one in 1,000 women under 30. In other words, it is very common, yet many are told they are too young to be menopausal, which is clearly wrong.

The duration and severity of symptoms vary from woman to woman. Generally, symptoms start a few months or years before periods stop—this is known as the perimenopause—and can persist for some time afterwards. On average, symptoms last for four years after the last period, but about one in 10 women experience them for up to 12 years. About eight in 10 women will have additional symptoms for some time before and after their periods stop, including hot flushes, night sweats, difficulty sleeping, palpitations, poor concentration, memory problems, low mood, anxiety and depression.

[*Rachel Maclean*]

The common symptoms are numerous and varied. Every woman's experience is unique. For example, I never experienced hot flushes or night sweats, but I certainly did experience other symptoms, and that was a problem for me, because I did not realise I was menopausal. That is the case for many other women. I remember considering whether I could even continue my job, and I know from correspondence I have received that countless other women struggle to manage the menopause however it affects their lives. A survey from West Midlands police showed that 21% of policewomen had given up work due to their menopausal symptoms.

Of course, the menopause does not affect just women. Every man in the country either lives with, works with or is related to a woman, and employers are affected and will continue to be affected.

Eddie Hughes: It is vital that men understand the symptoms and the challenges women face during this time of their lives and that they offer support, not just at home but in the workplace.

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend again for that really good point. In fact, menopausal women are the fastest-growing demographic in the workforce. It is vital, therefore, that employers step up and produce menopause policies to help women going through this process.

There are many ways in which society can better support menopausal women, but we must look also for ways in which menopausal women can better help themselves. Of course, education can help. We can raise awareness of these issues in numerous ways—for example, through sex and relationships education in schools. We teach young girls about reproduction and periods, about contraception and relationships, and we ought at that stage to educate them about what happens in the menopause.

Employers also have an important part to play and can introduce supportive policies in the workplace, and I am pleased that many large employers are starting to lead the way in this respect. The best known local employer I have worked with is the West Midlands police, who are introducing creative and groundbreaking policies. Having spoken to women who have worked with them to introduce those policies, I know they faced considerable barriers when they first started to bring these conversations into the workplace—this very traditional, male-dominated environment—and yet they persisted, and now they find that their events and support groups are oversubscribed and that men really want to help and get involved to support their female colleagues.

Jim Shannon: I mentioned in my earlier intervention the importance of access to GP surgeries. Every lady who has this problem goes to her doctor. That is a fact. At that stage, there is an opportunity to address the issue. I hope that the Minister will respond to this point—she always does respond very positively—because there needs to be some extra assistance in GP surgeries to help the ladies whenever they present with these problems.

Rachel Maclean: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have heard that point from so many women who have written to me, and I know that many of the women watching right now will have had the experience going to their GP and not getting the necessary support.

I will now talk about what I think the Government, the NHS and GPs can do to better support women experiencing, and sometimes struggling to cope with, the menopause. Central to the treatment available is hormone replacement therapy—or HRT, as it is commonly known. In essence, by addressing the hormonal imbalance resulting from the ageing process, HRT can address a wide variety of different symptoms experienced by menopausal women, and this is explicitly confirmed in National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on the menopause. It is recommended to treat vasomotor, psychological and urogenital symptoms, as well as altered sexual function resulting from ageing.

Despite these guidelines having been published in November 2015—three years ago—only 10% of women are actually taking HRT. Time and again, I hear about women who have been turned away from their GPs—as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned a moment ago—and not given this effective medicine, on spurious grounds. They are told, for example, that because their periods have not stopped they are not menopausal. However, it is suitable to prescribe the medicine at that point. It is not expensive, it is safe, and it has a transformative effect.

Back in 2015, when these guidelines were introduced, they were heralded as a great step forward, but that, sadly, has not materialised. Many attribute the problem to a 2002 study which found some causation between HRT and breast cancer, but the 2015 NICE guidelines are crystal clear: for the vast majority of women, the benefits of HRT greatly outweigh any risks. The guidelines state explicitly that it does not increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, that there is no association between developing type 2 diabetes and taking HRT, and that there is no evidence to suggest an increased risk of developing dementia. In fact, evidence suggests the contrary.

Even in individual cases in which cardiovascular concerns may discourage the prescription of HRT, oestrogen in the form of a skin patch or gel is available, and carries no risk of clots. That is the form of HRT that I am taking, and, combined with migraine treatment, it is helping me enormously. In fact, evidence shows that HRT lowers the risk of heart attacks by 50% and the risk of osteoporosis by 50%, and that the risk of depression is also reduced. Moreover, women on HRT are less likely to put on weight, because weight increases during the menopause. It is therefore clear that HRT brings public health benefits.

HRT with oestrogen alone is associated with no change in the risk of developing breast cancer. Body-identical progesterone does not carry a risk of breast cancer for the first five years, and even after that point the risk is very low. The risk of developing breast cancer is much higher in women who drink just a couple of glasses of wine every day, or who are overweight.

Sadly, despite all that evidence, the media have misreported and whipped up fear about HRT for a number of years, and many people, including women and healthcare professionals, are still misinformed as a result. The issue is further augmented by the fact that

very few GPs and nurses receive enough training, undergraduate or postgraduate education about the menopause. That has led to a general lack of awareness and misinformation in the medical community. It is clear that many GPs are not following the NICE guidelines.

That negligence is a problem, because many women are being sent away with no support, or are being mistakenly treated for misdiagnosed conditions such as depression and anxiety. Research that Dr Louise Newson has undertaken and shared with me shows that it is common for GPs to prescribe, for example, risperidone or diazepam rather than HRT. Of the thousands of menopausal women whom she surveyed, some 66%—a truly staggering figure—had been given antidepressants rather than HRT. Those expensive and addictive medicines are, of course, effective in treating certain conditions, but in menopause cases there is no evidence that they improve low mood or anxiety. Both types of HRT, oestrogen and progesterone, cost the NHS about £4 a month, so they are low-cost in comparison with antidepressants. They are highly effective, and pose a very low risk.

The benefits of HRT are clear, the size of the issue is unavoidable, and the action that needs to be taken is simple. The health service must give better training to GPs and other health workers, and must increase their awareness of the benefits of HRT in treating the menopause. The myths must be dispelled, and I hope that many millions more women will then see the benefit. Society, including men and employers, will also see the benefit, and the health service should benefit as well. Women who take HRT are less likely to attend GP surgeries, and effective HRT treatment removes the need for unnecessary referrals to specialists such as cardiologists or psychologists. That would undoubtedly relieve pressure on those already burdened specialisms. Medicine and diagnostic costs would be also reduced.

A few weeks ago, I held a productive roundtable discussion about this issue with the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price). I am pleased that the Department will be considering what more it can do to support menopausal women. I was encouraged by my hon. Friend's commitment and her pledge to engage in further work with us. However, I implore the Department to prioritise that work, because it affects every woman.

I am keen to hear the Minister's remarks, and I look forward to working closely with her. Women across the UK, including in my constituency, are struggling and being denied help. That is so wrong when there is a cheap, effective and low-risk treatment already available. I am glad we have started to break the stigma in this place and I thank all who have supported me in this campaign.

7.15 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) on securing this debate on health services and the menopause, and I want to start by celebrating the fact that we are discussing this subject. For too long the things that only affect women have been taboo; they have been brushed under the carpet—they have not been discussed in this place. One of the most magnificent of the many great side-effects of having a more gender-equal

place is that we begin to discuss these subjects and those last taboos get addressed properly. It is wonderful to hear and see the men present in this Chamber who also care passionately about this subject; that must be celebrated too.

My hon. Friend has been a passionate and highly effective campaigner for improved awareness of the menopause and better support for women who are dealing with some of the difficult symptoms. I am very grateful and supportive of her work on this issue; in my eyes she is an absolute hero. I believe it is vital that we provide effective support and treatment for women with menopausal symptoms. It is of the utmost importance that we continue to work to improve that and to tackle the misconceptions attached to the menopause.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of HRT and expressed her concern that some GPs are not prescribing or recommending it to women who need it. No two menopauses are exactly alike and GPs play an important role in ensuring patients are given treatment that is appropriate to them. It is worth bearing in mind that the menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life, and that many women will experience the menopause without troublesome symptoms or the need for treatment. Where symptoms do arise, HRT can be very effective in relieving them, and GPs should give menopausal women information about HRT as a treatment option, highlighting its risks, if they see that there are any, and its benefits. However, every patient is different and HRT might not be suitable for everyone. It is not the only treatment for menopausal symptoms, and GPs should also, where appropriate, talk women through all the non-hormonal and non-pharmaceutical treatments that are available.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there has been real confusion in the past about the safety of HRT. Concerns were raised in the early 2000s, as she mentioned, when a study said it was associated with an increased risk of breast cancer and heart disease. As a result, many women were advised by their doctors to come off HRT and the number of HRT users in the UK fell significantly. I cannot stress strongly enough that, as my hon. Friend has noted, the evidence base has since become clearer and the NICE guidance on the menopause is clear that HRT is a perfectly safe treatment in the majority of cases, and in most cases there is a far lower health risk in taking HRT than in drinking a couple of glasses of wine every day or in obesity, as my hon. Friend said.

The NICE guidance on the menopause also provides GPs with advice on how to recognise symptoms of the menopause. This guidance has helped prevent misdiagnosis, and my hon. Friend spoke very powerfully about how sometimes menopause can be mistaken for depression, which is incredibly worrying. Improving treatment of the symptoms of the menopause is also important.

We are also taking a range of other actions to improve support for women experiencing menopausal symptoms. This includes the work of the royal colleges, which of course play an important role in the education, training and professional development of healthcare professionals who treat women with menopausal symptoms. The Royal College of General Practitioners has produced a toolkit that includes learning resources for GPs on diagnosis and management of symptoms of the menopause. In addition, the Royal College of Nursing, in collaboration with the British Menopause Society, has produced a guide providing information for nurses who wish to

[Caroline Dinenage]

become specialists in the menopause. That is very important, too. The Royal College is also aiming to develop a GP specialty that focuses on women's health, which will be warmly welcomed.

Correct diagnosis and treatment of symptoms of the menopause are important, but we also have to focus on improving wider awareness of the menopause. An important part of this will be to have more open conversations around the menopause, so that we can start tackling the taboos that are attached to it. Taking this wider, bigger-picture approach is vital, given the huge impact that the menopause can have on all parts of a woman's life.

In raising awareness and tackling taboos, we need to ensure that we reach out to all demographics, including boys and men. I cannot help thinking that if a similar hormonal transition affected men for an average of four years in the second half of their life, we would never hear the end of it—[*Interruption.*] Present company excepted, of course. As it is, the menopause has become something of a taboo, and we have to get over that. That is why it is so incredibly faith-restoring to see these incredibly liberated and forward-thinking gentlemen in the Chamber tonight, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), who has talked about the menopause café that he runs. He should be championed for that. I was also pleased to see that the debate that was held on world menopause day last October was called by a male MP. These men are champions, in my eyes, and they deserve to be celebrated.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch mentioned, education is absolutely key to promoting awareness and understanding of the menopause. The Government are making relationships education compulsory in primary schools and relationships and sex education compulsory in secondary schools. The underpinning focus in these subjects is to equip young people to develop positive attitudes to health, relationships and wellbeing. Schools will then have a really good opportunity to improve pupils' understanding and awareness of the menopause.

Hon. Members will be aware that women represent 51% of the UK population and 44% of our workforce. They play a vital role in the nation's health, but they do not always receive the most timely or appropriate healthcare. My hon. Friend mentioned the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), who is the Minister with responsibility for mental health, inequalities, and suicide prevention. She is doing sterling work on this issue, and she has set up a women's health taskforce. This taskforce will work to ensure that women receive timely and appropriate care in relation to a whole range of issues, and as part of its upcoming early work, it will consider the menopause.

This work will be informed by a collaborative discussion that will be led by the brilliant chief medical officer and include the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, a number of academics who work in menopause research and GPs who specialise in the menopause. These discussions will feed into the taskforce's wider objectives: to empower women to speak more confidently; to raise awareness and break taboos around women's health problems; and to improve the access, quality and experience of care for women. I hope that that will help to address some of the important issues

that my hon. Friend has raised today, and I am sure that my ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care will be absolutely delighted to work closely with her on the taskforce's developing work around the menopause, because she has done such sterling work in this area so far.

We need to ensure that workplaces provide the necessary and appropriate support for women. A recent study found that 41% of women aged 50 to 60 said that the menopause had affected their job, but that 70% did not tell their employer about their symptoms. This demonstrates the work that needs to be done to move beyond shame and silence to an open conversation about the menopause, because half the population will go through it. Giving better support to those women in work is not only right but fundamentally good for the economy. Women over 50 are now one of the fastest growing groups of employees. They have invaluable skills and experience, which means that they are incredibly difficult to replace. We should be looking to support them to stay in work whenever we can.

I am particularly proud to be responding to this debate tonight not only because I am hurtling very fast towards the menopause myself but because, when I was Minister for Women and Equalities, I chaired the very first parliamentary roundtable on awareness and taboos around the menopause in the workplace. This was the first ever meeting in Parliament that brought together important stakeholders and interested parties to discuss this important issue. We heard some incredible evidence. I remember one lady telling us that she had had to leave her workplace because all she wanted was a desktop fan to help her deal with the hot flushes, but the company would not let her have one and so lost an employee with incredible experience and huge amounts of skill, which just makes no sense at all.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for her positive response. There is an old proverb that a problem shared is a problem halved, and the Minister has clearly indicated a method of doing that. I encourage her to get that message out across GP surgeries, education and all the relevant bodies.

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Gentleman is an enlightened man. The work that we did at the very first roundtable led to an evidence review that was published in 2017, which talked about raising awareness and about the effects on women's economic participation. The review led to the Women's Business Council developing a toolkit to enable employers to support their employees more effectively, and I think we can all agree that that can be nothing but a good thing.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the Minister both for the measures she is outlining and for the work that she did originally. Is she aware that the menopause used to be called the silent passage? The work that she and the others in the Chamber tonight are doing is helping to bring some sound to this passage, which can only be a benefit for every member of society.

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend is right. I had not heard that description before, but it sums up what we are talking about.

The toolkit that the Women's Business Council produced when I was in the Government Equalities Office sets out positive action that employers can take around flexible

working and improving awareness and understanding around the menopause. It also provides practical and often simple adjustments that employers can make. We also support actions taken by individual organisations to raise awareness. My hon. Friend mentioned some wonderful examples of such work, including at West Midlands police and the Bank of England. I pay tribute to them and encourage more employers to think about what more they can do to support women through the menopause.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue. The menopause is about valuing people, equality and rights. We have shown we can make progress on such issues elsewhere, and we must and will do the same here.

Question put and agreed to.

7.27 pm

House adjourned.

Recall of MPs Act 2015: Member for Peterborough

CORRECTION

Letter from Registrar of Criminal Appeals:

“In accordance with s.4(4) of the Recall of MPs Act 2015, I write to inform you Fiona Onasanya has submitted an appeal against conviction, which I have referred to the full court and which is listed for hearing on 5th March. I also confirm that we have received no appeal against sentence nor any Attorney General referral, but the time limit for such a referral does not expire until 26 February 2019.”

Deferred Division

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY)

That the draft Intellectual Property (Copyright and Related Rights) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 19 December 2018, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 308, Noes 267.

Division No. 329]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
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
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
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
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey

Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
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
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
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
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
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
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene

Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
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
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
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
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa

Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, 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
Morton, Wendy
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
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, 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
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
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, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
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 Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie

Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
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
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh

Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan

Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward

Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 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, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 13 February 2019

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

Sunbed Use: Health Implications

9.30 am

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the health implications of sunbed use.

It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Hosie, and I thank my good friend the Minister for responding to this important debate.

The motion asks the House to consider the health implications of using sunbeds, but I would go as far as calling for a ban. Who needs sunbeds? No one. Many people in the UK believe that they look healthier with a tan, but that could not be further from the truth. Bronzed skin was a trend first popularised by Coco Chanel in 1923, and it has never gone away. From St Tropez to Derbyshire, a suntan continues to be a desired accessory. Over time, people have sought to maintain their tan using artificial means, including the sunbed. In the '60s, sunbeds were developed for the first time, and in the '80s they began to be used in large numbers. The industry continued to grow throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. Today, an estimated 3 million Britons use sunbeds to keep themselves tanned.

According to the World Health Organisation, sunbeds are as dangerous as smoking—many people do not realise that—and in 2009 it classified them as carcinogenic to humans. Worryingly, statistics show that people who have used a sunbed at least once, in any stage of their life, have a 20% higher risk of developing melanoma than those who have never used a sunbed. The first use of a sunbed before the age of 35 increases the risk of developing melanoma by 59%.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making an important speech. In all honesty, I think of sunbeds as pernicious death machines. They rely on people's vanity, but we all have elements of vanity in our lives, so let us not decry that. We should be doing far more. One hundred thousand people get a melanoma every year; it is one of the most pernicious forms of cancer, and 10,000 people die. These are death machines, aren't they?

Mrs Latham: Yes. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and we must emphasise the fact that sunbeds are killing machines that nobody needs to use. Nobody needs a tan, and as the hon. Gentleman says, this is purely about vanity. We know there is a lot of vanity in the world, but this is a deadly vanity and it is a waste of everybody's time and money—sunbeds are also expensive.

Dr Andrew Birnie, a consultant dermatologist and dermatological surgeon, supports the World Health Organisation classification of sunbeds as carcinogenic. He notes that

"it has been shown that the biggest cause of melanoma is high-intensity bursts of ultraviolet light on skin not used to being exposed to UV."

The World Health Organisation has recommended that countries either ban or limit the use of sunbeds. In reality, there is no such thing as a safe tan unless it comes from a bottle or a can. Indeed, one trainee beautician, Kimberley Platt, said:

"I'm a trainee beautician and part of the course is being taught to spray tan. Our course tutors tell us to steer clear of sunbeds, I wonder why. Has anyone ever looked on Instagram at sunbed burn photos? Horrific. It seems as if to burn, either artificially or in the sun, is somehow a funny thing to do. Dealing with skin cancer is not funny though. Think about the cost of treating skin cancer, not to mention the cost of a life."

Chris Bryant: Is this particularly an issue in this country because so many people are genetically made for British weather? We have freckles, fair hair and fair skin, which is far more prone to some of the dangers that the hon. Lady mentions.

Mrs Latham: Again, the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are not built for the sun; otherwise we would be black. That is why people in Africa do not have the problems that we have. We tend to go on holiday for a couple of weeks, burn like mad, come back and think it is great, but it is damaging to the skin. One need only look at people who spend a long time either on sunbeds or in the sun. When they get older they look like dried-up prunes, and nobody wants to look like a dried-up prune. People think that they are making themselves look healthier, but they are not; they are deeply damaging their skin, and we must try to persuade the Minister that a ban on sunbed use is the only thing we can do.

Frighteningly, over the past 30 years cases of malignant melanoma have more than quadrupled in the UK, and the scary truth is that it is now the second most common form of cancer in those aged 15 to 34. A melanoma is not easy to treat unless caught early. There are around 15,400 new melanoma skin cancer cases in the UK every year—42 every single day. Every 24 hours in the UK, six people die from a melanoma, and in 2016, 2,285 people died of the condition.

In the United States of America, Europe and Australia, combined sunbed use is estimated to have been responsible for more than 450,000 non-melanoma skin cancer cases and more than 10,000 melanoma cases every year. It is no coincidence that the rise in that aggressive form of skin cancer aligns with the popular use of sunbeds. The current updated body of scientific evidence strongly suggests that indoor tanning significantly increases the risk of melanoma. A large amount of data from observational studies provides enough information to infer that sunbed use causes melanoma, using all the epidemiological criteria for causality.

Dr Nicole Chiang, a consultant dermatologist who treats skin cancer patients on a regular basis, has noted that the risk of melanoma more than doubles when sunbeds are used at a young age of below 35 years. Sunbeds cause three times more DNA damage than natural sunlight, and it has been estimated that 20 minutes on a sunbed could be equivalent to approximately four hours in the sun. Just one sunbed session can increase someone's risk of developing squamous cell skin cancer by 67%, and basal cell skin cancer by 29%. Even more important is the increased risk of melanoma, which is the deadliest form of skin cancer.

[Mrs Latham]

I was concerned to learn that data from Cancer Research shows that more than 25% of the UK's 3 million sunbed users are unconcerned about the dangers that sunbeds pose. Indeed, I was on the radio today and I heard some people talking about this issue. They said, "Well, so what? It doesn't matter. It will be okay." I believe it is important to dispel the fake news, often used in the marketing of sunbeds, that they provide a "controlled" way of getting a "safer" tan. Sunbeds are no safer than exposure to the sun.

A 2008 study published in the journal "Pigment Cell & Melanoma Research"—that sounds like something from "Have I Got News For You"—came to the conclusion that to achieve a tan, the skin must be exposed to ultraviolet radiation, and therefore "safe tanning" is a physical impossibility. It is also important to dispel the myths perpetrated by the sunbed industry about vitamin D benefits from sunbeds. Due to the carcinogenic risk associated with sunbeds, their use cannot be justified. We can take a tablet in the winter to ward off vitamin D deficiencies. A further myth is the idea of the base tan—the dangerous and fanciful assertion that getting an initial tan from a sunbed will protect the skin from the sun. Guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence explain that getting a tan provides little protection against later exposure to sunlight, and the resulting skin damage outweighs any later protective effect.

Throughout my time in Parliament, I have focused on the prevention and treatment of skin cancer as a result of personal experience. I have had the privilege of working with a cancer charity, Melanoma UK, which I thank for its support in gathering evidence for this debate. I know only too well the devastating effect that that cancer can have on people's lives. What is most insidious about melanoma in particular is that it is impossible to treat in its late stages, and it often results in a drawn-out, very painful death. Last year I had my own personal scare. I found a mole, which was malignant. After a tortured three weeks waiting for the results I found out that, luckily, the tumour had not spread—but it was malignant. The fear was magnified by the fact that my own brother died from a melanoma when he was only 54. I have therefore always taken a close interest in that type of cancer and its causes.

My brother went to his GP three times in a year before the GP eventually said, "There's nothing wrong with you, but I will refer you"—just to get him out of his surgery, I think. By that time it was far too late, and my brother died from his melanoma a few years later; but he was never able to work again, because muscle and lymph glands had to be taken away, so he could not do his job. Neither I nor my brother used sunbeds, but given my experience of the awful disease of melanoma I cannot comprehend why anyone would want to increase their risk of contracting it. Research shows that many people who contract it probably would not have done, if they had never been able to use a sunbed.

I want to refer to some case studies highlighting the horrific effect that sunbed use can have on individuals and their loved ones. I thank the House of Commons outreach team for helping me to collate a vast and wide-ranging response, obtained thanks to the power of social media. I am so grateful to those who participated

in the initiative. There were some interesting and informative discussions. I was taken aback by the significant number of responses from people who said they regularly used sunbeds in their youth and today have, or have had, a melanoma. One such lady, Jade Luelle Cope, said that she used sunbeds often between the ages of 15 and 32, and was diagnosed with malignant melanoma at 38. She stated that she does not think that it was a coincidence.

