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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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House of Commons

Monday 18 February 2019

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

Death of a Member

Mr Speaker: It is with great sadness that I have to inform the House of the death of the hon. Member for Newport West, Paul Flynn. A dedicated, principled, fearless and award-winning parliamentarian, Paul represented and championed the Newport West constituency and the wider interests, as he saw them, of Wales for 31 and a half years in this House. From drugs policy to pensions, from animal welfare to Europe, from parliamentary reform to the war in Afghanistan, Paul Flynn spoke with conviction, with total commitment and without fear or favour. He was every inch the exemplar parliamentarian whom he strove over three decades to be.

As many colleagues will know, Paul spent the vast majority of his career as a Back Bencher. I often teased him, affectionately and with respect, about that well-thumbed tome that he penned, "Commons Knowledge: How to be a Backbencher". He was a fine parliamentarian, a dedicated socialist, and much loved in his constituency and beyond.

I hope that I speak for the House, in concluding my tribute to that very fine man, to whom I last spoke on Saturday 26 January, when I say this. Paul Flynn was a standing rebuke in his parliamentary service to two categories of people. The first are those who think that the only point of coming into politics is to become Prime Minister or a Minister—at the very least that shows a lack of imagination. Paul knew that there were so many other ways in which you could achieve real gains and derive fulfilment.

Secondly—I am sure that there are people on both sides of the House, who sit in certain positions, who will recognise the veracity of what I am about to say—Paul was a standing rebuke to those who thought that it was vital always to be in the closest possible regulatory alignment with one's Whips Office. It was not. He spoke his mind. He did it his way. He did it with eloquence, with knowledge, with character, and often, as we all know, with mordent wit.

Paul will be greatly missed by his wife of the last 34 years, Sam, and by the wider family. We respectfully remember him, and I hope we always will.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU: Defence Relationship

2. **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the UK's future defence relationship with the EU after the UK leaves the EU. [909265]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): May I take this opportunity to associate us with your comments about Paul Flynn, Mr Speaker? I remember having the privilege of serving with Paul on the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. As you quite rightly stated, he was always incredibly passionate about his constituents and about his beliefs. As a former Chief Whip, I also agree that Labour Members not following their Whip is good advice, but the same is not necessarily true on the Conservative