Beverley Chesters passionately advocated a ban. Describing her experience, she said,

"without a doubt these killing machines"—

as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) called them earlier—

"need to be banned in a heartbeat!"

She used sunbeds in her late teens and early 20s, when

"it was the norm for everyone to walk about with the supposed 'healthy glow'. How very naive was I. I cannot recall ever any health warnings regarding sunbeds, and yes a pair of goggles given for eye protection and that's it! Now all these years later I have malignant melanoma, first diagnosed last August...since then I have 2 more separate melanomas, and also waiting for results of 2 further biopsies. I would not wish this horrible disease on anyone. If only I knew then what I know now I would never ever have put myself in that position of risking my life, all for a tan. My body looks like a patchwork quilt."

Similarly, Vicki Brennan noted that she used sunbeds and now has a malignant melanoma. Tragically, she comments:

"If I knew the statistics back then I would have made an informed decision not to use them, it scares me to think how many people are putting themselves at risk. And as for banality...Tell this to the thousands enduring treatment and those who are dying. You don't just cut skin cancer out and carry on as normal. Please ban sun beds."

A lady who came to a meeting that I was chairing had four young children, and was only in her 30s. She knew she was not going to survive, because she had a melanoma. She was going to leave the four young children for her husband to bring up, and they would not know their mother at all because they were so young.

The heartbreaking consequences of melanoma, aligning with sunbed use, were highlighted by Elaine Broadhurst. She said she and her brother used sunbeds as teenagers.

"We had one in our own home. There was no legislation or advice on the dangers. My brother was diagnosed with melanoma and died from it two years ago aged 46, leaving a wife and two young children. I'm convinced that the sunbed use contributed to losing my brother to this deadly disease and that sunbeds should be banned."

Hundreds of people wrote similar testimonials, which illustrate the huge personal impact that the condition has on people's lives, and the regret that many feel, having used a sunbed repeatedly and contracted the condition as a consequence. I encourage Members to take the time to read through some of the comments on the House of Commons Facebook page.

It is important to stress that it is clear that the majority of people use sunbeds purely for cosmetic reasons and vanity. The significance and dangers of cosmetic tanning are supported by many case studies and scientific research. It is said that people feel more confident, and sometimes even slimmer, when they are bronzed. However, in reality, over time when people over-use sunbeds their skin can age prematurely, making it look coarse, leathery and wrinkled—prune-like. In the worst-case scenario sunbeds can cause burns, scars

and ulcers known as basal cell carcinomas. Dr Birnie observed that there has been rising incidence of the condition in younger people, and especially in women who have used tanning beds in their teens and early 20s. I am sure that that is not the aesthetic that young people craving a tan are trying to achieve.

I am particularly concerned to learn of a trend towards sun tanning addiction, where people use the sunbed for a quick and lasting tan. Some research suggests that as many as one in 50 sunbed users are addicted to them. There are stories of people using a sunbed daily for a long period of time. I was on Radio Sussex this morning and a lady said she had for three years used a sunbed at home for an hour a day. She now has a melanoma. That is excessive use, but lower use is still deadly. Scientists from Germany and the US recently published a study showing that almost 20% of indoor tanning users have addictive symptoms.

I would like high street tanning salons that offer sunbeds to raise awareness of the potential health implications of using sunbeds, as happens with cigarette packets. I understand that the British Association of Dermatologists has explained that many tanning salons fail to provide adequate information. However, I should prefer an outright ban to the use of nasty pictures of people with burns.

There is work to be done outside the legislative reach of Parliament. I would encourage the fashion and beauty industry to take an active role in discouraging the use of sunbeds. I commend initiatives previously adopted by the fashion industry, such as when in 2012 Kate Moss and her then modelling agency, Storm, aimed to raise awareness of the dangers associated with sunbeds, to put heavy tans out of fashion. At the same time directors from 11 UK model agencies including Elite, Premier Model Management, Storm and Next signed up to a zero tolerance policy on sunbed use, to protect new and established models from the health and cosmetic effects of using ultraviolet tanning beds. It would be good to see such work continue and perhaps go further. Perhaps there should be more articles in girls' and women's magazines to explain the dangers of tanning in that way. We all know that models are generally young and thin—that is another issue—but they do not need a tan to look beautiful. Twiggy, in the 60s, was pretty beautiful, and she has continued to be. I doubt whether she uses a sunbed.

In 2003 the World Health Organisation responded to the serious public health challenge and published a guidance document on sunbed legislation. Since then, a number of organisations and individuals in the UK have called for an outright ban on the use of commercial sunbeds. We should also look at the practice of selling them privately, because there is then no control over how people use them. The Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010 banned the use of sunbeds by under-18s, but many people feel that the ban did not go far enough. It was a start, but only an all-out ban is acceptable. That idea is being explored by our European partners. France's health watchdog says that the risk of cancer from sunlamps and sunbeds is proven and authorities should act to stop people being exposed to artificial ultraviolet rays. France is one of a number of countries that have already limited their use.

I know that many members of the public support the banning of sunbeds. I was very pleased that Melanoma UK's recent petition to ban sunbeds in the UK received

in excess of 15,000 signatures. While I received a mixture of responses on both sides of the argument from the parliamentary outreach exercise, I was struck by the support from some people in the beauty industry. I am pleased that some individuals in the industry have recognised the dangers of sunbeds and champion the safe alternative of a spray tan.

One such example is Tonina Healey, a beauty salon owner who took the decision to ban the use of tanning beds in her salon and instead has promoted a spray tan. She said:

"I have always been very uncomfortable at the use of sunbeds. I took the decision to stop the use of tanning beds in my salon, I think one of the things that should be of major concern to all salon owners, is the issue of control. I have seen articles relating to tanning addiction and of clients going from salon to salon in order to achieve 'double' sessions. No one in the beauty industry can legislate for that and I for one, do not want to invite a lawsuit my way—does anyone in this industry really need that kind of hassle? I do believe that that will come one day, a salon in the UK will be sued when someone develops melanoma. I don't want that on my plate and I certainly don't want the illness of a client on my conscience. We trained in beauty to make our clients feel good, not to watch them die horrific deaths. We support a ban."

Brazil and Australia have already banned sunbeds commercially. Brazil was the first to ban sunbeds in 2009, the only exception being where doctors prescribed their use for health reasons. In the same year, the World Health Organisation classified exposure to UV sunlamps, sunbeds and tanning booths as carcinogenic to humans. Australia followed Brazil's ban in 2013. Annual rates of malignant melanoma in Australia were 10 times the rate in Europe for women, and more than 20 times for men. Professor Grant McArthur stresses the success of the ban in Australia, saying:

"The Sunbed ban in Australia has been highly effective. We estimate that one unnecessary death per week has been prevented by the ban. The greatest burden of deaths from Sunbeds falls in people aged 20-40. I plead that the UK save their young people by banning sunbeds".

To conclude, it is my view that there should be an outright ban on sunbeds, and I hope I will receive the support of colleagues in that. While the temptation to achieve that sun-kissed glow is understandable, risking contracting such a devastating disease is not. The unnecessary exposure to UV is nonsensical, and I implore anyone to get a fake tan through a bottle or can, not the sunbed. It seems wrong that people should have the option of damaging their health so greatly, purely in pursuit of cosmetic gratification.

The evidence is clear: for over three decades, deliberate sunbed exposure to UV for cosmetic purposes through sunbeds has been driving up the incidence of skin cancers and driving down the age of their first appearance. I stress again the shocking figures that people who have ever used a sunbed are 20% more likely to develop melanoma later in life than people who have never used one, and those who started using sunbeds before the age of 35 were 87% more likely to develop melanoma than people who have never used a sunbed.

I also believe that action needs to be taken to further raise awareness of melanomas and what causes them, including over-exposure to UV through sunbeds. That action should include providing stronger and clearer warnings about the consequences of sunbed usage. Being aware of the possible consequences of the sunbed should lead to a cultural and generational shift, with

[Mrs Latham]

people avoiding exposing themselves to UV unnecessarily. It is vital that people are conscious of the impact that this awful condition can have on one's health and personal life—something that I myself have experienced through my own personal circumstances. Please may we have a ban on sunbeds?

9.54 am

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Hosie. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) for securing this important and emotive debate.

Good health is a precious gift, which most of us will hopefully be able to maintain throughout our life by ensuring that we have a balanced diet, take regular exercise and make appropriate lifestyle choices. However, one lifestyle choice that appears not to be beneficial is the frequent use of sunbeds, which give out potentially harmful ultraviolet, or UV, rays.

According to Cancer Research UK,

“sunbeds are no safer than exposure to the sun itself”.

The damage to the DNA in our skin cells builds up over time, possibly resulting in skin cancer, of which melanoma is the deadliest form. NHS research illustrates that people

“who are frequently exposed to UV rays before the age of 25 are at greater risk of developing skin cancer later in life.”

Over the last decade, the number of people diagnosed with melanoma in the United Kingdom has increased by almost half, and it is the fifth most common cancer in the United Kingdom. However, not only have UV rays been linked to the increased risk of developing melanoma, but they may result in premature ageing of the skin, and eye damage may occur if proper and effective eye protection is not applied.

Sadly, some people continue to put body image before their personal health, perhaps inspired by the media coverage of celebrities and models they seek to emulate. That is despite the fact that the risk of cancer is constantly being highlighted by the NHS throughout the UK, with various charities giving the same advice; indeed, the issue was the subject of a debate in the main Chamber only nine days ago.

In recognition of the potential dangers, it is illegal for people under 18 years to use sunbeds at commercial premises, including beauty salons, leisure centres, gyms and hotels. Use is controlled in England and Wales by the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010, and Northern Ireland has passed delegated legislation in the form of regulations, providing a health warning with information that must be imparted to sunbed users. That information explains that those who use sunbeds for the first time before the age of 35 increase their risk of developing malignant melanoma by around a staggering 75%. Scotland has similar but less specific information in the Public Health etc. (Scotland) Act 2008 (Sunbed) Regulations 2009.

In 2009, the Health and Safety Executive was so concerned that it issued revised guidance on sunbed use in the UK. It is clear about the health risks associated with using UV tanning equipment such as sunbeds, sunlamps and tanning booths. However, any legislation is only as good as the enforcement, and that needs to be

extremely robust. I would welcome any measures from the Minister that further protect the public from what is in effect a form of self-harm, emanating from the unnecessary pursuit of that perfect appearance. One measure he may wish to consider is raising the age limit from 18 years or consulting on a ban. Equally importantly, however, I ask those using or considering using sunbeds to weigh up the risk that it might present, not immediately but in later life. I said at the start that good health is a precious gift: why, oh why, would we as individuals put that gift at risk?

In closing, it is worthy of note that, properly utilised by experts in the field, and particularly medical staff in the NHS, light rays and phototherapy have a place in the treatment of skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema, but they are not the same as tanning sunbeds.

9.58 am

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie.

One of the great pleasures of being in Parliament is that I learn new things on a regular basis. I must confess that, prior to coming to this debate, I had, as a peely-wally, fair-skinned, red-headed Scotsman, always avoided the sun and had no experience of sunlamps. It was fascinating to learn about them, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) for securing this debate and for her informative presentation, taking us through the history and many of the health problems. She presented some fantastic statistics, including the fact that sunbeds are used by 3 million people and that they cause three times the DNA damage of sunlight. Her case studies brought home the very human nature of this problem.

There is no doubt that UV rays from sunbeds can damage DNA in skin cells, which, building up over time, can cause skin cancer. The International Agency for Research on Cancer—IARC—accepts that there is enough evidence to show that sunbeds cause melanoma skin cancer, and further states that sunbeds provide no health benefits. That is a fundamental point. It also highlights that sunbed use before the age of 35 significantly increases the risk of melanoma; both earlier speakers used statistics, and the statistics I found last night put the range at 59% to 79% more likely. I do not know the actual figure, and I am interested to hear whether the other Front Benchers have a firmer handle on it. Either way, those figures are frightening.

Those figures are, however, hotly contested by the sunbed industry, which points out that, when professional sunbed use is separated from home use, it has no increased melanoma risk. The industry also highlights the benefits of UVB radiation in treating vitamin D deficiency. While I have no doubt that professional sunbed use will be safer than home use, it is no safer than exposure to the sun. The World Health Organisation classifies sunbeds as a group 1 carcinogen. A WHO director, Dr Maria Neira, says:

“There's no doubt about it: sunbeds are dangerous to our health”.

I certainly take that warning very seriously.

The Scottish National party recognises the potential harmful effects of sunbed use—or misuse—and has taken action. The Public Health etc. (Scotland) Act 2008,

implemented under an SNP-led Government, contains provisions to regulate sunbed use, as well as measures that include prohibiting unsupervised use, banning the use of sunbeds by under-18s and banning the sale and hire of sunbeds to under-18s.

It is imperative that people using sunbeds realise the health implications and risks of doing so, so that they can make an informed decision about their use. The 2008 Act has provisions requiring all sunbed premises to display a health notice visible to anybody entering them and to provide information to customers on the risks, allowing them to make an informed choice.

A Scottish Government leaflet highlights those risks, and reading it earlier in the week gave me my first pieces of information about sunbed use—I have to say that it ticks quite a few of the boxes that would frighten me off ever going on a sunbed, and I encourage the public to have a serious look at it. In addition to the higher risk of skin cancer, it highlights the risk of eye damage—including the higher risk of cataracts if appropriate eye protection is not worn—and of accelerated skin damage, including premature ageing of the skin, which was well covered by the earlier speakers. The leaflet concludes:

“These health risks outweigh any potential benefits in using sunbeds to supplement vitamin D.”

There we have it. There are plenty of warnings about sunbeds, and I will certainly avoid using them. Indeed, I slap factor 50 sun cream on if I walk along Princes Street on a slightly cloudy day. I will leave my remarks at that. I thank hon. Members for an informative debate. I have learned a considerable amount about this issue.

10.2 am

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I thank the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) for her passionate and excellent speech and for so bravely sharing her own experience with melanoma, which makes it all the more delightful that she is with us in such fine health this morning. I am very sorry to hear about her brother, but I am pleased that her diagnosis was found early and was successfully treated. I also thank the hon. Members for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) and for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) for their excellent contributions.

It is fair to say that the health implications of using sunbeds once dominated public consciousness. Almost 10 years ago, when the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010 was introduced by the former Labour MP for Cardiff North and passed by a Labour Government, the health risks that came with using sunbeds were well known and well talked about. I remember a parliamentary reception with celebrities such as Nicola Roberts from Girls Aloud speaking out loud and clear about the dangers of sunbeds.

Roberts spoke as someone in the public eye who felt compelled to be tanned—despite being of ginger complexion and very fair skinned—and to constantly use tanning products. She bravely said that she was coming to a point in her life where she wanted to be her natural colour. However, that was 10 years ago, and we should have come a lot further, but owing to vanity or whatever, everyone still goes in search of that elusive

tan. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire says, we do not need a tan; it should not be something that we desire.

The issue has certainly not been talked about in a long time, not least in the House, where between January 2011 and February 2019—more than eight years—the word “sunbeds” has been said only 16 times. It is therefore very welcome that the hon. Lady has brought this issue to the fore once again, because there is a generation of young people who will not really understand the risks of sunbed use. They will not know that the short, high-intensity exposure to UV radiation provided by sunbeds is dangerous and can dramatically increase the risk of skin cancer. Looking tanned might seem desirable when we are young, but I doubt, as the hon. Lady said, that looking aged with skin damage several years along the line will be as desirable. I invoke the dried-up prune analogy once again: we have all seen them on the beaches, haven’t we?

It is important that we get the message about the health risks across to young people, particularly because people frequently exposed to UV rays before the age of 25 are at a greater risk of developing skin cancer later in life. I have to admit that that statistic greatly worries me. I confess that, as a young woman in the 1980s, before we knew what we know now, I used sunbeds, although not as often as some. It was obvious that they could not be that good for me, but I did not realise how bad they were for me. I often used them to get a base tan before going on holiday, because we all believed that we would look after our skin better if we got a base tan before going abroad. As the hon. Lady said, that is a total fallacy. Has the Minister therefore made any assessment of how many young people know the risks of sunbed use, and does he have any plan to address the issue?

All the Government information on sunbed use dates back to 2009 and 2010, despite more relevant information being published since. For example, the WHO published a 2017 report entitled “Artificial Tanning Devices: Public Health Interventions to Manage Sunbeds”. The IARC also assessed UV-emitting tanning devices as “carcinogenic to humans” based on consistent evidence of a positive association between their use and the incidence of melanoma.

As we have heard, melanoma is on the increase in the UK, and it is estimated that the NHS will spend £465 million on treating skin cancer patients by 2025. I pay tribute to charities such as Melanoma UK and MelanomaMe., which was set up in my constituency in 2017 by Kerry Rafferty and Elaine Taylor—I met them in 2017 when opening an awareness event for them in Sunderland—after one of them suffered from melanoma and the devastation it wreaked on her life and body. Charities such as Melanoma UK and MelanomaMe. support patients and their families and raise awareness of skin cancers and the risks of sun exposure and, of course, sunbed use.

The Minister knows how strongly I feel that the Government have an obligation to prevent cancers, and I know he is passionate about doing so. That is why I believe that the Government must look at sunbed regulations again, to assess whether they need to be updated almost 10 years on since they were first published. It must be a priority for the Government to ensure that people know the risks of sunbed use before using them, as well as during and after their use. For example,

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

people are told that smoking is harmful before they take it up, but guidance does not disappear once they have started smoking or even once they have stopped. Even though they may carry on smoking, everyone who smokes will admit to knowing the health risks. We are not at that stage with sunbed use.

It is easy to shrug off health warnings when it comes to sunbed use, because the symptoms of skin damage may not appear for up to 20 years. However, skin damage can have very serious implications, as we have heard, so the warnings must not be shrugged off. The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire called for a ban on sunbeds across the UK, like in Australia and other countries. Although I can see why she calls for a ban, I feel that we must first allow the Government to look at all the most recent evidence and make an assessment. They should definitely update the regulations if necessary and ensure that younger generations are made aware, at the earliest stage, of the risks of sunbed use.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, this issue was very much in the public consciousness almost 10 years ago, and perhaps it is time to ensure that it is again. I am sure the Minister will take on board all that he has heard this morning, and I look forward to his response.

10.10 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hosie. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) very much. We use the term “hon. Friend” a lot in this place, but she knows that she is my very good friend as well as my hon. Friend. Well done to her for securing the debate.

I was interested to hear the word search statistic from my shadow, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). It was very interesting, but not at all surprising. The hon. Lady and I spend a lot of time in Westminster Hall, but this is not an issue that we have covered before, although we have obviously covered cancer a lot. This issue affects so many people’s lives. We heard from my good and hon. Friend about how it has impacted on her family and, as the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West said, it was very good to hear that she herself has managed to deal with it successfully.

I do not know about other hon. Members, but sunbeds feel very 1980s to me. As someone who was at secondary school in the 1980s, I thought that they had been left behind there, because we do not hear much about them these days, but it occurs to me that there is a large sunbed salon in my constituency of Winchester. There is a reason why the 1980s came into my mind. Hon. Members may remember an episode of “Only Fools and Horses” called “Tea for Three”. The infamous character Trigger has a niece whom Del and Rodney remember from her much younger years and who comes to stay with Trigger for a period. The niece, Lisa, is now 25 and—well, let’s just say that she has matured into a very attractive young lady. Del and Rodney set out to impress her, both thinking that they have a chance. I remember the episode well, and the reason why it is relevant to the debate is that Rodney decides to lie on the sunbed in the flat at Nelson Mandela House to

improve his look for young Lisa and falls asleep. Del then turns up the dial, and Rodney spends the rest of the episode with a bright red face—in many ways. It is interesting that tanning was portrayed in that sitcom as a technique to attract the ladies. It backfired, as everything seemed to, on poor Rodney, but it was interesting how it was used and it explains why I connect sunbeds with the 1980s. As we have heard today, however, sunbeds and their impact are very much current phenomena.

As my hon. Friend is keenly aware, there are huge health consequences from exposure to both natural and artificial ultraviolet radiation. The most significant is of course skin cancer, which we have talked about, but there are other impacts, such as sunburn, which is very unpleasant and uncomfortable, accelerated skin ageing—the “prune” factor that we have discussed—eye inflammation, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) mentioned, and temporary immunosuppression. Importantly, though, there are measures that we all know we can take to reduce the impact of exposure to UV radiation from the sun, such as using sunscreen and seeking shade. Equally, there are many precautions that should be taken when using sunbeds, such as only using a staffed facility that provides guidance to users and limiting regular use of a sunbed. I will come on to those two points. Younger people who use sunbeds are at greater risk, which is why in 2011, regulations were introduced banning the use of sunbeds by under-18s in England and Wales, as we have heard.

Melanoma skin cancer is one of the most common cancers in the UK today. About 15,500 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed each year and more than 2,000 people die every year in the UK from melanoma. In recent years, skin cancer has become much more common in the UK, which is thought to be the result of increased exposure to intense sunlight on holidays abroad. Many people these days can afford foreign holidays, which come with much fun but also many dangers. It is worth noting that more than one quarter of skin cancer cases are diagnosed in people under 50, which is unusually early compared with most other types of cancer. Cancer Research UK estimates that 86% of skin cancers are preventable. I often say in Westminster Hall debates—my shadow will have heard me say this many times—that two thirds of cancers are down to bad luck and one third of cancers are preventable. When we consider the high percentage of skin cancers that are preventable, we realise that this is an area where we can move the dial in the prevention space. That is why I am interested in today’s debate and so grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire for initiating it.

My hon. Friend referred to the many people who would not have skin cancer if they had not used sunbeds. It is difficult to be certain about how many cases of skin cancer are due to sunbed use, as most people will also have had natural exposure to UV from the sun. Obviously, there are a few people who have skin conditions that mean that they must remain 100% covered up or who do not go outside, for other health reasons. It is vital—my hon. Friend made this point very well, as did others—that the public are fully aware of the risk from their overall exposure to UV and how to minimise the risks.

We have not mentioned vitamin D much in this debate. Vitamin D is a hormone that is very important in musculoskeletal health, and vitamin D synthesis is triggered in the skin through exposure to UVB, including

from sunbeds. However, we do not advise people to use sunbeds to enhance vitamin D levels, because any beneficial effect of increased vitamin D synthesis is outweighed by the adverse effects that we have heard about in the debate. We recommend alternative sources of vitamin D, such as dietary supplements.

Public Health England, for which I am responsible, discourages the use of sunbeds for cosmetic tanning, and rightly so. Those individuals who have very fair skin, who burn easily in the sun—I think of the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) when I say that, and it certainly applies to me—or who have had skin cancer previously would be at increased risk and obviously are advised not to use a sunbed. This is the point that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) made about the race that we are and the part of the world in which we live.

The Be Clear on Cancer campaigns, which Public Health England leads on behalf of the Government, are designed to raise the public's awareness of specific cancer symptoms, encourage people with those symptoms to go to the doctor, and promote the diagnosis of cancer at an early stage. We are about to roll out the next iteration of the Be Clear on Cancer campaign, about cervical cancer, on which there was a big debate in this Chamber last month, and we have had the campaign on breast cancer in the past. It is fair to say that there is no shortage of applications for the next iteration of Be Clear on Cancer. And often we are limited in what we can do in those campaigns in relation to the impact that people would then be driven into the health service. However, one of the things that I will take away from this debate is that it would be well worth my placing on the radar of the Be Clear on Cancer team melanoma and skin cancers generally for the campaign as we roll it forward. That will hopefully be one positive outcome from the debate.

It is critical—it is important that Health Ministers say this at the Dispatch Box—that people are aware of their skin. They need to be skin aware—in the same way as so many women have, hopefully, been trained to be breast aware—and to seek advice from their GP if they notice any changes, particularly in terms of moles that itch, bleed or change shape. I remember being taught that as a youngster and I wonder whether the younger generation are still as aware of that health message, but Be Clear on Cancer is something that we can look to with hope.

Let me touch on regulation. The Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010 came into force in April 2011 in England and Wales, as has been mentioned, to prohibit under-18s from using sunbeds. Restrictions on sunbed use by under-18s also apply in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. Guidance has been provided to support local authorities' authorised officers in successfully implementing the Act, by providing information on the duties of businesses and how to carry out inspections. The local environmental health departments in England are responsible for monitoring and inspecting sunbed salons everywhere, except those situated in local authority leisure centres, which are regulated by the Health and Safety Executive. It is worth making that distinction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire talked about banning sunbeds. Should they be banned? A range of options to minimise the adverse effects of sunbeds has been considered. Public Health England

has contributed to the most recent World Health Organisation review, published in 2017, on the public health interventions to manage sunbeds. Banning sunbeds was one option under consideration, but the adverse impacts need to be considered carefully to avoid unintended consequences, such as increased use of home machines—like Del and Rodney had—with more harmful impacts.

We have to be aware of the unintended consequences. One of the unintended consequences of banning the use of commercial sunbeds by under-18s was the opening of a market for home hire of second-hand sunbed equipment and sunbed parties—believe it or not. I have been to many parties in my time, but I have yet to be invited to a sunbed party. The mind boggles—it is probably best to leave it there. My swimming trunks have not had an outing for years, but that is probably for the best. It is vital to equip people with the information to avoid the risks of over-exposure to UV radiation. In this way, we empower individuals to protect themselves from UV sources.

Before I address prevention, diagnosis and treatment, I will respond directly to my hon. Friend's suggestion that sunbeds should be banned. I think we need to look at the regulations again, as the shadow Minister mentioned. They have not been changed for a number of years. My hon. Friend has brought this issue to this Chamber with great force, intelligence and evidence. Now is a good time because we have published the prevention strategy and we are working on a Green Paper on prevention. I am interested in any and every idea that is related to prevention.

As a Minister, I am often given papers by officials, and stuff to look at and sign off. However, in this process of preparing the Green Paper on prevention I can say to my officials, "I want real blue-sky thinking here. I want you to look out into academia, to see where the really interesting and cutting-edge work is going on around prevention and future prevention." This Green Paper process is really open-minded and based on open-source planning. If we look at the evidence and think that banning the commercial use of sunbeds, while taking into account the possible unintended consequences, could be part of prevention, I will not rule it out. I absolutely do not rule that out.

Wherever possible, the aim is to prevent skin cancer from developing in the first place. I met Melanoma UK at the Britain Against Cancer conference just before Christmas. It has a fantastic team, who I am sure have been very helpful to my hon. Friend ahead of today's debate. I am proud to say that Public Health England and Melanoma UK have had great success in raising awareness of the risks, and the actions to take to reduce the risk of exposure to the sun and the use of sunbeds. The Health and Safety Executive plays a vital role in raising awareness through leaflets and posters, reflecting its guidance for tanning salons and their customers about the safe operation of sunbeds. My hon. Friend used many quotes from people who are engaged in this issue. One interesting quote was from the lady who runs a salon and said that she wants people to feel good about coming into her business, and that sending people away with a potentially life-threatening condition is not a good look for any business. That was an important point.

A tan may give you a so-called healthy glow. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock pointed to the magazines and the media image: people always have

[*Steve Brine*]

that healthy glow. However, I have never thought of a good tan as a healthy glow. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance, published in February 2016, is clear that there is no healthy way to tan. The idea that there is such a thing as a healthy tan, as my hon. Friend said in her opening remarks, is a myth. Any tan can increase your risk of developing skin cancer, whether through natural or artificial UV, and getting a tan does very little to protect your skin from the harmful effects of the sun, which is my hon. Friend's fundamental point.

NICE, NHS England and cancer charities, including Cancer Research UK and Macmillan, are all clear that if you want browner-looking skin, fake tan is the way to go. It is much safer to use a fake tan product on your skin than to sunbathe or use a sunbed. As the expression goes, "Fake it, don't bake it". I think that is what they say in the Department of Health and Social Care these days. I do not know whether you are aware of that, Mr Hosie.

I hope that I have covered a lot of the points that have been raised. I hope that I have demonstrated the Government's commitment—my commitment—to improving outcomes for people in this country living with skin cancer, and the many more who are at real risk of developing this disease. The Government's ambitions outlined in the long-term plan for the NHS, the Secretary of State's prevention strategy, and the Green Paper will ensure that we strive to do even better over the next decade. In conclusion, I agree completely with the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk that, while we learn a lot in this place, there is a lot of repetition in many of the debates, but that this debate has not been one of those.

10.26 am

Mrs Latham: I thank the Minister for his thoughtful response. I hope that we can get something in the Be Clear on Cancer campaign and the Green Paper, because that would take us to the next stage. If we can prevent melanomas, it will obviously be a good thing. I thank the hon. Member for Rhondda, who talked about killing machines. Unfortunately, he is no longer in his place, as he has had to become a diplomat, educating the Germans to be diplomatic.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), and the

Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who all made thoughtful contributions. This issue does have a very 1980s feel, as the Minister illustrated with the good example from "Only Fools and Horses". However, it is still happening.

The Minister said that education is very important. I support a campaign for "Sun Safe Schools" in Mid Derbyshire. We had a broadcaster who died in his early 30s from a melanoma—not from sunbeds. A lot of the money raised for him was spent in schools to make them sun-safe schools, where children learn an amazing little song about slipping on a T-shirt, slapping on a hat and slopping on sunscreen. It educates not just the children, but their parents: keep covered up and keep the sun cream on.

That did not happen in my day. When I was a child, there was no sun factor. We just put on Nivea, got burnt and put on camomile lotion after that. Today, there are options for people and it is important that we educate as many children as possible, because they will educate their parents. I actually challenge builders in the street if I see them without a top on, getting burnt, and ask them if they put on sunscreen. They are very polite, usually, about my intervention.

We need to keep talking about this issue, because I passionately feel that nobody should die from a melanoma. There are familial traits, but we need to educate as many people as possible about sunbed use and over-exposure to the sun, whether on the beach, in the countryside or in the back garden. If the Minister could include it in the Green Paper, it would be an excellent step forward.

However, I would still like not only a ban on sunbeds in commercial premises, but a total ban on the sale of sunbeds in this country. I know that is draconian, and I am not a great "banner" of things, but nobody needs a sunbed—they are not necessary to anybody's life. I thank the Minister for his thoughtful response. I hope that this has moved the debate forward. Since it is 10 years since anything has happened on this issue, let us hope it is not another 10 years before we move forward again on this particular type of cancer.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the health implications of sunbed use.

10.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Education Funding: Cheshire

11 am

Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered education funding in Cheshire.

It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and I am grateful to the Minister for being present to respond to this important debate. I am also grateful to the Secretary of State for agreeing to meet headteachers in my constituency, and I am delighted to be joined by my hon. Friends the Members for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who share my concerns about this important matter—I know that there might not be enough time for my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton to make a full speech, because this is only a short debate. I also notice that friends from across the House are present, including the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson).

I acknowledge the support that has been provided nationally to date, including the £1 billion increase in funding, the extra support for teachers' pay and pensions and for capital spend, and the increase in overall education funding since 2010. However, increases in costs are outstripping that extra funding, and there are discrepancies and differences in school funding in different parts of the country. The funding of Cheshire's schools is, and will be, seriously negatively impacted by its geography, rurality and perceived needs, or lack of needs. We will explain some, and hopefully most, of the key issues in the time that we have, so that if the Minister does not have time to go through everything, he will be able to meet us and address those funding shortcomings.

First, Cheshire East Council is considering its three-year budget forecast to 2020-21 and its calculations for its maintained schools, and it says that by March 2021, 50% of maintained schools in the borough will be reporting a deficit in excess of £100,000. The total forecast deficit will equal £9.2 million—that is 10% of those schools' funding—which will affect 38 schools in the borough. Cheshire's national funding formula consultation identified cost increases of 8% from 2016-17 to 2019-20, but funding in Cheshire East has only increased by approximately 2%. As the lowest-funded authority, our schools already have lean budget plans, which makes addressing those pressures even more challenging than in other areas. The current national formula is shifting resources away from areas—such as Cheshire East—with relatively low deprivation levels, reducing basic funding levels and not leaving enough to run the schools.

Under those conditions, it is not possible in Cheshire East to meet the headline minimum per pupil levels in all cases. Where school deficits are exceeding £100,000, schools will have to look at reorganising, whether that means creating federations or possibly closing. That will not meet the needs of families and children in Cheshire East, because the money will be diverted into transportation to get children to their schools. The pressures on special educational needs services continue to grow, particularly given the contribution of £6,000 that schools need to make. I have been told that because of that contribution, some schools might refuse to take children with special educational needs, or that schools that are all-inclusive and do accept those pupils will face an extra strain on their budget.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Presumably, the right hon. Lady was sitting at the Cabinet table in July when the latest school funding formula was discussed. I do not know whether she made representations to the Chancellor at the time, or even pressed the Cabinet for a vote, as there are well-documented claims that she did in the case of Brexit. We share some of her analysis of school funding cuts, but this matters when it comes to the Division Lobby, and in the right hon. Lady's case, when it comes to her collective responsibility as a member of the Cabinet.

Ms McVey: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the fact that the extra £1 billion was put in place was particularly due to the pressure applied by my hon. Friends the Members for Congleton and for Eddisbury. As I only returned to the House at the 2017 election, I too applied pressure, because I think it is vital that schools get the money they need for education. For me, education is one of the key building blocks of social mobility that every child needs, so I did indeed make sure that we pressed for further funding. I would like that to be on the record.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the pressure that was put on by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton and myself, and indeed by other hon. Members who met with the Minister to ensure that a minimum level of funding was applied, resulted from the particular problems in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester? Does she also agree that those problems are linked to the formula by which rurality is calculated, which is as the crow flies, rather than as the car or bus travels?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is correct in what she says and in the work that she has done. I am glad that I have entered the House again, enabling me to unite with my friends and push these important points.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms McVey: If the hon. Lady does not mind, I will continue a little bit further, because I do not have much time. This is only a 30-minute debate, and I know the Minister has to respond, so I want to raise a couple of key points about Cheshire West and Chester. However, I know that the hon. Lady has done a lot in this area, and has a lot of knowledge about it.

The key challenge in Cheshire West and Chester is that it is funded below the average of all local authorities, due to the emphasis in the national funding formula on funding areas of deprivation and areas with higher living costs. Under that formula, Cheshire West and Chester is funded at the minimal level of funding for all local authorities for early years provision, meaning provision for three and four-year-olds. In 2018-19 and 2019-20, Cheshire West and Chester has received the minimum 0.5% increase in school core funding, but in the same period, local government officers' payment bills have increased by 5.6% and teachers' pay costs have increased above the anticipated public sector pay cap. Spending is outstripping the funding that is going into that area, and as a result, Cheshire's primary schools are now 44% less funded than London's primary schools and its secondary schools are 49% less funded than in London.

[Ms McVey]

My key questions to the Minister are as follows. Will he commit to look again at rural funding and address the discrepancy? Does he accept that the increase in costs is outstripping the increase in funding? Will he provide support when local authorities have to use independent schools to meet specific needs? Will he support Cheshire in creating additional special educational needs places, and provide capital investment to enable that to happen? Will he also look at the apprenticeship levy and whether it needs to be applied to schools, and if that is the case, make sure that the levy can be used in a wider context—maybe training, rather than just apprenticeships? Will he ensure that in the forthcoming spending review, he applies for more funds for the Cheshire area, now that he understands the discrepancies in funding in that area?

As I said, although we appreciate the money that has come in, when we look at how that money is filtering through, we see that there are still needs. Additionally, given the increase in housing and development in the Cheshire area that we all know about, considerably more pupils will be wanting to go to school. There are more children with needs in that area, including complex needs, and more demands are being placed on the local authorities of Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester. I appreciate that the Minister might not be able to give a full response to those questions today, but will he agree to a subsequent meeting, so that we can all work together to make sure that our area gets the right funding for its children?

11.9 am

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) for allowing me to contribute to the debate, which we applied for jointly.

Before the debate, I wrote to every primary and high school headteacher in my constituency. All seven senior school headteachers, whether in free schools, academies or multi-academy trusts, sent a collective response stating that they cannot remember morale being so low, the main reason being the lack of funding into schools, and that standards—high in Cheshire East—will be adversely affected.

The heads asked me to bring four key messages to Parliament. I will quote their words, which are strong:

“The Government must stop misleading the country by stating that record amounts are being spent on education when”, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, since 2010, in Cheshire East

“the amount spent per child has fallen in real terms by 8%.”

Secondly, they say:

“The Government must commit to an index linked approach to the national formula so that all schools are able to deal with changes that are outside of their control, such as increased employer NI and pension contributions”,

as well as underfunded pay awards and other cost pressures. They say that there has been a 10% rise in staff costs in our schools since 2017 alone. Their third and fourth points are:

“The Government must demonstrate that every school in the country will gain enough funding via the Age Weighted Pupil Unit to run a school regardless of the characteristics of its pupils.

The Government should provide a long-term commitment to educational funding in a similar manner to the National Health Service.”

A major issue, say the heads, is that schools go from year to year with no annual Government statements or decisions about school funding, so there is no long-term planning. That makes it impossible for heads to plan or budget for the future. I have known most of them for many years and, dedicated as they are, it is remarkable that they carry on under the relentless pressure they experience year on year. One says:

“the role of the Head Teacher is becoming an impossible responsibility to fulfil, due to significant constraints on the financial viability of schools.”

To quote the seven heads again,

“school finances in Cheshire East are in a terrible state, despite the NFF promises made in July 2017.”

The Schools Minister knows that that was when funding of £4,800 per secondary school pupil was announced as a result, as we have heard, of a sustained campaign by headteachers, including those in my constituency. In Cheshire East, however, the heads tell me that they are not receiving £4,800. Instead, they receive: £4,018 for every key stage 3 child, £4,804 for every key stage 4 child and £3,971 for every key stage 5 child. That represents a reduction of 1% each year since 2014. Overall expenditure on school sixth forms has fallen in real terms by 16.3% since 2014. Funding for 16 to 19-year-olds is now 21% lower than funding for 11 to 16-year-olds, which makes it very difficult to run a broad sixth-form curriculum.

What is the impact of such figures on our schools? The heads state:

“Pastoral support...cut or removed at a time when the need is greater than ever...Class sizes have increased to unmanageable numbers and teacher contact ratios have been increased...over what is acceptable. SEN needs of pupils are not being met as they should. Courses have been cut, especially at KS5...denying many young people the opportunity to study what they want to. The...potential closure of multiple post-16 institutions across Cheshire East...Schools are having to continually restructure at all levels...to save money”,

reducing support for young people and staff year after year. Many schools have recently undergone ICFP—integrated curriculum financial planning—reviews, as recommended by the Government. The independent advisers said they cannot see where any savings can be made without the impacts I have just listed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) also continues to work hard to support schools in his constituency. As a Minister, he is not able to participate in the debate, but I am grateful to him for having organised a meeting, as a local MP, with the Secretary of State. Before his ministerial appointment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton, my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and I were able to discuss with him the important issue of school funding.

I turn now to primary schools. Many heads wrote to me—too many to quote them all, so I will quote just some:

“Finding it impossible to balance our budget.”

“Costs continue to escalate outside of our control from NI increases, regrading for Living Wage, national pay rises for teachers and non-teaching staff, local government pension increases, cost of energy and utilities, and general inflationary pressures.”

"If a child starts my school after the first week in October, I will receive no funding for them until 22 months later."

"SEND Funding...is made up of a number of proxy factors, but 25% of this is deprivation. Just because you may have special needs, it doesn't mean you're deprived and...just because you're deprived doesn't mean you're special needs...The current formula makes a postcode lottery out of special needs funding."

"In 2019-20 in Cheshire East...39 out of 124 primaries will get less than last year. 31% of primaries will lose an average of 3-4%...The very small schools, such as rural schools, suffer further losses: 8 out of 16 small schools will get less than last year, with an average loss of over 8%".

"The whole NFF formula needs to be revised...and...in Cheshire East schools actually receive just £2,928 for every primary aged child"—

not the £3,500 that they should get. Another head said:

"Funding for SEN is now at crisis point in Cheshire East."

I want to finish with the comments of a new head, which moved me deeply:

"As a new Head, I have been overwhelmed by the constraints of our budget...We are particularly struggling with support for pupils with additional needs...support from the SEND Team at County has been limited because they are overspent and cannot afford to meet children's needs...Services such as Special Needs, Safeguarding and Looked After are overspent and cannot offer the support and guidance that school and families need...The lack of funding in education in Cheshire is causing great hardship...It is heartbreaking to be supporting a child who needs alternative provision and to have to explain to their parents that there is nothing more you can do...If we don't support our more complex children, we risk pupils being hurt, property being broken, and learning disrupted...We have a number of children suffering with mental health issues, and are witnessing self-harm"—

this is at primary-school age. They continued:

"We frequently find Health and Safety issues, but are unable to correct them because we don't have the funds...I am also concerned that talented staff will leave the profession."

I note that the petition for a longer debate on fairer funding had been signed by 1,424 of my constituents as of this morning. That is 1.5% of them. I will of course speak again in that debate on 4 March, because I have much more to relate from my teachers, but time does not permit today.

11.18 am

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, I think for the first time.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) on securing the debate. I pay tribute to her and to my hon. Friends the Members for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) for the way in which they have, over the past few years, brought the issue of school funding in their area to the Department, to me personally and to the Secretary of State. If I may say so, they have had a significant influence on the way in which the national funding formula has been implemented—

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): And the rest!

Laura Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Nick Gibb: I will not give way, because of time, but I was about to say that Opposition Members have also brought the issues to the Department's attention. I pay tribute to them, too, and to other hon. Friends who are not present at the debate.

This Government are determined to create a world-class education system that allows every child to achieve their potential, regardless of who they are or where they live. As well as improving standards and supporting teachers, we are investing money in our schools and helping them to make the most out of every pound they receive. We are also delivering on our promise to make funding fairer. The introduction of the national funding formula, the biggest reform of the school funding system for a decade, means that we are now directing money where it is most needed, based on schools' and pupils' needs and characteristics.

I want to start by emphasising the significant progress we are already making towards creating a world-class education system, thanks in part to our reforms: the attainment gap between rich and poor is shrinking; the proportion of pupils in good or outstanding schools has increased from 66% in 2010 to 84% now; and our primary school children have achieved their highest ever score on international reading tests. We have also launched 12 opportunity areas to drive improvement in parts of the country that we know can do better.

Antoinette Sandbach: The Minister mentioned the improvement in standards. One example is the Sound and District Primary School, which improved the proportion of pupils achieving at key stage 2 from 70% in 2017 to 83% in 2018. Will the Minister deal with the suggestions about the index-linked approach and the age-weighted pupil unit funding that is the core of funding for every school, regardless of its particular characteristics, which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton raised?

Nick Gibb: I will come to that point. I am sure other hon. Members would like to raise that as well.

To support the improvements in standards, and because children get only one chance of a great education, the Government have prioritised school spending, even while having to make difficult decisions on public spending in other areas. We have invested an extra £1.3 billion across 2018-19 and 2019-20, as referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton, over and above existing plans set out in the previous spending review, so core funding for schools and high needs will rise from almost £41 billion in 2017 to £43.5 billion in 2019-20. Figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies show that real terms per pupil funding for five to 16-year-olds in 2020 will be more than 50% higher than it was in 2000.

We can compare ourselves favourably with other countries. The UK spends as much per pupil on primary and secondary state education as any major economy in the world, apart from the United States of America. Although there is more money going into our schools than ever before, we absolutely recognise the budgeting challenges that schools face, and we acknowledge that we are asking schools to do more. That makes it all the more important that we do everything to ensure that we get the best out of every pound that we provide. One aspect of that is ensuring that that money is directed where it is most needed.

For the first time last April, funding was distributed to local authorities based on the individual needs and characteristics of every school in the country, not accidents of geography or history, as had been the case in the previous system, when schools with similar characteristics

[Nick Gibb]

received very different levels of funding with little or no justification. Those disparities had persisted and grown for nearly a decade and left some schools and areas unable to get the resources they needed. That is why our commitment to reform the unfair, opaque and outdated schools and high needs funding systems was so important. I am very pleased to say that our introduction of the national funding formula delivers on that commitment.

Schools are already benefiting from the gains delivered by the national funding formula. Since 2017, we have given every local authority more money for every pupil in every school, while allocating the biggest increases to the schools that have been most underfunded. By 2019-20, all schools will attract an increase of at least 1% per pupil compared with their 2017-18 baselines, and the most underfunded schools will attract up to 6% more per pupil by 2019-20, compared with 2017-18. On average, schools in Cheshire East, including in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton, will receive gains of 2.4% per pupil by next year, compared with 2017-18. That will mean an extra £10.4 million in total when rising pupil numbers are also factored in. On high needs, last December we announced that we will provide £250 million of additional funding across England over this financial year and the next. In Cheshire East, it means the local authority will receive an additional £1.6 million across this year and next, on top of the increases that were already promised.

We recognise, as I have said, the challenges faced by the lowest funded schools. We heard throughout the consultation, particularly from stakeholders in Cheshire East—I remember meeting headteachers that Members brought to the office—that we could do more to support schools that attract the lowest pupil funding. We listened carefully and have included minimum per pupil funding levels in the formula to guarantee that every school attracts a minimum amount of funding for every pupil, regardless of whether they have children with additional needs.

I am pleased that the council representing Cheshire East has chosen to use the transitional minimum of £3,300 for primary and £4,600 for secondary schools in its local formula in 2018-19. In 2019-20, the formula will provide for at least £4,800 per pupil in every secondary school and £3,500 for every primary. In Cheshire East, secondary schools in particular benefit from this measure with around half of secondary schools attracting extra funding as a result. We have not limited gains for schools benefiting from those minimum funding levels.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton also raised the issue of rural schools. The national funding formula includes support for small schools, especially those in rural areas. It provides a lump sum of £110,000 for every school as a contribution to the costs that do not vary with pupil numbers, and that gives schools certainty that they will attract a fixed amount each year. The sparsity factor in the formula allocates additional funding of £25 million specifically to schools that are both small and remote. This year, seven schools in my right hon. Friend's constituency attracted a combined total of £133,000 in sparsity funding.¹

As for schools in Cheshire East that do not attract such funding either because they are not among the smallest schools nationally or they are not far enough apart to meet the distance threshold—something my hon. Friend

the Member for Eddisbury raised—we have been clear that we want all schools to operate as efficiently as possible, and there is scope for rural schools in close proximity to work together to get the best value from their resources. None the less—this will please my hon. Friend—we keep the formula design under consideration and will consider feedback on specific factors when developing the formula. In particular, we appreciate that the straight-line distances used to determine eligibility for sparsity funding might not always be appropriate, given local geography, and we are considering how to refine the methodology for calculating sparsity eligibility in future. In the meantime, local authorities can submit a request to vary how distance is measured for sparsity funding allocations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton also raised sixth-form funding. We recognise the pressure that post-16 funding has been under and we have protected the base rate of funding for all 16 to 19-year-old students until 2020. Our commitment to the 16 to 19 sector has contributed to the current record high proportions of 16 to 17-year-olds who are participating in education or apprenticeships. We are also providing additional funding to support institutions to grow participation in level 3 maths. Institutions will receive an extra £600 for every additional student from next year.

I also recognise that protecting the base rate in cash terms means that funding per student has not kept pace with inflation, and we will look carefully at 16 to 19 funding in preparation for the next spending review. I hope that gives some assurance to my hon. Friends.

Fiona Bruce: I appreciate what the Minister is saying, but the issue is not only about pupils coming to the end of their time at school. Primary school heads have told me that the base figure of £3,500, which they do not receive, will simply not cover their costs. They say the base cost to run a primary school and serve their pupils is £4,060, so they make the point that the base figure is now insufficient.

Nick Gibb: I understand the representation that my hon. Friend makes. She is, as always, assiduous, as are my other hon. Friends and Opposition Members. We have to make difficult decisions. We introduced that minimum amount to tackle particular problems highlighted by headteachers from Cheshire, and we keep the issues under review.

We understand that the national funding formula represents a big change to the funding system and that schools need stability. To ensure that there is a smooth transition, we have confirmed that, for the next two years, local authorities will continue to be responsible for setting school budgets at a local level, in consultation with their schools. This flexibility will help to ensure that the transition to the formula takes place in a way that best meets the needs of local schools and pupils. Many local authorities are moving closer and closer to the national funding formula, and 112 authorities, including authorities in Cheshire, have introduced a minimum per pupil funding level factor in their local formula. I am very pleased that so many authorities across the country are showing such strong support for the national funding formula.

I thank all Members in this debating Chamber today for their contributions to this very important debate.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

1. [Official Report, 19 February 2019, Vol. 654, c. 13MC.]

Human Rights in the UK

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered human rights in the UK.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes, I think for the first time. I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce today's debate.

Over the last few years, particularly since we began our Brexit journey, we have discussed human rights in the United Kingdom and the potential consequences for them were this country to leave the European Union. A number of colleagues, most notably my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), have sought assurances from Ministers that human rights protection in the United Kingdom would not be in any way diminished as a result of that process. By and large, those assurances have been given.

Why, therefore, is it appropriate to discuss this matter again? There are three reasons. First, we have moved on in the Brexit process. We now have a draft political declaration that seeks to define the relationship this country would wish to have with the other 27 members after it leaves the European Union—if, indeed, it does. A number of us noticed a slight change of language in that declaration regarding human rights. No longer is there a clear-cut commitment to embody in domestic legislation the European convention on human rights; instead, there is talk of respect for the framework that the ECHR provides. The other 27 signatories to the political declaration are quite clear in their commitment to the ECHR. That suggests the possibility of some divergence between the United Kingdom and EU member states regarding implementation of the convention.

Secondly, the Government are led by someone who could hardly be described as absolute in her commitment to the current human rights legislative framework in this country. When the Prime Minister was Home Secretary, she sought to undermine the Human Rights Act 1998 by suggesting that it was in some way soft on terrorists. It is also worth noting that when she stood to be leader of the Conservative party, she ruled out repealing the HRA, not as a matter of principle, but because there was, in her words, no majority in Parliament for doing so. One wonders what her position might be were the majority in Parliament to change.

Thirdly, the Conservative party was elected on a manifesto that pledged that the HRA would not be repealed

“while the process of Brexit is underway”.

Who am I to guess whether the Brexit process is nearing the endgame or not? It certainly looks likely that, in 2019, it will get to the final stages, and we may or may not leave the European Union. The question therefore arises: what would the governing party's policy be on repeal of the HRA once the Brexit process has been completed or at least got to the position of being implemented? For all those reasons, the central purpose of today's debate is to seek an assurance from the

Minister that there will be no attempt to repeal, undermine, weaken or amend the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

I often feel that our discussions on human rights can become somewhat abstract and go over the heads of the ordinary man or woman in the street. It is important that we state clearly why human rights are so central to everything we believe in. In essence, human rights are an expression of what we mean by civilisation. They define how individuals should act towards one another. They confer respect and dignity on the individual. Crucially, as well as setting standards for the behaviour that we expect from others, they set obligations on how we ought to behave towards others. I would argue that the existence of human rights is central to our wellbeing as a healthy and dynamic society.

It has been rightly suggested that few people ever think about their human rights; they certainly do not feel the need to go to court to have them upheld. I doubt if more than a tiny percentage of the population even know of someone who has gone to court on a human rights matter. That in itself suggests how powerful and useful the legislative framework is. The central point of human rights legislation is not to allow people to seek redress if their rights are infringed, but to protect people in the first place from others doing bad things to them. The fact that there is so little court activity in this field vindicates the view that the system is working.

Of course, there are cases where the system does not work and people feel the need to have their rights upheld. It is interesting to refer to a few of those, so that we, and the public, can understand how central these matters are. Celia Peachey did not think that the Human Rights Act related to her at all. Her mother was killed at the hands of a violent partner. She tried for years to get the police to do something about it, but could not persuade them to intervene. After her mother died, she was able to use the Human Rights Act to secure an inquest, which returned a verdict of unlawful killing and criticised the police for refusing to take action despite her representations.

The Driscolls were an elderly couple who depended on each other for care and support to go about their daily lives. When Mr Driscoll was rehoused in a residential care home, his wife was not allowed to live with him. They used the article in the Human Rights Act on the right to a family life to argue that they should be rehoused together, and they won and were rehoused as a couple. That was of benefit not only to them; they set a precedent, and in such cases it is now normal to consider rehousing elderly couples together.

Members will know of the case of Gary McKinnon, a young man with Asperger's who allegedly hacked into a National Aeronautics and Space Administration computer database and who was wanted by the United States of America. They tried to have him extradited, which would have led to 60 years' imprisonment had he been found guilty. He tried to resist that extradition. To her credit, the then Home Secretary said in 2012 that she would not allow his extradition, because, under the Human Rights Act, his rights would be breached were he extradited to stand trial in the US.

There is also the celebrated case of the black cab rapist, John Worboys. Two of his early victims, in 2003 and 2007, went to the police to complain about what

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had happened to them, and their complaints were not investigated at the time. After the case came to prominence, they used the Human Rights Act to get an inquiry into how the police had dealt with their complaints. It found that they had not done so correctly. The police were reprimanded, and the victims received compensation as a result of that use of the Human Rights Act.

Many people will know of the continuing campaign of the families of those who died in the Hillsborough disaster to seek justice for their loved ones. They have repeatedly used the Human Rights Act over the last 20 years to move their cases forward.

The final example I will give is that of people trying to get redress against public authorities—particularly health authorities, such as the Mid Staffordshire NHS hospital trust. I do not want to go into detail about the sad state of affairs in that institution; suffice it to say that 119 families have used the Human Rights Act to seek redress for the treatment they received from that hospital. Those are all important uses of the Act. Often, they quite literally make the difference between life and death, and are central to the quality of life of our citizens.

Let me turn to the implications of Brexit for the protections in the Human Rights Act. I have already discussed the wording of the political declaration with respect to the European convention on human rights, but in a sense I have to wonder why it is even an issue. The ECHR is the creature not of the European Union, but of the Council of Europe—an organisation to which this country subscribes and that involves 47 European countries, 40% of which are not members of the European Union—so one wonders why this is even being talked about in the context of Brexit.

It has been suggested that a commitment to the ECHR, if taken seriously, is in some ways a hindrance to the process of government and that it prevents the Government from acting freely. Some people on the extreme wings of the Brexit movement would suggest that it means foreign interference with the ability of an independent United Kingdom to do whatever it wants. Well, it is a good hindrance, because it obliges us to conform to international norms of civilisation to which most people throughout the world subscribe.

In terms of complaints under the ECHR and judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the United Kingdom actually has a very good record: it is right down at the bottom of the list of countries having cases lodged against them. Our association with the Court and with the processes upholding the convention should not be seen as some sort of hindrance; it is a vindication of the fact that this country is actually quite good at upholding human rights when it comes to how things are governed.

There is a concern that one reason behind the debate on revisiting human rights legislation may be a desire to free up the United Kingdom for international trading arrangements post Brexit—the International Trade Secretary is not doing that well at signing us up to them, but I am sure more will come on the agenda in time. It is important that we say at the outset that we are not prepared to accept any trade-off in human rights standards from third-party countries as part of securing trade agreements. Surely we need to be seen as a country that

not only upholds its own human rights standards, but uses its power and authority to ensure that such standards are upheld internationally. I therefore ask the Minister, first, to confirm that there is no intention to diminish current protections, and, secondly, to explore how in a post-Brexit scenario—if indeed that comes about—human rights will be protected not just in this country but around the world.

One problem is that we are talking about something that, to some extent, has already happened. Last summer, in debates on the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the Government were keen to ensure that the EU charter of fundamental rights would not be included in British legislation, despite opposition from my party and many others. Their case was that including the charter would be unnecessary duplication, since all the individual rights in it were replicated elsewhere. That was not quite true—some rights in the charter are not in the ECHR—but, in any case, it missed the main point: the charter's purpose was not just to define people's rights, but to create obligations on EU member states regarding how those rights would be upheld and, in particular, to assert their primacy over other legislation.

Jason Coppel QC's advice to the Equality and Human Rights Commission cites a 2017 case of cleaners in the Sudanese embassy who had tried to go to court to uphold their employment rights but had been told that, under the State Immunity Act 1978, foreign embassies were exempt from employment claims. They used the charter to go to court and to argue and win their case that their employment rights and human rights at work are more important than the 1978 Act, which should be set aside to ensure their rights. The tragedy is that if we exit the European Union at 11 pm on 29 March, the charter will be gone, so those cleaners would not be able to bring such a case. That is a diminution of people's rights.

It is important not to be complacent about this, so we need to look at ways of strengthening and developing the application of human rights in our country. To that end, I want to say something about the situation in Scotland, because developments there can provide some leadership to the United Kingdom and the other nations in it. The Human Rights Act is a reserved matter, but the European convention on human rights, which the Act enshrines, is fundamental to the devolution settlement in Scotland and Wales and to the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland. Scottish Ministers are required to comply with the ECHR in everything they do. For that reason—and for the simple reason that upholding most people's human rights has an awful lot to do with the day-to-day processes of government—the Scottish Government are keen to look at how human rights can be developed and incorporated into Scots law.

Just before Christmas, the First Minister's advisory group on human rights leadership, chaired by Professor Alan Miller, published a very good report, which I commend to colleagues. It sets an agenda for taking things forward over the next five years and sets out three central principles in the context of Brexit. The first, which I have already mentioned, is that there should be no regression in human rights protections as a result of Brexit. The second, which we do not often talk about, is that we need to keep pace with any improvements in human rights protections in the European Union. That is a matter of having policies to ensure that this country does not lag behind the EU27, or indeed

the Council of Europe 46. The third is how to make it real—how to integrate human rights protections into the very processes of government.

The report splits human rights into categories, of which the most familiar is civil and political rights such as the right to life, the right to vote or the right to free expression. Those rights are central to the ECHR and the Human Rights Act, but there is a whole other dimension of human rights that is essential to defining the nature of our society: social and economic rights, such as the right to health, the right to shelter or the right to work. The report is instructive in how it takes forward the debate; rather than describing those rights as abstract principles or objectives to attain, it examines how to shape Government policy towards their delivery.

I am happy to debate the point, because colleagues from the libertarian right may be able to put an alternative point of view, but, to my mind, delivering social and economic rights has to address the question of regulating resources in society. Essentially, such rights are about a fair allocation and sharing of resources between people. That does not mean that it is the Government's responsibility to provide everybody with the keys to a three-bedroom house, but it does mean that the Government ought to be responsible for ensuring that there is a housing public policy framework with the objective that everyone should be adequately housed. In cases where regulation or the market fail to achieve that objective, the Government should also be responsible for ensuring safety-net provision of basic shelter. To test whether Government policy is delivering those rights, we need to ensure that the notion of human rights is integrated into Government at all levels.

There is much that can be learned from the debate in Scotland, so perhaps the Minister could comment on it, and on whether such a debate could happen in the United Kingdom as a whole. Human rights cannot be seen as an add-on or afterthought to Government policy; they need to be central to it at all levels. In future debates on the subject, rather than having a reply from a Justice Minister, perhaps it would be more fitting to have one from a Cabinet Office Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister or even the Prime Minister, because human rights need to be driven into every aspect of Government policy. They should not be seen as the concern only of lawyers or legal departments; they should be central to how we do the business of Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Order. I am conscious that several Members wish to speak. I intend to move to the Front-Bench spokespeople at 3.28 pm, so I advise Members that they will have to be relatively concise if everyone is to speak. I call John Howell.

2.50 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes, and a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who is a fellow member of the Council of Europe. I understand and agree with a lot of what he said.

The European convention on human rights has been around since the early 1950s, and it is worth remembering that it was 1965 when we agreed to abide by the decisions

of the European Court of Human Rights in the UK. We have had almost 60 years of a relationship with the European Court of Human Rights and its decisions.

I start by making the point that the convention is not the same as the Human Rights Act, and the European Union is not the same as the Council of Europe. The two are very different and we should take them as such. I have a lot of time for the convention, and I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said about it. I was particularly irritated during the referendum campaign that a lot of people got the ECHR confused with the European Court of Justice. The two are completely separate. One is owned by the European Union and the other by the Council of Europe.

I would go on to say that the single biggest contribution to peace in Europe since the end of the second world war has come from the European convention on human rights, together with the work that NATO has done. We should state that, and we should be proud of it, because we have been very much involved in it from the beginning. As the hon. Gentleman and I know only too well, the European Court of Human Rights comes with a democratic mandate. I imagine the hon. Gentleman spends a lot of time, as I do, voting for the judges who are nominated to sit on the European Court of Human Rights. That gives democratic control and is also a means of reflecting, to some extent, the mixture of politics, competence and a whole number of other matters that give the European Court of Human Rights its character.

I am not as enamoured of the EU's involvement with human rights, which I think has created a very mixed picture. If I am not using the term wrongly, I think that the European Union has tried to steal the mandate of the Council of Europe, which applies to almost twice the number of countries as the EU does—that is where a large part of its strength lies. The relationship between the EU and the European Court of Human Rights is something that we are still debating at the Council of Europe.

UK involvement with the European Court of Human Rights has been a huge success story. It has been a very good illustration of how human rights overall are doing quite well in this country. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman on the need to extend those human rights to matters such as housing. That is a route to socialist involvement in the running of this country that I do not agree with, and would steer clear of.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that there are countries across the world, such as South Africa with its new constitution and some Nordic countries, that have a right to adequate housing in their constitutions? Does he consider those to be socialist countries?

John Howell: When the EU decided to bring out its own human rights framework, it thought very carefully about what should be included, and it differs from the European Court of Human Rights on only a few exceptions.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The European convention on human rights was opened for signature in November 1950 in Rome, and the Government in this country was a Labour Government from 1945 to 1951. Will the hon. Gentleman praise the socialist Government under which the ECHR was originally conceived?

John Howell: The hon. Gentleman plays politics with human rights, which is unworthy of him and of this Chamber.

To return to the issue I was discussing—the success of the British Government with the European Court of Human Rights—about 90% of applications that come before the European Court of Human Rights are deemed unacceptable and are not taken forward. Of those that are taken forward, since 1975, the Court has found no violation in a quarter. Our track record is particularly successful.

I want to bring up two cases that illustrate the extremes. The first is that of the Gurkhas. Members may remember that a few years ago we moved their headquarters back to the UK and their pensions on to the same basis as UK soldiers. They took their case to the European Court of Human Rights, which decided that there had been no real discrimination against them, and found for the British Government.

In a slightly different case on the UK's mass surveillance regime, which it uses as part of security operations, the Court found that the UK had violated the convention and it asked for some changes. That brings us on to the very tricky issue of the role of human rights versus legislation regarding dealing with terrorism. I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh East that this should be looked at in the context of what makes a better world to live in—I am not one of those who believes that tearing up the European convention on human rights is the best way to protect us against terrorism—but, having said that, and as the hon. Gentleman will know, at the last Council of Europe meeting, when the issue came up of whether we deprive those who have gone to fight with ISIS of their passports, I enthusiastically supported that motion. We should not have them back. The role of human rights in this plays out at different levels and in different ways.

In terms of how the ECHR works, people should understand that they have to exhaust all domestic remedies first, before they have recourse to the European Court of Human Rights. They cannot go straight to the European Court of Human Rights. There has to be an alleged violation of the convention, and significant disadvantage from that.

The response I would like to hear from the Minister is along the lines of what has already been said—indeed, it was this Minister who said:

“The UK will remain a party to the ECHR after it has left the European Union. The decision to leave the European Union does not change our strong commitment to recognising and respecting human rights.”

I am not sure whether he remembers making that statement, but it was in response to a question from the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake).

I agree with the Minister wholeheartedly: human rights are too important to be used as a political football in this game of Brexit or, indeed, in anything else. We have a long and successful track record of using our involvement with the European Court of Human Rights and our long relationship with the Council of Europe, which oversees the Court, and of protecting the interests of British citizens.

3 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful that we have you in the Chair, Mr Gapes, and it is a pleasure to serve under you. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) on securing the debate. I certainly have concerns about the loss of the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, including article 25, on the rights of older people. I have been campaigning for a commission for the rights of older people; they are very much voiceless in our institutions, and we need serious reparation.

Today, I will take a different perspective. People will be glad to know that I am going to talk not about Brexit but about my city of York, which became the UK's first human rights city on 24 April 2017. Currently, there are 41 human rights cities across the world, including nine in Europe, which are networked together. That is something we are incredibly proud of, and it builds on a strong legacy. In setting out what a human rights city is, I hope hon. Members will be encouraged to take that message back to their own cities to develop a case like the one Swansea is currently developing.

York is a human rights city built on a legacy. We became a city of sanctuary in 2016. York Travellers Trust has done incredible work representing Travellers and Gypsies in our city. The York LGBT Forum has welcomed lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender asylum seekers and refugees, bringing them together in a safe space. The University of York has a global reputation, and its Centre for Applied Human Rights is famous for its protective fellowship scheme, which brings human rights defenders from across the world to the university not only to have some thinking space to make sure their human rights activity is sustainable globally, but to have some intellectual rigour in looking at best practice in terms of human rights defenders across the globe.

I ask the Minister to ensure that we do not face real challenges in getting visas for these individuals when they come to the UK, so that they can have that space. We are humbled to hear of the work they are doing, whether they are journalists, human rights defenders or people working in court systems. They come to the UK not only to have some respite, but to advance their human rights practice, yet visas are blocked time and again because these people do not have the resources, although they have people here who are willing to sponsor them. It seems a shame that doors are shut when we should be extolling the incredible work these people do.

As a human rights city, York has signed up to a charter to work on the domestic human rights agenda. I disagree with the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) on the importance of these issues, because human rights must also apply at home in the UK. The five areas that York has chosen—they are not circumscribed—are equality and non-discrimination, education, decent standards of living, housing, and health and social care. In becoming a human rights city, York embraces a vision of a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe community built on the foundation of universal human rights. It is a vision that is shared by all citizens and institutions in our city, including the council, the police, the voluntary sector and the faith communities. It puts fundamental rights at the heart of policies that are passed by these authorities, and builds on hopes and dreams.

People who know the history of York will know that this follows a strong legacy. On housing, human rights is such an important issue to our city, where the Rowntree family built our country's first garden village in New Earswick. That stimulated the Housing Act 1919, which was the foundation of social housing in our country, and the model was then taken forward into Tang Hall, further into the city.

As a city, we have had pioneering mental health services—first at Bootham Park Hospital, which was established in 1777. When a patient tragically died there, the Quaker movement said, “We can do better” and set up a retreat. To this day, there has been competition to advance the human rights of people with mental health challenges in our city.

We then had Seebohm Rowntree, and many people will know that he wrote three incredibly powerful reports on the issue of poverty—the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has followed that through until today. Even in the 1899 report “Poverty, A Study of Town Life”, the authors talked to over 46,500 residents of York to look at the serious poverty in our city. What an incredible study that was, taking the stories as well as the statistics to try to advance our city.

Then we had Joseph Rowntree himself—yes, he of chocolate fame—who outlined what good-practice work should look like in our city. He provided not only jobs with decent pay, but pensions, healthcare, education, housing, a park, theatres, access to the arts, a swimming pool and decent conditions. He and his family understood the real importance of that holistic agenda for advancing individual rights, and he sewed that legacy into our city. That is why we are proud to be the UK's first human rights city.

However, we are on a journey, and it is fair to say that there is a lot that we need to achieve. As we map our way forward, we are looking at statistics and stories to tackle challenges where, quite frankly, our city needs to improve. Over the last year, we have seen wages fall in York by £65, causing greater economic inequality when we are already the most inequitable city outside London. By using the human rights framework to look at economic disadvantage, we will be advancing opportunities for people in our city. We have a gender pay gap of £117, which has to be addressed—it is above the national average. We have also looked at the issue of food bank use, which is up 25% in the last year—over 4,000 residents needed to use a food bank. How can that be ignored when we look at a human rights framework? These are fundamental issues facing our society today.

There is an eight-year gap in life expectancy in York. In the wards of Clifton, Westfield and Tang Hall, men die eight years earlier than their counterparts elsewhere—they are disadvantaged both economically and in terms of health.

On education, using the human rights framework we have established, we have already seen the number of NEETs—people who are not in education, employment or training—fall. That is a really positive outcome, which is due to our tracking through the causation and then introducing the restorative means to get more people into work. However, York has received the worst school funding in the country from the Government. In areas where we have the lowest attainment—we have the biggest attainment gap in the country—we are not building a legacy for the future. I urge the Government

to look at the data and make the link between funding and attainment, which our human rights framework clearly does.

Cuts to social care have had a real impact. To go back to the fundamental rights I mentioned, we know that contact with social care services has fallen in our city. On the important issue of housing, although we are a low-wage economy, we have people with high skills and therefore under-employment. That makes it harder to access housing, because we have a very high cost of living. Purchasing a property in York requires 10 times the average annual income, and it is incredibly expensive to rent. We have poor access to housing, and greater inequality is therefore being created between the haves and have-nots in our city. We therefore use the human rights framework to advance opportunity and map a way forward for people in our city.

Since 2017, we have established a human rights and equalities board and developed community voices, ensuring that those who never engage in our democracy, and whose voices are silent, are at last being heard. We reach out particularly to the homeless, disabled people, women and young people. We also support others who hope to develop the framework to advance rights in their own city. York has been built on its history and social traditions, and we want its legacy to move forward. The Labour party in the city has a vision of building a fair city for the future and re-enacting and repeating the work that Seebohm Rowntree did.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Order. Three people wish to speak. If Members can keep their remarks to about five minutes, including interventions, that might allow Front-Bench speakers time. I intend to call the first Front-Bench speaker at 3.28 pm.

3.10 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, Mr Gapes. I am a little perturbed that my time has been cut, but that is by the way. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for securing this debate. Although we champion human rights in this country, there are certainly cases that show we are not where we should be. Next year is the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower's journey. In September 1620, a group of 102 people and 30 crew members sailed across the Atlantic to seek opportunity and to escape religious persecution in the UK. Some 400 years later, we still have some problems.

There are also cases that show us that one person's human rights should not be laid on the altar of someone else's perceived rights. An example was the case of Ashers Bakery in Northern Ireland, when the question was raised as to whether we still have the right to refuse to serve based on a message that directly contradicts a sincerely and dearly held faith. After much legal wrangling, the case upheld the right to refuse a message, but not a customer. The idea that you cannot be forced to advocate something that you do not believe in is fundamental, and the decision was very important. The case was taken to the UK Supreme Court and in a unanimous decision five of the UK's most senior judges upheld Ashers' appeal against claims of discrimination. They agreed:

[Jim Shannon]

"The objection was to being required to promote the message on the cake. The less favourable treatment was afforded to the message not to the man...Nobody should be forced to have or express a political opinion in which he does not believe."

That is what the court said, and it is very important to have that decision when it comes to human rights in the United Kingdom.

Although the case was ostensibly about a message on a cake, a section of Christian people were fearful that it was also about an impact on their right to hold their belief and to live their belief out. We are so good at protecting the rights of everyone to live their beliefs inasmuch as they are not harmful or destructive, and yet increasingly we have a section of the UK beginning to fear what can be said or not said when it comes to their Christian beliefs.

A 78-year-old preacher in Northern Ireland was questioned and tried for preaching from his pulpit regarding a biblical story and hell and the fact that if someone does not have faith in Jesus Christ they cannot go to heaven. He was found not guilty. That is another example of human rights. We have registrars who have lost their jobs as they cannot oversee the marriage ceremony of same-sex couples, which is against their held beliefs. Other people are happy to do it, and yet registrars have lost their employment. It is little wonder that Christians question their human rights when all seem to say, "Believe anything you want, tolerate everything possible, except for something based on the word of God and personal and heartfelt beliefs." The court cases have proven that that is not the case. We must question how such cases get to court. There is a real fear within Christian circles at this time.

I have heard more than one Christian preacher warn his congregation that a time is coming when all will be persecuted for their faith, and many people believe that will happen in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I want a message sent today, very clearly and specifically, that that will not happen in this country while we are still a democracy—that we will allow people to hold on to their belief and live by it as long as there is no harm to others around them. This nation was founded on biblical principles from the time of Alfred the Great, and it is time that we reminded people that, whether we personally believe or not, Christians will not be persecuted for living their faith, in the same way as we do not allow the persecution of other religions. It goes without saying, and yet a growing section of our community need to hear it said in this debate today as we talk about human rights. We also must speak up for those who have been persecuted because of their religious and heartfelt views. It is very important that these matters are put on the record.

3.14 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for leading this debate.

I want to say a few words about the European convention on human rights, which I very much support. It is important to emphasise that the values that we see in the European convention are British values. Let us look, for example, at some of the rights contained within it: the right to life, which sounds fairly British to me; the right to avoid

torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, article 3—we could probably sign up to that; the right not to be subject to slavery, article 4; the right to liberty and security, article 5; and the right to a fair trial and so on. All too often this debate has been tainted by a misunderstanding of what the actual rights are, as though they are a foreign import that do not reflect some of the cultural norms in our country, but nothing could be further from the truth. That is emphasised by the fact that, certainly in my experience in court, and I dare say in the experience of plenty of the other distinguished practitioners in this room today, it is overwhelmingly the case that any submission that is supported by, for the sake of argument, article 6 is often buttressed by domestic legislation as well.

In the criminal courts, if someone seeks to exclude evidence that is relied upon by the prosecution on the grounds that it would deny their client the right to a fair trial, it might be that, in tandem with invoking article 6, they will rely on section 78 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Although the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was absolutely right to highlight individual cases where rights had been asserted in order to achieve a remedy, in the overwhelming majority of cases in our country the domestic legislation does perfectly well and may be supported to some extent. As I say, it is rare that the right itself would found the claim or application for a remedy.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right in his assessment of the criminal law. The one area where the Human Rights Act, in the sense of the incorporation of the ECHR into UK law, has made a big difference is in family law, particularly in rights to see children.

Alex Chalk: That is right, and there are areas where there has been a greater role for it. However, I want to slay the myth that people are routinely invoking Human Rights Act points to seek remedies that are not otherwise available in the legislation. There are examples of that, but they are by no means the norm. The convention is important because it provides an important safety net at a time particularly of national stress and crisis. We know that in the case of a terrorist atrocity, the cry immediately goes up that the state must act ever more robustly, often impinging upon individual liberties. Sometimes that is the right judgment to make, but equally it is critically important that any measures that the state proposes are viewed through the prism of what we see as keenly won liberties. It is not just a British phenomenon.

If one thinks of the United States in the second world war, one of the episodes of which it has now the most shame was the internment of Japanese Americans at a time of national stress. But our country is not immune to it. In the aftermath of September 11, there was legislation in the UK that people will remember: part 4 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which was used by the then Government to effectively hold people without charge. That ultimately was challenged in the European Court of Human Rights and the Court ruled that that was unlawful because it breached article 5. Again, it seems that that provides a useful safety net.

Joanna Cherry: In my lifetime, members of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland were interned without trial, with quite some impact on family life. Does the

hon. Gentleman agree that that is something that the ECHR has made a big difference to in the United Kingdom? As a result of our membership and its applicability through the Human Rights Act, it now would not be possible to intern without trial in the UK.

Alex Chalk: It is an important point and we must recognise that because—as is necessary in a democracy—we listen to our constituents and reflect their concerns, this House will always have a tendency to react in a very public way to what is perceived as a public need; but it is not wrong that there should be a check to that and a requirement for us sometimes to pause for thought.

In so far as we give great power to the courts—and to the European Court of Human Rights, through the convention—it is also right that they should exercise necessary discretion, and I respectfully suggest that there have been examples of their straying beyond their natural area of competence. The most obvious example is *Hirst*, when article 3, which of course prohibits torture and “inhuman or degrading treatment”, was relied on to rule that the British Government were in error in saying that prisoners could not vote. A number of people might think that that had gone too far, and that there had not been appropriate respect for the principles of subsidiarity and the margin of appreciation. I will not go into that now, but there is certainly a case for saying that the Court should tread carefully—and I invite it to do so. I say that because what the Court does, and the rulings that it provides, overwhelmingly contribute to human rights in this country and to the quality of our public discourse and democracy. It would be a crying shame if unfortunate judicial activism were to put that at risk.

3.21 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for bringing this important issue to the House.

I am deeply concerned by the huge hole that will be left in human rights protection after Brexit, especially in the event of a no-deal Brexit. However, even while the UK remains a member of the European Union, human rights have been considerably worn down as a result of austerity policies.

Alex Chalk: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Osamor: No, but only because there is not a lot of time.

Only last year, the UK, according to Professor Alston, the UN rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, was found in breach of four UN human rights agreements: those relating to women, children, disabled people and economic and social rights. The critiquing report drew on work by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to highlight predictions that child poverty could rise by 7% by 2022, possibly up to a rate of 40%. Professor Alston declared that such actual and projected levels of child poverty were

“not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster”.

Such reports agree with the experience of my constituents. Enfield Council has already made £178 million-worth of savings since 2010 because of funding cuts from central Government. However, further cuts mean that

the council currently has to find another £18 million to draw out of essential services by 2020. That amount of £18 million is more than Enfield’s current net spend on housing services, leisure, culture, libraries, parks and open spaces combined. The impact of cuts on young people is tragic. Youth services have been decimated and young people are abandoned, as essential staff have had to be shed, and what is simply a skeleton service is provided. Austerity in education in Edmonton has created an £8.5 million annual funding shortfall. Every school in my constituency has had funding cuts since 2015. That means, in an already struggling community, that the education of every single pupil in Edmonton has been undermined.

All that and much more has been done while the UK still has the protection of the EU charter of fundamental rights. The Human Rights Act 1998 is woefully insufficient on its own, and I dread what could be done to our communities without the limited protection that the EU charter provides. Does the Minister recognise the limitations of the Human Rights Act without the protections of the EU charter of fundamental rights, and can he explain how his party’s Government are preserving those rights before the UK leaves the EU?

3.24 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) on securing the debate. We have had diverse contributions, from the hon. Members for Henley (John Howell), for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and for Edmonton (Kate Osamor). I was particularly interested in the concept of the human rights city, which I was not aware of. I shall look at that as something that Edinburgh might think about. I was also pleased that the hon. Member for Edmonton mentioned the report and findings of the UN rapporteur on poverty. We should bear that in mind carefully as we proceed to look at how we run our economy and society.

The debate is timely, because Parliament is convulsed in a state of indecision at the moment about whether to go for the Prime Minister’s deal, no deal or no Brexit. Everyone is talking about the backstop. It is important in that context not to lose sight of the clear risk posed by Brexit of regression in terms of human rights, across the United Kingdom. It is also important to remember the threat that it poses to human rights in Northern Ireland. At least one speaker today has pointed out how integral the recognition of human rights is to the Good Friday agreement. For anyone interested in that, I highly recommend the briefing paper “The Good Friday Agreement, Brexit, and Rights” by Professor Christopher McCrudden, who is the professor of human rights and equality law at Queen’s University Belfast. The paper was published by the British Academy and the Royal Irish Academy, and makes interesting reading.

I believe that human rights are in a precarious position in the UK at the moment, because despite a clear commitment from the Prime Minister that Brexit would not result in a diminution of rights protections, the UK Government have not to date lived up to that commitment either in the context of Brexit or more widely, as we can see from the UN rapporteur’s report and the huge concern caused by the Windrush scandal and other aspects of

[Joanna Cherry]

the hostile environment policy. Many of us feel that the Government have refused to engage with people's concerns about the impact of Brexit on human rights. It is concerning that while the Human Rights Act is said to be safe for the duration of the Brexit process, recent events have made it clear that the current UK Government have not lost sight of a long-standing desire on the part of some in the Conservative and Unionist party to repeal and replace the Act.

In the meantime, we know for certain that if Brexit happens we shall lose the charter of fundamental rights. That charter protected a wide-ranging list of fundamental rights and principles, covering certain social and citizens' rights, and going considerably further than the ECHR. The UK Government have tried to argue that the charter did not add anything to the corpus of UK law, but that is demonstrably false, even going by the UK Government's own right-by-right analysis from 2017. That highlights how limited UK domestic protections are in certain key areas. That is not just my view; it was echoed by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, of which I am a member.

The Scottish Parliament tried to preserve the benefit of the charter of fundamental rights on or after exit day, in so far as it applied to retained EU law in Scotland. It did that in a Scottish Parliament Bill called the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill. Most regrettably, British Law Officers objected to the Bill and held it up until the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 was passed. That retrospectively changed the powers of the Scottish Parliament so that the continuity Bill, in so far as it attempted to preserve the charter in Scotland, was *ultra vires*. That was a retrograde step. To anyone who says that Brexit has not been used as a power grab on the Scottish Parliament I point out that the UK Supreme Court has clearly said otherwise.

The Brexit process threatens human rights protections across the UK, not just by repealing the charter but because of the wide range of delegated powers afforded to the Executive in the Brexit process. As the withdrawal Act stands, it would allow the amendment of important domestic rights legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the Data Protection Act 2018 with little or no parliamentary oversight. That is so because, despite the efforts of many of us to amend it, the Act contains no clear prohibition on the use of delegated powers to erode rights protections.

The repeal of the charter, the risks of delegated legislation, and Government obfuscation on these issues—that is also a result of Brexit—all threaten human rights in the United Kingdom. Hon. Members should not just take my word for that, because the Joint Committee on Human Rights criticised the Government over their report on human rights and the implications of Brexit, and stated back in 2016 that it was “regrettable” that the Government had not set out “any clear vision” for how they expected Brexit to impact on the UK's human rights framework.

In the same report, the Committee found that the Government seemed “unacceptably reluctant” to discuss human rights after Brexit. The then Minister responsible for human rights, the right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), was either

“unwilling or unable to tell us what the Government saw as the most significant human rights issues that would arise when the UK exits the EU.”

Such reluctance to commit is of particular concern when we consider future trade deals with third countries because many of us fear, as the JCHR hinted, that an unwillingness to discuss such issues in detail is suggestive of a Government who wish to prioritise trade deals over human rights. That is important not only because of the message that it sends out to the UK, but because of the message that is sent out across the world if the United Kingdom does not prioritise human rights.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East said, concern has recently raised its head again about the Government's long-term intentions regarding the repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998. It is difficult to remember what we all talked about in those dim and distant days before Brexit, but in 2015 and 2016 the current Prime Minister's avowed desire to get rid of the Human Rights Act was a huge issue, and the big question mark that she raised over whether Britain would continue to observe the ECHR involved us all in a lot of debate. It seems that that issue has merely been put on the back burner, which is concerning.

As my hon. Friend said, in Scotland under devolution two pillars guarantee human rights—membership of the European Union and membership of the ECHR. Scotland now faces being taken out of the European Union against the will of the majority of Scots, and there is a big question mark over the depth of this Government's commitment to the ECHR. The majority of Scottish voters did not seek or support those threats to human rights, and it is good to know that the Scottish Government are showing the way forward. Scotland's national action plan for human rights has existed for a number of years, and just before Christmas the advisory group on human rights leadership to the Scottish Government published a report that suggested a new human rights framework for Scotland in the future. That advisory group was asked by the Scottish Government not only to make recommendations about civil and political rights, but to consider social, cultural and environmental rights, as well as if and how to incorporate rights found in United Nations treaties into Scots law and governance.

As my hon. Friend said, in recommending the next steps on Scotland's human rights journey, the report of the advisory group set out three guiding principles—first, that Scotland should not regress from the rights currently guaranteed by membership of the European Union; secondly, that Scotland should keep pace with future rights developments within the European Union; and thirdly, that Scotland should continue to demonstrate leadership in human rights.

Will the Minister consider each of those principles and say whether the UK Government will sign up to them for the whole of the UK? Will the Government agree that the whole UK should not regress from the rights currently guaranteed by membership of the European Union? Will they agree that the whole UK should keep pace with future rights developments in the European Union, and that the UK should continue to demonstrate leadership in human rights? That is the sort of clarity that the Joint Committee on Human Rights and others have been calling for. I would like to hear such clarity from the Minister today, and if the UK Government cannot sign up to those principles, will the Minister tell us why not?

3.34 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes, and I am grateful to all hon. Members who have contributed to what has been, on the whole, a very fine debate on human rights. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) on securing it, and on his speech. He powerfully highlighted why this debate is so timely, given the worry that there will be a roll-back of rights, and that the EU27 will move ahead and enhance rights while we in this country fall behind. He also spoke well about the Prime Minister's ambiguity on this matter, to say the least—I will return to that in a moment—and he picked out some strong examples of practical cases where the Human Rights Act and the incorporation of the ECHR into UK law has made a difference to those seeking justice in this country over the past two decades.

It was great to hear about the human rights city initiative in York, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and all those involved in that. We must spread information about the human rights and equalities board, and all the other work going on around the country. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor), and the report of the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights should wake us up to the endemic problems of poverty in this country. She spoke about human rights agreements being breached, and that involves the economic and social rights of women, children, and disabled people. That is a stark reminder that although rights are critical, they are paper rights if people do not have the means to enforce them. It says everything we need to know about economic policy over the past nine years when an outgoing Lord Chief Justice can say that our justice system is “unaffordable to most”, and that should be a matter of great alarm.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) spoke about his experience on the Council of Europe, and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke movingly about religious persecution, about which we should all be vigilant. I did not agree with all the arguments made by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk)—he is no longer in his place—but I certainly agreed with his support for the European convention on human rights.

We must return to first principles when discussing the European convention on human rights, which grew after world war two out of the desire and noble objective to ensure that what had happened could not happen again. As I said to the hon. Member for Henley, the convention was part of many different initiatives by the post-war Government to put that “never again” spirit into practice. I am always even-handed when dealing with the history of this initiative, so let us consider who supervised the drafting of the original ECHR. One of the people who took part in that, David Maxwell Fyfe, was a Tory MP and lawyer, and I wonder what on earth he would make of some of the modern-day Conservative party's ambiguity towards that initiative.

What does the ECHR actually protect? I think the hon. Member for Cheltenham touched on that. It protects respect for life and is against torture and servitude. It protects liberty and security, and the right to a fair trial and not to have legislation applied retroactively. It protects the right to privacy, freedom of conscience and religion, and freedom of expression and association. It

protects the right to get married if one wishes to, and provides effective remedies and protection against discrimination. Who could disagree with any of that? My challenge to those who say that we should have a British Bill of Rights is to ask which of those rights they would take out and not include in that Bill. I remember asking Ministers that question when I first came to Parliament in 2015, but answer came there none.

John Howell: As I said, I am a great champion of the convention, and although it was written immediately after the second world war, it contains nothing that does not apply to today.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am happy to find some agreement with the hon. Gentleman because, yes, all those things still apply today. That is precisely my point—why would anyone want to change any of those time-honoured principles? Of course we can debate how some of them are applied and so on, but those principles are as important and relevant in 2019 as they were in late 1950 when the convention was opened for signature.

The Human Rights Act 1998 is also seminal—it is important to understand precisely what the situation was before its passage. The hon. Member for Henley said that our courts started following the judgments in 1965, but of course the problem was that between the early 1950s and October 2000, when the 1998 Act came into force, if one wished to enforce any of those rights, one had to go to Strasbourg in the first place. The big change that came about in 2000 was the ability to go to our local courts to enforce those rights, which meant that it was cheaper, easier and more efficient to enforce the rights that our citizens had held for so long. That was a seminal change.

I parted company with the hon. Member for Cheltenham because, although in one sense he is right to say that those rights buttressed existing UK common law rights, there are numerous examples—the hon. Member for Edinburgh East referred to some of them, and I also point out the example of family law to the hon. Member for Henley—where the incorporation of the 1998 Act into UK law has made a significant difference.

The Labour party is very committed and passionate about the ECHR and the UK's signatory status, and about its incorporation into our domestic law. However, there is real concern about the governing party's position, particularly that of the Prime Minister, on the ECHR. In 2011, the Prime Minister—when she was Home Secretary—said:

“I'd personally like to see the Human Rights Act go because I think we have had some problems with it.”

Her first view appeared to be that she wanted it gone.

In April 2016, she said:

“So regardless of the EU referendum, my view is this: if we want to reform human rights laws in this country, it isn't the EU we should leave, but the ECHR and the jurisdiction of its court”. That is the Conservative party's position in its 2017 manifesto, which states:

“We will not repeal or replace the Human Rights Act while the process of Brexit is underway but we will consider our human rights legal framework when the process of leaving the EU concludes. We will remain signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights for the duration of the next parliament.”

In his response, the Minister has an opportunity to explain, because although we know what the position is for this Parliament, we do not know what it will be for

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

the next Parliament. The hon. Member for Henley said, quite rightly, that these are time-honoured principles. Why, according to the Conservative party, are they only good enough for this Parliament? Why are they not good enough for the next Parliament, the next 10 Parliaments or the next 20 Parliaments?

I can say for certain that the Labour party will always be fundamentally committed to human rights, to the ECHR and to the Human Rights Act 1998. Can the Minister say the same for his party?

3.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) on securing this debate on human rights in the UK. I have listened with great interest to the views expressed. We have a multiplicity of not only hon. Members, but hon. and learned Members, who have offered the benefit of their legal expertise.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh East set out not only his case, but the broader importance of human rights as a concept, highlighting a number of specific cases and examples. That is, quite rightly, a subject of real importance to all Members, and one in which I have taken a very close interest within my portfolio. It is not only intellectually fascinating but, as hon. Members have said, it permeates our national life.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of where responsibility for human rights should sit. I will not take personally his suggestion that it be moved. The reason that it currently sits with the Ministry of Justice and with me is that, although he is absolutely right to say that it is a cross-cutting issue, the Ministry of Justice is a key defender of the rule of law, and this issue goes to the heart of that. I am sure, however, that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Ministers in the Cabinet Office will have noted his points.

As many hon. Members have said, human rights in the UK are not new. The UK has a reputation for setting the highest standards, both domestically and internationally. As has been set out, that did not begin with the ECHR, the Human Rights Act 1998 or our membership of the EU—nor will it end with our exit from the EU. “Human rights” as a distinct term may have entered common usage in this country in the 20th century and developed through international treaties and organisations, but the concept of rights—and, I might add, responsibilities—in our country goes all the way back to Magna Carta in 1215, the Petition of Right in 1628, the Bill of Rights in 1689 in England and the Claim of Right in 1689 in Scotland. The concept has evolved over many centuries.

Common law developed alongside statutes and set out rules developed by the courts to govern relationships between people and Government, which we would recognise today as “rights”. We have a strong and proud track record on that. As the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) highlighted when talking about her city and its university, in many of our communities, the issue is rooted more locally. I was particularly interested in her comments about the work that the university and her city are doing in that respect.

Winston Churchill, no less, was one of the main advocates for a new regional organisation that was to become the Council of Europe. In 1942, he called for the “enthronement of human rights” and in 1948, he called for a charter of human rights that would be “guarded by freedom and sustained by law.”

The European convention on human rights, as many hon. Members have mentioned, was drafted in 1950 by the Council of Europe, to safeguard basic political and civil rights.

I am always educated, not only in matters of the law, but in matters of history, by the shadow Minister, although in this case, it is a coincidence that I read David Maxwell Fyfe’s memoirs over Christmas. I suspect I am one of only a very small number of people in the House, or indeed in the country, to have done so.

As has been said, the UK was one of the first to sign up to the ECHR in 1951, before it came into force in 1953. It has been strengthened over the years by protocols, and the 1998 Act was a huge step forward in putting those rights on a footing whereby they could be enforced in the UK’s domestic courts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) set out, the ECHR reflects—not in totality, but in large parts—domestic laws both passed by Parliament and in previous common law. My hon. Friend’s views on the matter are always thoughtful and considered.

How are we doing in relation to the rights that we now recognise as forming our human rights framework? Let us not judge ourselves; let us see how others judge us. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East and my hon. Friend the Member for Henley remarked that we have a proud track record. Last year, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg considered 354 applications against the UK, which equates to 5.34 applications per million inhabitants—the lowest of all 47 states parties, and one tenth of the European average. Only 21 cases were considered by the Court to be potentially of merit and were sent to the UK for a response, with just two judgments against the UK. That touches on a point that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made about the need to strike a sensible and appropriate balance when considering such issues in a domestic context, which I think the UK generally does.

After the UK has left the EU, it will continue to afford its citizens access to well-established domestic and international mechanisms to bring their case and obtain appropriate remedies.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am pleased to hear that the Minister has read the biography of David Maxwell Fyfe. On our future commitment to the ECHR, at the moment there is real concern that the Conservative party’s position is to remain a signatory for the duration of this Parliament only. Can the Minister give a guarantee for the next Parliament and beyond?

Edward Argar: If the shadow Minister is patient, I will turn to what our ongoing position is—a number of Members have made that point. He may or may not be satisfied, but I will seek to answer him.

As I was saying, individuals will be able to obtain appropriate remedies when they consider their rights to have been breached. That will remain under our common law, the devolution statutes and, of course, the Human Rights Act 1998.

At the beginning of this month, the shadow Justice Secretary, the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), asked my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, to

“give a reassurance...that the Government will not repeal or reform the Human Rights Act in the aftermath of our departure from the European Union”.

The Secretary of State answered:

“We certainly have no plans to do so”.—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 163.]

I believe that that offers reassurance—perhaps not as specific as my shadow might wish, but it offers reassurance.

As we made clear in the Chequers White Paper, and as is clear in the political declaration, the UK is committed to membership of the European convention on human rights and will remain a party to it after we have left the European Union. The Lord Chancellor, and in this Chamber, the shadow Minister and others, read out the wording of our manifesto commitment on the matter. Our future relationship with the EU should be underpinned by our shared values of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. As reflected in my opening comments, the UK is committed to human rights. Our exit from the EU does not change that or signal a desire to reduce human rights protections.

I reiterate that most of those protections stem from work by the Council of Europe and under the ECHR, rather than from the EU, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley set out eloquently in his speech. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the work of all those hon. Members, including my hon. Friend, who serve on the Council of Europe. It is an organisation that, though not spoken about as often as it perhaps should be, continues to do very good work quietly and persistently. With that in mind, while I recognise the courtesy with which the hon. Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) made her point, I simply do not share her view that Brexit will leave any deep hole in human rights protections in this country.

More broadly, I too enjoyed reading Professor Miller's recent report, which the hon. Member for Edinburgh East cited, and the work undertaken for the Scottish Government by the First Minister's Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership, which proposed new ways to draw further international commitments to which the UK is party into Scotland's legislative framework. To underpin seven recommendations in the report, Professor Miller engaged in the broader debate about human rights in the context of socio-economic considerations and whether those should sit in a revised framework. That is part of a broader political and philosophical debate, with different views, as we have seen in the Chamber today. I suspect it is a debate that will continue. The hon. Gentleman asked whether it would continue in this place, and I have no doubt that if it does not, he will seek a debate on exactly that subject.

The SNP spokesperson, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), asked that I read and consider the report and its contents. I will do so; I am happy to read it again and to consider it carefully. I cannot give a commitment about whether I will agree with everything in it, but I will certainly reflect on it carefully, as I do with anything she suggests that I should read.

UN human rights treaties have not been incorporated into UK domestic law, and they do not require states parties to do that. The UK has instead put in place a

combination of policies and legislation to give effect to the UN human rights treaties that it has ratified. We have a long-standing tradition of not only ensuring that rights and liberties are protected domestically, but fulfilling our international human rights obligations. That aspect should not be neglected.

Some hon. Members touched on the report of the UN special rapporteur. As other Ministers have made clear, the Government will consider carefully the rapporteur's interim findings, but they disagree with the conclusions reached by the rapporteur, highlighting that, compared with 2010, for example, income inequality has fallen, the number of children in workless households is at a record low, and 1 million fewer people are in absolute poverty. I suspect, however, that that is a debate for another day—it could take at least another hour and a half, if not more.

I am the Minister responsible for overseeing the UK's obligations under the UN convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and its optional protocol, and under the UN covenants on economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights, not forgetting the UN human rights peer review process, the universal periodic review. I take those responsibilities seriously, and last year I went in person to Geneva to discuss the UK's role in relation to the convention against torture with officials. Broadly, in my conversation with them, I was clear—as were they—that the UK has a continuing role in leading the way on human rights in the world.

The title of this debate is “Human Rights in the UK”, so let me sum up by reflecting on the fact that the UK has a rich tapestry of rights running throughout our history, for hundreds of years, and reaching out across the globe. They neither began nor will end with the EU, and many of the key rights stem from the Council of Europe. I appreciate entirely that, during times of change, voices will rightly be raised to question protections and the future, challenging Government. It is absolutely right for that debate to take place.

Let us focus on the commitments given, the protections in place and our historical role—we should be judged on those and on this country's proud commitment to human rights. Many have suggested that human rights matter; I go further, echoing the words of my noble Friend Lord Keen of Elie: human rights are central to the way we live now and to the way we wish to live in the future. They are an integral part of the society of which we wish to be a part, and a reflection of our identity as individuals and as a country.

I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, and you, Mr Gapes, for chairing it. In particular, although we might not agree on everything, I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh East. I suspect that we will return to the subject in future—quite rightly so.

3.56 pm

Tommy Sheppard: I know we are nearly out of time, so I will be brief. I thank everyone who has participated in the debate. I am slightly concerned that a few more Members did not turn up, particularly because we do not seem to have that big a distraction in the main Chamber at the moment—unlike with many debates in the Westminster Hall Chamber in the past. Perhaps as the months go on, we will encourage more of our colleagues to take part.

[Tommy Sheppard]

I have a couple of quick points to make. I will have to check the transcript, but I did not get from the Minister quite the unequivocal and categorical assurances that I sought on commitment to the existing Human Rights Act and the protections that it affords, or—several Members requested this—on no falling behind after Brexit, if rights improve in other European countries. I hope that we get such assurances in future, but that ambiguity—if no other reason—ensures that we will return to this debate in the months ahead.

Finally, I invite my Council of Europe colleague, the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), to reconsider his attitude on whether social and economic rights should be accorded the same status as civil and political rights. After all, in this country we have a body of legislation that already gives people the right to education and to housing in some circumstances. As time goes on, we will want to incorporate such rights into the body of what we know as human rights. It is cold comfort, is it not, to know that we have the right to free expression if we are starving on the streets and have neither an income nor a home to live in. I am sure that we will return to the subject in the months to come.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered human rights in the UK.

NHS Funding: Essex

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

3.59 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered NHS funding in Essex.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I have raised the pressing need for a new hospital in Harlow on more than 20 separate occasions in the House of Commons, and this is my fourth debate on this subject. I thank my fellow Essex and Hertfordshire MPs, many of whom have kindly joined me this afternoon, for their support in the House and in our sustained campaigning efforts to secure capital funding for an all-encompassing health campus.

In May last year, I wrote to the former Health Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), to urge the Government to support the capital funding bid at the time for a new hospital. In that respect, I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker); my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), who is a stalwart supporter and works closely with me in campaigning for our new hospital; my hon. Friends the Members for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch), for Braintree (James Cleverly), for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) and for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford); the Deputy Speaker, the right hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing), who is another neighbour who works with me to ensure we have a first-rate hospital for the 21st century; and my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel). They all joined me in signing the letter, and they pledged their support for a new hospital to serve our constituents.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): I hope the Minister will take away my right hon. Friend's point that healthcare in Harlow is important, certainly to the people of Harlow and Essex, but also to people in Hertfordshire. People in Bishop's Stortford, Sawbridgeworth, Hertford and Ware are all looking for this investment, and we hope the Minister will listen carefully.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend has been an incredible supporter; his constituents will know the work he has done to lobby the Government for our new health campus. He makes an incredibly important point: this is about not just a Harlow hospital, but a hospital for the surrounding area that will serve the people of Hertfordshire and Essex, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) is also here.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): May I take the opportunity to add my support and that of colleagues in south Essex for the excellent campaign work on the additional provision in Harlow? I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will touch more broadly on the sustainability and transformation plans, particularly in south Essex. If we encourage the Secretary of State to press ahead with those plans, although there are some reservations, that will release capital expenditure in the south and further release pressure. That will not alleviate the problem completely, but it will help the issue across the county.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend makes the funding case for south Essex. As he says, the whole of Essex needs support, and I know he is supportive of a new hospital in Harlow.

The MPs in the surrounding area who wrote to the former Health Secretary said:

“The creation of a health campus...is fundamental to vitality of community and also to the economy of the entire region.”

To provide some context, the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow was built more than 50 years ago, having been completed in 1966. There is a lot to be celebrated about our hospital, but special mention must be made of the maternity unit, which was deemed outstanding in the Care Quality Commission report. It has been selected to feature for a second series of “Delivering Babies”, featuring “The Voice UK” host Emma Willis.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes a very good point about the maternity ward at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, where my 26-year-old daughters were born. Although we are concentrating on Harlow, I want to make the point that £15 million of investment has been made in Clacton Hospital, which is very welcome. However, we are still having trouble recruiting GPs to coastal areas, and I would like the Minister to bear that in mind.

Robert Halfon: I am delighted that my hon. Friend's daughters were born in the Princess Alexandra Hospital—not a fact I knew until today. Knowing their father, I am sure he was very proud that they were born in Harlow. I thank him for his support for our new hospital, and I am sure the Minister has heard the point about the need for more health investment in his part of Essex.

As one would expect, the natural ageing of the building means the estate is no longer fit for purpose, nor does it allow for service improvement. The structural materials are crumbling and the fabric of the hospital is outdated, making compliance with regulatory health and safety standards more and more challenging. Not only that, but demand for health services in Harlow has changed considerably since 1966. The population has grown by over 30,000, diagnosed physical and mental health illnesses are on the rise, and, more recently, NHS hospitals in neighbouring constituencies have closed, meaning that the Princess Alexandra Hospital now serves over 350,000 people—well beyond its envisaged capacity.

The impact of these pressures is fronted by both patients and staff. Waiting times in the A&E department are among the highest in the UK, and crowded wards are hampering patient experience. The dilapidated working environment, temperamental equipment and pressurised conditions are taking their toll on staff morale, with any hopes of enhancing performance dashed by factors beyond their control. Does the Minister not agree that we should do all we can to support our hard-working NHS staff and to champion their admirable aim to improve patient care at the Princess Alexandra Hospital?

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate, and I absolutely support and welcome his case for investment in the Princess Alexandra. In terms of getting the improvements my right hon. Friend seeks in his hospital, as well as across our county of Essex and in neighbouring areas, it

would be good to hear from the Government what plans there are in the 10-year plan to secure funding for the facilities we need.

Robert Halfon: My right hon. Friend has always been a champion for Essex—there is not an Essex issue that she is not on top of. She has been very supportive of the need for a new hospital in Harlow, and I welcome her signing and supporting the letter we wrote to the Health Secretary. She is right that we need to know how the 10-year plan will help our beautiful county—how it is going to help in west Essex, across the south and right up to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling).

In spite of the difficulties, the staff have proved they can implement changes. In March 2018, the hospital was brought out of special measures thanks to the incredible efforts of every employee, from the board members right through to the nurses, doctors, porters, cleaners and catering staff. Given the working conditions, it is no wonder that attracting and retaining well-qualified staff is so difficult. In December, the hospital operated at a 13.8% vacancy rate, and the board cited particular difficulty in filling critical nursing roles.

That issue is exacerbated by the promise of higher salaries and competitive training programmes at Barts and University College Hospital, just 30 miles from Harlow, in London. Further, Essex County Council notes the higher wages available in the privately funded social care sector as another magnet attracting staff away from our NHS hospitals. Many of those factors were never envisaged during the hospital's construction in the 1950s, but we have the opportunity now to build a brand-new health campus that will bring healthcare services in Essex into the 21st century, as well as creating the space and training facilities for longevity.

At the start of this month, the hospital and I were delighted to welcome the Health Secretary; he saw for himself the state of affairs at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. I am incredibly grateful to him for taking the time to speak so meaningfully with the NHS staff, particularly those on the frontline—the doctors, nurses and support staff—to allow him to gauge the realities of the day-to-day operations at the hospital. I take this opportunity to ask whether the Minister will commit to visiting the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow, to continue the Health Secretary's work. Does he recognise how useful it may be to inform future decisions about capital funding?

The Health Secretary concluded that Harlow has a strong case for capital funding. He stated how impressed he was with what the staff were managing to do in the tight working spaces, and acknowledged that a longer-term solution was essential. The board is doing all it can to set progress in motion. The trust is currently developing a pre-consultation business case and refreshing its 2017 strategic outline case, which will be submitted for approval in June. An event will be held tomorrow with stakeholders to assess the preferred way forward, including for the location of the new health campus, with a final decision to be made next month.

I understand from discussions between the Health Secretary and the trust's executive board that the Department of Health and Social Care has spent its current capital allocation, and that major capital projects will be considered following the upcoming spending

[Robert Halfon]

review. Will the Minister provide an assurance that, when the time comes, he will take all the necessary steps and work with the Treasury to release the capital funding for the new hospital we desperately need? Will he also set out a timeframe for that decision?

The trust's executive board estimates that the health campus would cost £400 million. It is one of the seven new hospital projects seeking more than £100 million. I assure the Minister that that investment would provide a long-term solution, ultimately saving the Government, the hospital and the taxpayer millions of pounds. Princess Alexandra Hospital has been fortunate to receive pockets of Government funding, for which we are incredibly appreciative. In December, it received £9.5 million to provide additional bed capacity, on top of a £2 million investment in September ahead of the busy winter period. Successful capital funding bids led to the four-month turnaround of the £3.3 million new Charnley ward in January and the addition of a second maternity theatre last year.

I acknowledge that the Government are supporting the hospital, but those stop-gap investments were quick fixes when the need became urgent. Surely it is now time to look at the bigger picture. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that we must be wise with taxpayers' money, and that to do so, we must address the root causes of the problems—the reasons why we need additional space for beds and extra funding for our A&E department, which is one of the busiest in the country?

Giles Watling: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those problems are not always merely a question of funding but are frequently to do with hospital management, which sometimes fails? We politicians, and the Government, should stand by to offer support and hold management to account.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend is right. We are very lucky that the management of Princess Alexandra Hospital are second to none. We were in significant difficulties, but they turned the hospital around and are doing a remarkable job. They are doing their side of the equation; we need the Government to do the other side.

Mr Prisk: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way to me a second time. Does he agree that the issue, and the reason we need long-term funding, is that both our constituencies face significant pressures for additional housing? Simply coping with what we have now is difficult enough. We need long-term funding to provide healthcare to the new communities that will be built.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend again hits the nail on the head. We have a problem at the moment, but we will have thousands and thousands of new houses in our area. It will be impossible to maintain the hospital as is with that population influx.

A new health campus would provide the additional space we desperately need and make a huge difference to patient and staff satisfaction. Patient flow would improve with greater bed capacity. Reduced pressure on staff to turn over beds quickly would allow them to spend more time with patients, delivering the quality of

care they are eager to provide. What is more—I know this will please the Minister—the Government would no longer need to fork out millions of pounds for temporary add-on structures to create space for more beds. We have a ward that was literally built on stilts above a car park.

The health campus would take into account the anticipated population growth in Harlow and provide the flexibility that is currently lacking. Working conditions for staff would greatly improve, the attractive state-of-the-art facilities would allow the hospital to recruit from the very best, and of course the skills and training opportunities would be limitless. I am heading up an inquiry on the fourth industrial revolution in my capacity as Chair of the Education Committee, so I am well aware of the skills deficit we face in this country, which is set only to widen in the age of automation.

4.14 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.29 pm

On resuming—

Robert Halfon: The health campus would work closely with Public Health England, whose timely move to Harlow in 2022 would allow for unrivalled research and training partnerships.

The hospital is already working with the award-winning Harlow College to provide apprenticeships, and with the University of Essex on training, but we could go further. High-class nursing degree apprenticeships could be delivered at an education centre on site, rather than sending staff away on courses that cost valuable time and money. These career development opportunities would go a long way to improve staff retention, and the board would no longer be forced to pay expensive agency providers to fill vacancies.

In line with the NHS 10-year plan, this digitally enabled, purpose-built health campus would provide the flexibility to adapt and take advantage of technological advances in medicine and science. Harlow would become the health science capital of England if the Department would allow it to have that future.

In summary, we have a hospital that has outstanding staff and is improving daily, yet it has an ageing infrastructure that is not fit for purpose, and it is currently spending millions on repairs that could be spent on the frontline. A new Harlow health campus for the 21st century would save the Treasury money in the long run, because it would mean an end to this constant need for capital refurbishments, hugely cut down on agency staff and help to cut the cost of healthcare in west Essex more generally, providing an enormous number of modern services under one roof.

The hospital, its staff and the MPs who represent them all have grand aims for the future of healthcare in Essex. I urge the Minister and the Government to pick up the baton, to champion our hard-working NHS staff and to dip into the £20.5 billion of additional NHS funding announced in the Budget to deliver the health campus that we desperately need.

4.31 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) on securing this debate and on being—I hope he will not mind me referring to him in this way—a warrior for Harlow. There is no doubt that he has made a strong and welcome case for investment in the Princess Alexandra. It is clear that Harlow needs a new hospital, and that a new campus can meet the long-term health objectives of both Harlow and neighbouring areas.

That brings me to the question of the health challenge across the whole of Essex when it comes to funding and investment in the NHS and the delivery of better healthcare services, especially given the significant levels of housing and population growth. There is an irony here: central Government provide money to local authorities for housing, looking at capacity studies, new growth and things of that nature, but we are not joined up enough across Government to release some of those funds back into the health economy.

Importantly—I hope the Minister will recognise this—the comprehensive spending review presents an opportunity for the Government to look at how the funding formulas can be connected to long-term economic and population growth. Of course, to ease pressures on hospitals and the health and social care systems, we also need investment in my constituency in a new multi-purpose healthcare centre that brings GPs and other health practitioners together at a local level. I am grateful to the Department of Health and Social Care, because I recently met the Secretary of State, who endorsed and gave his personal support to a new health centre in Witham and has also put pressure on the clinical commissioning group to work on the delivery of that, as the Minister is aware.

Returning to the point that I made in my intervention earlier, the new 10-year plan for health and the NHS is a perfect opportunity and window to consider how the Department can join up the whole system, make it much more integrated and look at delivery. My hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) mentioned GPs; in our part of Essex and in rural parts of Essex we struggle to recruit them. We have the excellent Anglia Ruskin University training the next generation of GPs at a rate of 100 per year, thanks to its new medical school, and we want to benefit from that; I think the whole of Essex will benefit from it.

I hope the Minister, in his remarks, will look at the whole health economy in Essex and take on board the case that has been made today that we need not just investment, but a long-term vision from the Department.

4.34 pm

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): Sir Christopher, it is good to see you in your place and to take part in this important debate. I start, as I should, by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) on securing another debate—his fourth—on this matter. He is well known for his tireless work on matters of healthcare in Harlow and across the whole of Essex. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) described him a moment ago as a “warrior for Harlow”; I think that was in response to the compliment he paid her of being a “champion for Essex”. I listened to her speech and her earlier intervention,

and I will say that, should she wish to, I would be delighted if she joined me in a debate next Tuesday on the 10-year plan.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham is of course right that this is an opportunity. We have set out a comprehensive plan, full of ambitions to link up healthcare, backed up by an implementation plan. I am hopeful, because this is the first time that has been seen. Layer on to that the integration of health and social care in the Green Paper, and I hope she will agree that those are steps forward.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow has not only secured debates, but has had a number of meetings with my predecessor on a number of issues relating to the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust. I notice that today he welcomed the visit of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who visited the trust two weeks ago. I know the Secretary of State was hugely impressed by the outstanding staff and the good work they do, and I have noted the kind invitation extended by my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow to come to Harlow, which I accept; I look forward to coming later in the year.

On a number of occasions, my right hon. Friend has raised the proposal to build a new hospital, which demonstrates his commitment to what he and I both recognise as the most important issue in his constituency. The Government recognise that a number of trusts face estates challenges; that is why there is a commitment to upgrade the NHS estate, with £3.9 billion in capital investment for buildings and facilities by 2022-23. I will come on to the comprehensive spending review in a second.

I noted, of course, the interventions from other hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk) made the point about Harlow's importance to the wider health economy in Hertford and Stortford, and my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) reminded me that we must have the staff in the hospitals. The workforce section of the 10-year plan sets that out.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow knows that the NHS's buildings and services are being modernised and transformed through the sustainability and transformation fund investment. That money is going toward a range of programmes. I recognise that in July 2018 the trust put forward a revised bid for around £330 million, with potential for that to be funded through sustainability and transformation partnerships funding, private finance contributions and some land disposals.

I know that the bid was well supported and attracted a lot of careful attention but, as my right hon. Friend will recognise, there was strong competition from a range of schemes across the country; the fund was heavily over-subscribed and there was some rigorous prioritisation. I hope he will recognise that officials from both NHS England and NHS Improvement are working closely with the trust. They are supportive of the capital bid that has been put forward and are working with the trust on the programme to look at that bid for the future. They continue to develop the options to tackle the challenges that the people of Harlow and the wider economy face, and to secure that best outcome. I guarantee him that that work will continue, and that I will ensure that I take an interest in his scheme.

[Stephen Hammond]

I know that my right hon. Friend will have recognised and welcomed a number of tranche 4 bids that did secure some money for the trust for additional bed capacity, improving emergency department performance and patient flow and reducing bed occupancy. That scheme represents a key part of the NHS trust's plan to dramatically improve and transform the emergency care pathways. I acknowledge that that was not the scheme he wanted, but I hope he will recognise that it has been extremely helpful, and that the trust has made excellent use of that capital.

I know that my right hon. Friend will wish to acknowledge that there has also been wider recognition of bids from across Essex; there was money for Hertfordshire and West Essex in Luton, in the Hertfordshire and West Essex vascular surgery network and in West Hertfordshire hospitals. I hope he will agree that there is continued commitment from the Government to the NHS and to the patients in the wider region.

I will directly address the point that my right hon. Friend raised with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. There will be further opportunities to access capital. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham pointed out, there will be a comprehensive spending review this year, in which we clearly have the chance to link up those things she mentioned; I entirely take her point on board. My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow will recognise that the CSR will be when decisions on future capital allocations will be made for the next five years. The 2015 CSR first did that, and that has continued, and we expect it to happen in the next CSR. I assure my right hon. Friend that I have no doubt that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will listen to his financial appeals for his constituents.

I hope that my right hon. Friend recognises the wave 1 and 2 capital funding secured during 2017-18 to support the redesign of the emergency department at the hospital. That was targeted very much at improving those facilities. I hope that he also recognises that that was on top of what I referred to earlier. I am sure he will support, as I do, the fact that that has gone into championing excellence in the paediatric emergency department.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the Harlow science hub and campus programme. Partly owing to his campaigning, there will be a new public health campus in Harlow, and I pay tribute to his efforts. I am pleased to say to him—as I am sure he knows—that that is still on schedule. A phased opening from 2021 will ultimately see approximately 2,700 people based there from 2024. Public Health England and the Princess Alexandra Hospital have discussed what other opportunities for Harlow's wider health economy might arise from basing the campus there. I hope to be able to share with him more details on that in the near future.

I commend my right hon. Friend's work in raising support for the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust's bigger capital bid. I reassure him that there will be opportunities to access that capital in the spending review process in the latter part of this year. He challenged me on the timeline of that. As someone once closely associated with the former Chancellor, he will know that the Treasury does not easily give out its timelines. "Soon" or "this autumn" are probably appropriate answers to his inquiry.

On numerous occasions, my right hon. Friend has raised the estate issues facing the trust, in the House, in meetings with my predecessors and with the current Secretary of State. I look forward to accepting his invitation to continue working with him on this issue for the people of Harlow and for the NHS in Essex.

Question put and agreed to.

Primary Schools: Nurture and Alternative Provision

4.43 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered nurture and alternative provision in primary schools.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this issue. I am also grateful to colleagues who have come along. On what is a standard Brexit day in the House, an education debate might be nice light relief for us all.

I got into politics to talk about education. As somebody who always wanted to be a teacher before accidentally finding myself here, I have the privilege of working on the Education Committee, which has undertaken—before my time on it—interesting inquiries on both alternative provision and the benefit of early intervention for the life chances of young people. It is important that we get the foundation of our education system right. In my view, education should always be our priority; without it, nothing else works. Without the right support early in children's lives, the challenges and costs only grow over time.

This debate covers two specific areas: “nurture care”—I am grateful to nurtureuk for the information it shared with me on that—and alternative provision, each of which I will address in turn. Nurture care begins at home but is a crucial aspect in the early years of schooling, especially in deprived areas and for troubled families. Across my constituency, there are relatively high levels of family breakdown, mental health issues and deprivation, which is a perfect storm of challenges for both parents and children.

Those challenges have an impact on educational attainment. In Mansfield, 27% of children start primary school without the core abilities needed to succeed, including speech and language skills. I have seen this at first hand. Barely a week goes by when I do not visit a local school. I have seen five-year-olds still in nappies, unable to communicate properly, not knowing what a book is or how to hold one and unable to settle in primary school. The Government introduced free childcare, starting for two-year-olds, aimed at supporting such children sooner, but inevitably it seems that those most in need are the ones who do not take it up.

Children who have a good start in life tend to do better at school, attend lessons regularly and form meaningful friendships, and they are significantly less likely to offend or experience mental health problems in later life. Nurture care in schools ensures that children engage with more supportive experiences, giving them the necessary social and emotional skills to succeed and to develop resilience.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an incredible speech. I am proud to serve with him on the Education Committee. On the importance of nurture groups, does he agree that schools across our constituencies could be encouraged to introduce them if their extra efforts to be inclusive by doing so could be somehow acknowledged in Ofsted reports?

Ben Bradley: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind comments. I absolutely agree. Recent Ofsted proposals to look more at the holistic support within schools, and not only at academic results, are positive. However, that could certainly go further, and this kind of provision could be included in that.

Mansfield has some great examples of schools that work to provide nurture care for their pupils. I particularly mention Forest Town Primary School, which supports its most vulnerable pupils through a nurture group. That group is almost a school within a school, providing holistic care to help children engage with education early.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Last year, I went round several Coventry schools. Some were particularly short of resources to employ what we might call specialist teachers, for kids who have special needs. We found the same thing in nursery provision in some of the most deprived areas in Coventry. I do not want to get too political, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should try to address that somewhere down the line?

Ben Bradley: I agree. There is certainly a case to be made for specialist training and for changes to the way we train teachers, which I know from discussions with Education Ministers that the Government have touched on.

That Forest Town centre is a separate building on the school site, allowing young people who find mainstream education challenging in those early years to be in a quieter, more personal and supportive environment, and to slowly build up to the full experience. Some have special educational needs or challenging situations at home, but all are able to grow at their own pace with extra support. It is a bit like alternative provision, but it is on site and is therefore more flexible, allowing the children to move in and out of that mainstream setting and to have a space to call their own within the school. Equally, they are not excluded from their social networks in the same way as if they were sent to off-site provision. The teachers at Forest Town do a fantastic job, and their hard work and supportive care makes a huge difference to those children's lives.

Emma Hardy: The different curricula offered to children in nurture care are more bespoke and suitable for those children. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the progress of those children should therefore not be judged by the same measures as their peers? They are getting a bespoke and individualised experience.

Ben Bradley: I agree; there has to be some leeway. We often talk in this place about people's aspirations for the future. For some people, that means undertaking A-levels and going to university, but for others it just means being able to live a relatively normal life, to get on in school and get into employment; the simpler things. There should be an acceptance of that in the way that we judge schools more broadly.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his work on the Education Committee. I note that several Committee members are here. On his point about on-site organisation within a school, he will know that the Committee's alternative provision report suggested

[Robert Halfon]

that, whether it is learning support units or other organisations within schools, it is important for teachers to be properly trained to deal with children who have difficulties. At the moment, there are often supply teachers or temporary teachers in those organisations, who do not necessarily have those skills, which can make a world of difference. As he describes, it is so much better for a child to stay within the main school and to move between the mainstream unit and the separate unit, depending on his or her difficulties.

Ben Bradley: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention and particularly thank him and the other members of the Select Committee for coming along today. I absolutely agree—I will touch on this later—that it is important that this is not exclusion from the classroom; it is a nurturing and supporting environment to help the children to succeed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on initiating the debate. The fact that so many hon. Members have intervened indicates our interest. Like the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), I believe that there is a real need for the short-term, focused intervention that is found in nurture groups for children with particular social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Does he agree that we need to increase the availability of nurture groups, which will allow individual children to reach their potential, but also ensure that teachers are able to better spread their time and energy throughout classes in which children who are unable to learn in a typical classroom set-up are being taught in a dedicated way that benefits everyone?

Ben Bradley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Later I will touch on some statistics from Northern Ireland that I hope he will find interesting. I agree with him. The reason why the provision at Forest Town, in particular, works is that although it is in a separate building and environment, it is included within the school. That allows the teachers to engage with it and children to dip in and out, and allows the integrated and supported approach that the hon. Gentleman describes. It is incredibly beneficial.

The earlier we can get children and families engaged with nurture care, the better. Children learn best when they have strong self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and resilience. Nurture groups were first developed in London in 1969 by educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall. Large numbers of young children were entering primary school in inner London with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, which led to high demand on special school places in particular. Marjorie Boxall understood that these children had not received early support and were not ready to meet the demands of primary school. As a response, nurture care was developed, and it has consistently proved to be an effective way of helping disadvantaged children.

Nurture groups tend to offer short-term, inclusive and focused intervention. The groups are classes of between six and 12 children, supported by the whole school—not just by specialist staff for that particular site, but by teachers from across the school and by parents, who are often included in the provision. Each

group is run by a couple of members of staff. They assess learning, communication and emotional needs and try to break down the barriers to learning in the mainstream environment.

Crucially, the children who attend nurture groups remain an active part of their main class and their school. They are not excluded; they are not taken off site into alternative provision. They are able to engage in the classroom with their peers wherever that is possible and wherever they are comfortable. I will touch on this again later, but I strongly support programmes that allow children to remain in mainstream schooling to engage with their peers. That is better for the child and for the taxpayer wherever it is possible.

The relationship between staff and pupils in nurture groups provides a consistent and supportive example that children can base their own behaviour on. For so many children, role models are simply vital, and this caring approach can be hugely successful. It engages children with education, giving them a positive and enjoyable learning experience, and it can help where children do not get the same support at home.

Nurture groups have been working successfully for more than 40 years right across the UK. That statement is supported by a number of studies. Last year, in my constituency, I was pleased to meet nurtureuk, which is the national charity supporting this whole-school intervention. Its figures show that this provision works. One school in Kent running a nurture programme saw exclusions drop by 84%, which I am sure that hon. Members will agree is a remarkable figure.

A 2016 Queen's University Belfast study also supports the effectiveness of nurture groups. It evaluated the impact of 30 such groups in Northern Ireland and found them to be cost-effective. In addition, although 77% of children who entered nurture groups exhibited difficult behaviour, that had reduced to just 20% at the end of the programme.

Emma Hardy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. Does he share my concern in this respect? Nurture groups sound absolutely fantastic and definitely suitable for the children. I wonder whether we would find nurture groups and the approach of looking at the causes of that behaviour in schools that have zero-tolerance behaviour policies.

Ben Bradley: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. The point that she raises may not be one for discussion now, but it is certainly interesting. There absolutely does have to be a balance. I am a firm believer—having been to a variety of schools, with different atmospheres—in discipline and teaching children the value of that, but equally in respecting the needs particularly of vulnerable children in cases such as these. I do not think that nurture care has to be a formal thing, but I do think that there has to be that flexibility of approach to give a more bespoke experience to children who need it.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is very kind; he has been most gracious to us all in taking our interventions. He mentioned Queen's University. I made a contribution in a debate last year and used the statistics to which he referred. When it comes to summing up and integrating all the information from across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, there are many

examples of good practice—the hon. Gentleman has used one from Belfast—and perhaps the Minister could take them on board.

Ben Bradley: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will do that. It is important to weigh up all this evidence when we are deciding where to put our time and energy in education. I certainly think that primary school and the early years environment should be a key priority.

Over the last three years, school exclusions have risen by more than 40%. If there is ever a time to invest in early intervention and nurture care, it is now. This early support, if properly managed, can set children up for their whole lives at school. Some will continue to need help, and it is especially important that those children who have needed this low-level, ongoing support throughout their time at primary school do not then lose all this help when they go to secondary school; that transition is vital. We can be more inclusive, support children to stay in school, and reduce exclusions, but we have to invest in that both financially and with the time and training for teachers.

The links between school exclusion and social exclusion are well known. Children who are excluded from school are far more likely than their peers to have grown up in the care of the state or in poverty, and they go on to have much higher rates of mental illness and are more likely to end up in prison. That cycle needs to be broken somewhere. These children are the most vulnerable in our society and need greater support. We need to do more to provide a supportive environment and to ensure that our education system provides a positive, safe and reliable space for the most vulnerable children.

Nurture care can turn around a child's life and help secure a stable future in adulthood. This is not a debate about financial efficiency, but I would like to highlight a 2017 Institute for Public Policy Research report, which argued that every cohort of permanently excluded pupils will go on to cost the state an extra £2.1 billion. The Government should support nurture programmes because that is the right thing to do, but I also argue that spending on nurture care is one of the best-value options for education expenditure. It is proactive, preventive support. Just as we are looking at prevention in the NHS long-term plan, so we should be looking at it in education.

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman is making an absolutely excellent speech. It is quite surprising for me to find myself agreeing so wholeheartedly with a Government Member, but the point that I would like to make is that there is not just a financial consideration, but an accountability consideration. Even if schools have the money that is needed to provide nurture care and even if, as the hon. Gentleman rightly suggests, they would have the money that would be used for exclusions to provide this early intervention and care, schools still might not want to do it unless the accountability system is changed to recognise this as good, worthwhile work.

Ben Bradley: I absolutely agree. We mentioned briefly the changes in Ofsted's approach that I think are positive. We could do more to highlight some of the good practice nationally and to incentivise schools to do this. We talk a lot in the Select Committee about special educational needs and disability provision. I think that

schools would love to have more independence in relation to how they provide this kind of support. I think that, if it came with the right accountability and the right financial support, teachers would embrace it.

At this point, I would like to mention the Select Committee's recent report entitled "Tackling disadvantage in the early years", which notes that there is currently not enough of a clear strategic direction in early years education. The report argues that the Government have to remove barriers to progression for early years teachers to encourage the recruitment and retention of a skilled early years workforce. We need experienced teachers who can provide effective nurture care and help with the transition from nursery to primary school. I welcome the recent announcements on recruitment and retention from Government, which have also been welcomed by the schools that I have visited since. Similar incentives and support in relation to early years could be equally helpful.

The report praises maintained nursery schools for ensuring excellent outcomes for disadvantaged children and argues that we need to fully fund maintained nursery schools by the end of the financial year. This is a debate about primary education, but the earlier we can start support programmes for vulnerable children, the more effective that intervention will be. As one of my constituents working in the nursery sector recently said to me:

"The early years of life are the most important of life, the building blocks for their future, miss these bricks and it all comes tumbling down."

I thought that that was quite a poetic way of describing it.

The report discusses the importance of a strong home learning environment and of reviewing the evidence in relation to interventions that support parents and families in creating a positive home learning environment. It is important that we continue to review best practice and share information about the forms of nurture care that are the most effective, and that they engage with parents to help to provide that.

Let me turn to alternative provision more broadly. It is often seen as somewhere only the worst behaved pupils should go, but alternative provision is much more than that and, done properly, can provide excellent education. It is important to remember that alternative provision also covers education for pupils who cannot attend mainstream education for a variety of reasons, including health reasons, and is not only for those who have been excluded from school. It includes pupil referral units, alternative provision academies, free schools and other settings, and there are some excellent examples of settings that provide tailored education to the pupils who have struggled the most in mainstream education. The alternative school in Accrington, for example, offers a holistic and flexible full-time school experience, designed to respond to the needs of young people who are unable to remain in mainstream school. It caters for up to 90 pupils a year spread across three campuses in the north-west. It specialises in a curriculum designed specifically for people aged eight to 18 who require that smaller, more personalised and individual approach to their education. I think that is a positive path and example to follow.

Alternative provision, when done right, works well, but too often it is seen as a dumping ground for difficult children—a way to get them out of a school. We need that narrative to change. As I noted earlier, I believe

[Ben Bradley]

that schools should try to keep children in a mainstream setting where possible. The correlation between exclusions and problems in later life is significant. I have raised concerns previously with the Secretary of State in the Education Committee about interventions such as isolation.

Emma Hardy *rose*—

Ben Bradley: I know the hon. Lady feels strongly about that. I will come to her in a second. When done right, such interventions can be helpful, but too many reports suggest that children are taken out of a classroom not to be supported, but to be kept out of the way.

Emma Hardy: I was going to intervene just before the hon. Gentleman mentioned isolation rooms. One of the points in our Education Committee report was about buddying a mainstream school with an alternative provision school, so that teachers can share knowledge and expertise. I know that some initiatives are now happening, whereby mainstream teachers can teach in special schools for a while, and vice versa, so that they have that shared knowledge.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about isolation rooms. There is a world of difference between nurture and an isolation room, where children get no education whatsoever, but are made to sit there with a sheet to occupy them, not educate them, yet we wonder why the children have not made any progress at the end of that period.

Ben Bradley: I agree with the hon. Lady, and the Government have promoted partnership working between schools in some ways. We see that work between schools in the independent sector and comprehensives. I welcome that and I think teachers would welcome the opportunity to get a broader experience, and the training and development that comes with that.

Providing proper support to children, by not isolating but helping them, would be more effective and cheaper in the long-run than exclusion, but schools need investment to be able to do that. I would like to see alternative provision run more along the lines of a nurture care programme, where possible. Obviously, I acknowledge that separate settings can be the most appropriate option for some pupils. However, where possible, it would be good to do more to include, rather than exclude, pupils who are struggling in mainstream education. I would also like to see a focus on reintegration. Just as nurture groups tend to work as a short-term approach to alternative provision, rather than being a final, permanent destination for pupils, there should be a way of tailoring support with a view to bringing that child into mainstream education, at least for part of the time, further down the line.

The figures show that more than 77% of pupils in AP settings have special educational needs, so it is important to look at special educational needs and disability provision, and how it can effectively help pupils at risk of dropping out of mainstream education.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend mentioned children with special educational needs. Does he agree that there is a significant problem when something like 4,000 children

with special educational needs are excluded each school week? Unfortunately, they often go into a postcode lottery of poor alternative provision, if they get any at all.

Ben Bradley: I absolutely recognise that challenge. Our existing inquiry on SEND in the Education Committee highlights the postcode lottery element and the confrontational experience that many parents face in trying to get the support that they need. While it seems that a lot of those involved have recognised the will of the legislation and the ideas behind it to be right, there is a practical barrier, which causes problems so that it does not always offer the support that it should.

The Government's vision for alternative provision, outlined last spring, was largely positive, with a commitment to ensuring that it becomes an integral part of the education system, with high-quality outcomes for pupils. It is positive that the Government increased funding for higher needs and alternative provision in Nottinghamshire. The budget has risen from just shy of £60 million in 2017 to £64 million this year. That is welcome and it will have a positive impact on pupils in my constituency. However, there is still far more to do. The SEND challenge is probably the biggest problem we face in our education system. It is not simple to solve, and it affects mainstream schooling and budgets across the board.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I visited a school in my constituency, St Anne's Infants School, which won the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award for its nurture group in 2016. I appreciate the really good work it does. Yesterday, I was in a Westminster Hall debate on special educational needs. There are real concerns around the country about the lack of funding for that. The hon. Gentleman just mentioned integrating this into the education service. It should not just be excellent groups that are getting excellent provision in some schools. We need to ensure that children—whether they have emotional or physical needs, or just need a decent education—get support in a joined-up way.

Ben Bradley: Absolutely. I welcome some of the things that the Government have done in recent pilots for mental health support in schools, and some of the positive things that are happening there, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right that that needs to happen across the board. Every child who has that need should be able to access the support, rather than its being a postcode lottery, as has been described.

The quality of alternative provision is too variable across the country. While some settings have brilliant teachers trying to turn around lives, others do not have that focus, and the most vulnerable pupils often do not get the education that others do. Both in SEND and behaviour management, one size does not fit all, so schools need to find and offer the right intervention.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister to look at ways in which the Government can do more to support nurture provision in primary schools, with a view to offering early support, particularly in deprived areas that are most in need, helping more children to stay on in mainstream education and cutting the number of exclusions, thereby giving children in my constituency better life chances, as well as saving the taxpayer money in the long-term. I would like to see more of that supportive focus within alternative provision, too: support for schools

to have more in-school alternatives to exclusion or outside provision. I believe that that approach is one of the most effective ways to support vulnerable pupils.

5.6 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) on securing this important debate. It is good to see so many fellow colleagues from the Education Committee in attendance.

Nurture groups are recognised as the best way forward for children, especially those from a disadvantaged background. In Scotland, we have a system that we call “Getting it right for every child”, which is the basis of how children are put at the centre of any educational initiative. Having been a member of the local education committee when I was a councillor, I can tell hon. Members that this GIRFEC policy is well thought of, well established and well used across Scotland.

Nurtureuk has pointed out that there are more nurture groups in Scotland, especially in Glasgow, Angus and West Lothian, than in the rest of the UK, which sends a signal that education in Scotland is setting about things in the best way possible. Indeed, the First Minister has made the closing of the attainment gap—the gap between children from the poorest and richest households in Scotland—the cause célèbre of this particular term of office.

All children and young people deserve to get the support they need to reach their full learning potential. The evidence for the use of nurture groups to do that is long-established. Children and young people should learn in the environment that best suits their needs, whether that is in a mainstream or special school setting. Ninety-seven per cent. of children with additional support needs are educated in mainstream schools in Scotland. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places duties on education authorities to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils.

In my time on the Education Committee, in particular in this Session, as my colleague the hon. Member for Mansfield said, there has been a lot of focus on SEND issues. We are still taking in evidence. I do not think that there is any debate or difference across the Chamber about the need to focus on giving all our young children the best possible start in their educational life, even if they come from a background that does not lead them to know what education should be like.

The phenomenon is not new. I remember many years ago talking to a teacher who could not believe that young children were coming into school unable to hold a book. If that was 40 years ago and that experience is replicated across the UK, it must be even worse now. Children might well be able to use a tablet, but many of them do not understand the value of books.

Nurture groups help to give children, teachers and the support-for-learning assistants in schools a real insight into pupils and how they can best develop. They also help to develop resilience in children. Nurture UK defines the outcomes from nurture groups as greater academic attainment and improved behaviour. As we all know, if children are to learn, they need to be in the

right state to behave and to sit and listen. A large mainstream classroom is not necessarily the best place for that to happen; nurture groups are typically much smaller. As my friend and colleague on the Education Committee, the hon. Member for Mansfield, has said, nurture groups can be on site. It is important that children feel part of the main school, because that helps them to improve their behaviour.

Nurture groups also help to improve attendance and reduce exclusions, which is an important point, and they can help to provide a whole-school ethos. It should not simply be about those children in a small group in one area of the school. Where nurture groups work well, the whole-school ethos is affected and improved. I can give a simple example. My granddaughter, who is educated in Perth, comes home and says things such as, “I can’t do this yet,” which is a huge improvement on “I cannae dae that”—full stop—which I used to hear from students who came to me in further education in West Lothian. When people start to nurture young children by saying simple things like that, it really improves their life chances.

Emma Hardy: On school ethos, is the hon. Lady as concerned and deeply disturbed as I am by recent comments in the press about “flattening the grass” policies? The CEO of one academy trust advocates going into assemblies and bullying and humiliating a child until they are in tears as a way to intimidate the rest of the children into silence. Does she agree that that is not the kind of ethos that we want to promote in our schools—one where children are bullied or shamed until they cry if they do not behave themselves?

Marion Fellows: I totally agree that that is not the way that children should be helped to learn.

I do not want to stray too far from the point, but I did not know much about the English education system until I joined the Education Committee in 2015. It was a steep learning curve and I still struggle with the idea that schools are not run by local authorities, that different types of schools can be run differently, and that some schools are seen as “good” by Ofsted because there are not many exclusions and because they get high academic results. I agree with other hon. Members that it is better for everyone in the community, and for society at large, to have children who come out of school as better people, more enriched, curious and ready to learn in different ways, rather than simply being able to pass a standard exam.

In my experience of teaching in further education colleges, I saw many children who were damaged by a school system that did not suit them. I am not saying that the Scottish ethos and the Scottish way are perfect, because no education system can be, but putting children at the heart of the education system and committing to getting it right for every child is the best way forward. I would like to hear the Minister’s views on that.

5.14 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) for securing the debate, and the other hon. Members who have contributed.

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

We would welcome any proposal that supported children struggling with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, especially when that approach is backed up by more than two decades of research and more than 60 academic studies that show its positive effects. Inclusion is at the heart of the nurture model and there is a wealth of evidence that it works.

In the early days of the coalition, the then Secretary of State for Education set the continued direction of travel when he stated that he wanted to remove the “bias towards inclusion”. Yesterday, the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, the right hon. Member for Guildford (Anne Milton), said:

“Inclusion is...not always the right answer for children or their families.”—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 310WH.] Today, however, a member of the Minister’s party has brought forward this debate about the virtues of an inclusive policy. I hope that this Minister can clear up the confusion and clarify the Government’s policy on inclusion.

Nurture groups that are delivered in schools and supported by a teacher and teaching assistant cost about £10,000 to 12,000 per student and in excess of £120,000 per year. In the current climate, with cuts to schools’ budgets of £1.7 billion, coupled with a continually falling rate in real terms of pupil premium moneys since 2015, it is hard to see how the groups can be sustained, let alone expanded.

In fact, since 2011 at least 100 nurture groups have had to close as a result of a lack of funding. In a recent survey by the National Education Union, more than three quarters of teachers confirmed that there were now fewer support assistants and teaching assistant posts.

Kerry McCarthy: I was going to mention teaching assistants in my last intervention, because they are so important. For a child who needs extra attention and one-to-one support, whether because of SEND or emotional difficulties, they can often be the difference between their being able to stay in the class or needing to go to a nurture group. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a false economy to slash schools’ funding so that they cannot employ teaching assistants any more?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. In a recent survey, almost 100% of teachers said that the level of staff cuts was having a negative effect on the support that they can give pupils who need extra help.

Emma Hardy: One thing that we would perhaps all agree on is that the pupil premium has been effective in providing additional money and giving teachers additional support. Does my hon. Friend share my significant concern that some multi-academy trusts are operating their own funding formula and giving a school less core funding? They are saying to that school, “You get lots of funding through your pupil premium, so you don’t need as much core funding.” Within each multi-academy trust, the bulk of the money is not going where it should—to the school with the high pupil premium—but being reallocated. Does she agree that that is wrong?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: It will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend that I agree that it is wrong. There is a lot of mystery surrounding exactly where some of the pupil premium money is going. Perhaps the Minister can shed some light on that when he sums up.

Early intervention works. In the past, Ofsted has praised nurture groups as having “highly significant and far-reaching” positive impacts on young children and their families. Nurture groups have the potential to be part of a wider holistic framework that supports children with additional difficulties, but their value is not being met with investment or support from the Government, who do not see the value of early help. That is evidenced by the fact that in the past five years, local authority early intervention budgets have been slashed by more than £740 million, 1,200 Sure Start centres have gone and budgets for children’s centres across England have decreased by 42%.

As I know from my previous career, for nurture groups to succeed there needs to be an acknowledgment that the work being completed in the school environment needs to be supported at home, and that often the children who need the support of a nurture group are also having a difficult time at home. Historically, those children would have received help at home to support the help that they were receiving in school from statutory children’s services in the shape of child in need plans, but savage local government cuts under the misguided mantra of austerity have led to such services being beyond breaking point, with more than 400,000 children now classed as in need. Furthermore, another 1,700 children are being referred for extra help every single day and there is a looming £3.1 billion funding gap for local authorities by 2025. As this situation is coupled with extensive year-long waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services, it is easy to see why so many children are slipping through the net.

The Education Committee’s recent report, “Forgotten children”, criticised the Government for their “strong focus on school standards”, which

“has led to school environments and practices that have resulted in disadvantaged children being disproportionately excluded”, putting pressure on an already struggling alternative provider sector, where the number of children with SEND has increased by more than 50% in recent years. Pupils who are claiming free school meals remain over-represented in exclusion figures. Over 140,000 of them faced fixed-period exclusions during 2016 and 2017.

Nurture groups and other initiatives can prevent exclusions. As has already been stated, one primary school has said that its nurture group reduced its exclusion rate by 84%. With all of that in mind, can the Minister let us know when the delayed findings of the Timpson review will be revealed?

It really is time that the Government looked more holistically at children’s needs, at early intervention and at models that actually work. Last year, more than 120 national organisations wrote to the Prime Minister, stating unequivocally that this Government are ignoring children right across the board. I hope that the Minister can offer some assurances in his response today that those organisations will not have to repeat that exercise this year.

5.21 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure, Sir Christopher, to serve under your chairmanship—again, I think. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), on not only securing the debate but opening it so effectively and with such an interesting speech.

All schools, including primary schools, should be safe environments, with good behaviour, where pupils are respectful of one another and able to fulfil their potential. An effective whole-school culture should set high expectations and standards for all pupils, while providing support for the most vulnerable children, including those with mental health issues, those in care and those with special educational needs and disabilities.

As the Secretary of State set out in his speech to the Resolution Foundation last July, one of our Department's top priorities is to create a system that helps the most disadvantaged children to reach their full potential. So the question is: how do we ensure that we give children the best start in life?

I acknowledge my hon. Friend's argument that too many children still fall behind with their communication and language skills early on. We also know that it is hard to close the gaps that emerge. Some 28% of children finish their reception year still without the early communication, language and literacy skills that they need to succeed. The Secretary of State has therefore set out his ambition to halve that figure by 2028. To support that ambition, we are investing more than £100 million in our social mobility programme, which includes £20 million for high-quality, evidence-based training and professional development for pre-reception early years staff in disadvantaged areas; £26 million for a network of English hubs, to promote effective early language and effective reading; and £10 million to understand what works, which will be deployed in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation.

Emma Hardy: Unfortunately, the Minister has failed to address the other point that the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) made, which was about children with social and emotional problems. The Minister briefly mentioned children with SEND and children starting from a delayed academic standpoint, but what support will this Government give to children with social and emotional problems? Is it using initiatives, pilots or anything?

Nick Gibb: I will come to that point in a moment; if the hon. Lady will be a little patient, I will address that and the issue of mental health, in particular.

Of course, what happens in early years settings is only part of the story; what happens in the home is central to children's outcomes. We can do more to ensure that all parents have access to the best advice, tools and resources to support their children in the earliest years. That is why we are inviting a broad range of organisations to come together as part of a coalition to explore innovative ways to boost early language development and reading in the home. Following the successful home learning environment summit in November, we are developing a campaign that will be launched later this year.

It is clear that early education—from the age of two—has long-lasting benefits for children, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield intimated in his speech. It helps to promote a child's physical, emotional, cognitive and social development. However, as he suggested, evidence shows that, on average, disadvantaged families are less likely to make use of formal childcare provision than more advantaged families.

That is why, in September 2013, the Government introduced 15 hours of funded early education for the most disadvantaged two-year-olds. Eligibility was expanded in September 2014 to include children from low-income working families, children with a disability or special educational need, and children who have left care. This early education programme for two-year-olds is popular with parents. In January 2018, local authorities reported that 72% of eligible parents nationally had taken up their entitlement to a place, which was up by 1% from January 2017, and take-up of the free entitlement for two-year-olds in Nottinghamshire is in line with the national average.

However, there is still more work to do, which is why we have commissioned our national delivery contractor, Childcare Works, to support local authorities to increase take-up of the offer for two-year-olds among disadvantaged parents, in particular. We have also commissioned Coram Family and Childcare to support the take-up of the free entitlements through their Parent Champions programme.

Of course, nursery schools also have an important part to play in ensuring excellent outcomes for disadvantaged children. I realise that there is uncertainty over the future of funding for maintained nursery schools. The current arrangements that protect maintained nursery schools' funding provide nearly £60 million of additional funding a year, but they are due to end in March 2020, which is of course the end of the spending review period. This supplementary funding was a temporary arrangement, to ensure that maintained nursery schools did not miss out when we introduced the early years national funding formula, and we need to decide what should happen when that supplementary funding ends. As preparation for the forthcoming spending review, we are considering how best to handle transitional arrangements for a number of areas, including maintained nursery schools.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield talked about supporting children with special educational needs. The SEND reforms introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014, which came into effect in September 2014, brought in a new approach to supporting children and young people with SEND from birth to the age of 25 across education, health and social care. Our vision for children with SEND is the same as that for all children and young people: that they achieve well in their early years, at school and in college, that they find employment, that they lead happy and fulfilled lives, and that they exercise choice and control in their lives.

Those reforms represented the biggest change to SEND provision in a generation, and they are intended to improve the support available to children and young people with SEND by more effectively joining up services for children from birth to the age of 25 across education, health and social care, and by focusing on positive outcomes for education, employment, housing, health and community participation.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: On the point about SEND reforms, could the Minister shed some light on why children with SEND remain stubbornly over-represented in exclusion figures, and are six times more likely than their peers to be excluded? The system just is not working.

Nick Gibb: That is precisely why we asked Ed Timpson to look at why certain groups in society are more likely to be excluded than others, and he will publish his report soon.

Ben Bradley: I thank the Minister for his comments so far. I think I mentioned in my speech the positive intentions of the 2014 Act, which has been broadly well received—including in the evidence that the Education Committee received—in terms of the reasons behind it and its aspirations. When he talks about working together across different sectors and bringing different services together, does he recognise the element that is often raised as the problem, which is the challenge that local authorities face in getting the health sector genuinely to engage and to fulfil its commitments in education, health and care plans and in relation to the 2014 Act? How can we work to get those health bodies involved and more actively engaged in supporting children within SEND provision?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Those are the challenges that local authorities face, and we are continually working with them to improve the quality of the provision in their areas. As for SEND budgets, which I will come on to, we are concerned about the high needs budget for schools. That is why the Secretary of State recently announced an extra £250 million of funding—£125 million in this financial year and £125 million in the next financial year—to help local authorities with their high needs budget. I think that has been welcomed by local authorities.

Emma Hardy: I agree with hon. Members that the 2014 Act raised aspirations, but there were a few issues with it. First, it raised the entitlement to the age of 25, without any additional funding between the ages of 18 and 25 to meet that aspiration. It also hugely raised parents' aspirations about what they are entitled to, without the ability to provide that entitlement. That is why parents are now taking local authorities to court, with huge, burgeoning costs in tribunal and lawyer fees. When we see the tip of the iceberg—those parents who have the social capital and knowledge to fight this—we know that there are thousands of parents underneath whose children's needs are just not being met. I say to the Minister that this is more than just a small issue: a huge, fundamental rethink is needed in SEND.

Nick Gibb: Those issues, of course, are not new. They have existed for as long as I have taken a specialist interest in education; they were certainly key issues during the last Labour Government. One reason why we introduced the 2014 Act was to try to address the disputes that were taking place in tribunals, and to ensure much more co-ordination between the different services. We have increased funding for high needs education from £5 billion in 2013 to £6 billion this year, with the additional £250 million bringing the total up to £6.3 billion by next year.

We understand the pressures on high needs budgets, and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) is absolutely right that one of the reasons for those pressures is the extension of the entitlement to the age of 25 for children with special educational needs and disabilities. However, we do not apologise for that, because those young people need that support. *[Interruption.]*

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle has made many interventions. The Minister is trying to respond to her points, and all she is doing is chuntering.

Nick Gibb: I understand the hon. Lady's passion about these issues, but she should not underestimate the passion that also exists on the Government Benches, or the action that we have taken since being in office to address those difficult issues and provide the funding to deal with them.

We understand that at the moment, local authorities feel under pressure in their high needs budget; the extra payment of £250 million aims to address that pressure, but we accept that it will not deal with the issue fully. We are trying to provide more capital for local authorities, to enable them to restructure their special educational needs provision. For example, as well as the age extension, which has been a pressure on local authorities' budgets, there is the issue of the costs for some children with very severe educational needs. Independent school provision can be very expensive, and it is sometimes more cost-effective for local authorities to provide special educational needs schools or units of maintained schools in their own borough. We have allocated significant capital to enable that to happen.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield said, much of the support work for pupils will take place within the school setting. For instance, when a school identifies a pupil who has special educational needs, they should take action to remove the barriers that stand in the way of that child's education, and put effective special educational provision in place. That SEN support will often take the form of a cycle through which decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised with a growing understanding of the pupil's needs and of what supports the pupil in making good progress. That is known as a graduated approach.

One of the types of intervention that some schools choose in order to support pupils with social, emotional or behavioural needs, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield has talked about in detail—I said to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle that I would come to this issue—is the use of nurture groups. As my hon. Friend has said, nurture groups offer an in-school, short-term, focused intervention strategy that is aimed at addressing barriers to education arising from behavioural, social or emotional difficulties, and doing so in a supportive manner. It is for individual schools to decide which interventions to offer, and the best and most cost-effective potential for providing support for an individual pupil's needs.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield mentioned, the Forest Town Primary School in his constituency is rated "good" by Ofsted. It is an example of a school that uses nurture groups to support its pupils. In its March 2017 inspection report, Ofsted praised that school's positive culture and its determination that all its pupils succeed. Ofsted also highlighted Forest Town's work to promote high levels of attendance, its timely adoption of interventions for different pupils, and its support for vulnerable pupils with complex needs. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the teachers at Forest Town and elsewhere for the important work that they do for those children.

All children have the right to a school environment that is safe, and conducive to effective teaching. Sometimes that will mean headteachers taking the difficult decision to exclude a pupil, and I fully support headteachers using exclusion where that is warranted. However, exclusion from school must not mean exclusion from education: when a child is excluded, suitable full-time education must be arranged from the sixth school day of exclusion. The Timpson review is considering how schools use exclusion and how that impacts on all pupils, but in particular why some groups of children, such as those with special needs, are more likely to be excluded from school.

Alternative provision is the system that is in place to educate those pupils who are unable to attend mainstream school. It is vital that those pupils who enter alternative provision following exclusion have access to a high-quality education, to help every child to achieve their potential. Local authorities or schools as commissioners must have regard to our statutory guidance, which states:

“Good alternative provision is that which appropriately meets the needs of pupils”

who require its use,

“and enables them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers.”

That guidance also sets out that the personal and social needs of pupils should be properly identified and met in order to help them overcome any barriers to attainment, and that AP should aim to improve pupil motivation, self-confidence, attendance, and engagement with education.

There are some excellent examples of AP settings that not only have high standards for behaviour, progress and attainment, but have strong therapeutic interventions in place to support pupils of primary school age. Ofsted’s report on the Hawkswood Primary pupil referral unit noted:

“Pupils understand the need to manage their own behaviour, and they are able to reflect on the choices they make. This is because boundaries are consistently applied and expectations are very high.”

One parent was moved to tell inspectors that the school had “made my son respectable.”

Another example is the Family School, an AP free school that opened in September 2014. Its ethos is built around supporting pupils to cultivate a productive lifestyle, personal resilience, and the values required to become responsible members of society. An innovative aspect of that programme is that it requires a parent or significant adult family member to participate in the classroom with their child. The focus is on families helping themselves and each other to create the conditions and changes necessary, so that children can resolve their problems and be better equipped to return to school, which I know is something that my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield is concerned about.

In both the schools that I have cited, a high proportion of pupils are successfully reintegrated into mainstream schools. We are determined to ensure that every AP setting is as good as the good examples that I have cited, and that their best practice is shared. As I set out in the AP vision document that we published last March, we

want to make sure that the right children are placed in the right AP, and that they receive a high-quality education and achieve meaningful outcomes after leaving alternative provision. That is supported by a £4 million innovation fund, which includes projects that have a focus on reintegration.

In closing, I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield and other hon. Members who have participated in today’s debate that this Government are determined to do all that we can to support young people in achieving their potential, whether by providing continued support for early years services, supporting mental health services, reforming the special educational needs system or providing highly effective alternative provision where necessary.

5.39 pm

Ben Bradley: I am grateful to hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, particularly those from the Education Committee. They show a clear passion for the subject and for supporting young people. That is particularly so in the case of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), who spoke with her usual passion for supporting the most vulnerable people in our society.

I was pleased to hear the Minister’s response, which made it clear that supporting disadvantaged people and a commitment to social mobility are key priorities for Government. He highlighted investment in many different areas, which is welcome. I would like to see that investment going directly to schools, and for schools to be given the ability to make independent decisions more often about personalised interventions for our children. I recognise the positive aspirations of the SEND reforms that the Minister talked about and the 2014 Act, and I look forward to the outcomes of the Timpson review.

I also thank the Minister for his kind words about Forest Town Primary School, which I am sure will make those there very happy. It is an excellent provision and there are a number of such schools across my constituency. I hope we can meet the Minister’s expectations with positive alternative provision examples. They should be encouraged, matched and talked about across the rest of the country.

I recognise the work that the Minister does behind the scenes making the case for education with the Treasury in terms of the forthcoming spending review. That is difficult in the current climate, and I hope he continues to make that case. If I can help him in any way with making the case for education’s being a huge priority for the rest of this Parliament, I certainly will. It would be very welcome. I thank everyone for their contributions. In particular, I thank the Minister for his time and you, Sir Christopher. It has been a pleasure.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered nurture and alternative provision in primary schools.

5.41 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 13 February 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Competition and Markets Authority: Contingencies Fund Advance

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has sought a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund of £17,049,000 to ensure the CMA's relocation to new offices remains on schedule.

The CMA will only receive its voted funding for this project at the supplementary estimate, and consequently may only draw the related cash from the Consolidated Fund after the Supply and Appropriation Act has received Royal Assent in March 2019. This requirement has arisen because the 2018-19 expenditure for the construction works at the CMA's new offices is predominantly falling in the last quarter of this financial year.

The cash advance will ensure the project stays on track and on budget and ensure that the CMA also meets its operational needs.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £2,793,000 and capital of £14,256,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the CMA. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £17,049,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS1328]

TREASURY

Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): In a written statement on 22 March 2018 [HCWS579], I informed Parliament that the Government intended to amend the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993 to enable the Government's agreement with Pool Re, the terrorism reinsurer, to be expanded to include business interruption losses that are not contingent on damage to commercial property. This was achieved with Royal Assent of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act on 12 February 2019. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring that businesses can continue to secure insurance against the financial costs of terror attacks, and that Pool Re can maintain its position as an example world-leading partnership between Government and the insurance sector.

[HCWS1329]

Petitions

Wednesday 13 February 2019

OBSERVATIONS

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Bredbury Parkway Industrial Estate Extension

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that proposals to extend the Bredbury Parkway Industrial Estate deep into the Tame Valley would involve large-scale developments on the Green Belt land, which is a valuable barrier to urban sprawl and is hugely valued by local people, particularly in the areas of Bredbury, Woodley, Denton and Tameside; further declares that this development would destroy the openness of this section of the Tame Valley and damage the visual amenity from the Haughton Dale and Hulme's Wood Local Nature Reserves; further declare concerns over HGV traffic in the area and the impact that the proposals would have on an already congested Stockport Road and Ashton Road, and the associated effects on the environment.

The petitioners oppose plans to extend the Bredbury Parkway Industrial Estate. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, Tameside Council and the Department for Communities and Local Government no to support the extension of the Bredbury Parkway Industrial Estate; and to further urge that the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) must follow principles of a "Brownfield First" strategy, so that previously developed land, including derelict or unused sites, must be fully considered before Green Belt is released for development.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Andrew Gwynne, *Official Report*, 23 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 247.]

[P002273]

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that proposals to extend the Bredbury Parkway Industrial Estate deep into the Tame Valley would involve large-scale developments on the Green Belt land, which is a valuable barrier to urban sprawl and is hugely valued by local people, particularly in the areas of Bredbury, Woodley, Denton and Tameside; further declares that this development would destroy the openness of this section of the Tame Valley and damage the visual amenity from the Haughton Dale and Hulme's Wood Local Nature Reserves; further declare concerns over HGV traffic in the area and the impact that the proposals would have on an already congested Stockport Road and Ashton Road, and the associated effects on the environment.

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and to further urge that the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) must follow principles of a "Brownfield First" strategy, so that previously developed land, including derelict or unused sites, must be fully considered before Green Belt is released for development.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr William Wragg, *Official Report*, 23 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 248.]

[P002274]

Observations from the Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):

The Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government has a quasi-judicial role in the planning system, and so the Government cannot comment on specific plans or planning applications for reasons of propriety. Local planning authorities, working with their communities, are responsible for determining the best location for industrial estates. When they receive planning applications, local planning authorities must determine them in line with the development plan and all other material considerations. These considerations are likely to include any relevant views and evidence expressed by local people; an assessment of all the potential impacts and planning consequences of the proposal; and the policies set out in our revised National Planning Policy Framework published in July 2018.

Environmental protection is at the heart of the revised National Planning Policy Framework, setting clear expectations for future developments, including assessing the impacts of proposed development on the road network. The revised Framework sets out that most new building is inappropriate in the Green Belt and should be refused planning permission except in very special circumstances. Only in exceptional circumstances can an authority establish the need to alter a Green Belt boundary, using the plan process of consultation and examination. The revised Framework has strengthened this policy by setting out that authorities should show fully evidenced justification for a Green Belt boundary change, including through setting out the fact that they have examined all other reasonable options for meeting their identified development needs by making more effective use of suitable brownfield and under-utilised land; optimising density of new development where appropriate; and discussing with neighbouring authorities whether they could take some of the necessary development.

It is understood that the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework is open for consultation until 19 March 2019, so petitioners, stakeholders and local residents have the opportunity to comment on the proposals.

Kings Langley Green Belt

The petition of residents of Kings Langley,

Declares strong opposition to plans under consideration in Dacorum Borough Councils Local Plan 2017 that would mean the loss of valuable farmland and the demise of Wayside Dairy Farm and other local green areas.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to protect the Green Belt in and around the village of Kings Langley.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Sir Mike Penning, *Official Report*, 24 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 400.]

[P002270]

Observations from the Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):

The Government are clear that councils and their communities are best placed to take decisions on planning issues affecting their local area, within the context of national planning policy and our ambition to build 300,000 homes a year. Up-to-date plans reduce speculative development, provide certainty and are a mechanism for holding authorities to account on managing local housing need. It gives local areas the flexibility to use land they already have to build the homes, facilities and infrastructure that they need.

Environmental protection is at the heart of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (published July 2018), setting clear expectations for future developments, including assessing the impacts of new development on the road network. The revised Framework sets out that most new building is inappropriate in the Green Belt and should be refused planning permission except in very special circumstances. Only in exceptional circumstances can a strategic policy-making authority establish the need to alter a Green Belt boundary, using the plan process of consultation and examination. The revised Framework has strengthened this policy by setting out that authorities should show fully evidenced justification for a Green Belt boundary change. Including through

setting out they have examined all other reasonable options for meeting their identified development needs by making more effective use of suitable brownfield and under-utilised land; optimising density of new development where appropriate; and discussing with neighbouring authorities whether they could take some of the necessary development.

The Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government has a quasi-judicial role in the planning system, and so the Government cannot comment on the detail of specific plans or planning applications for reasons of propriety.

It is understood that Dacorum Borough Council are undertaking a partial review of their core strategy to produce a new local plan. As part of this process the council held a public consultation on an issues and options document, followed by a series of public exhibitions. It is also understood that the council proposes to undertake a pre-submission draft consultation during summer 2019.

When ready, the council will submit the plan for examination by an independent inspector. Before the examination anyone with an interest in the plan will have an opportunity to make representations and may request to appear before the examination.

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 13 February 2019

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill [Lords]

The following are extracts from the Report stage of the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill [Lords] on 12 February 2019.

Caroline Dinénage: This particular area of law has always been open to legal challenge. We decided to include a definition because so many stakeholders, as well as the Law Commission and Members of the other place, thought it essential.

[Official Report, 12 February 2019, Vol. 654, c. 802.]

Caroline Dinénage: For example, in the new system a family member or a loved one can be an approved person.

[Official Report, 12 February 2019, Vol. 654, c. 803.]

Caroline Dinénage: The wishes and feelings of the vulnerable person are at the centre of the Bill, and the wishes and feelings of their family will definitely be

taken into consideration if their family is the approved person. We must always leave a little space in case the person does not want their approved person to be a family member for whatever reason.

[Official Report, 12 February 2019, Vol. 654, c. 804.]

Letter of correction from The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinénage):

Errors have been identified in the response I gave on Amendment 1 to clause 6.

The correct wording should have been:

Caroline Dinénage: This particular area of law has always been open to legal challenge. We decided to include a definition because so many stakeholders, as well as the **Joint Committee on Human Rights** and Members of the other place, thought it essential”.

Caroline Dinénage: For example, in the new system a family member or a loved one can be an **appropriate** person.

Caroline Dinénage: The wishes and feelings of the vulnerable person are at the centre of the Bill, and the wishes and feelings of their family will definitely be taken into consideration if their family is the approved person. We must always leave a little space in case the person does not want their **appropriate** person to be a family member for whatever reason.

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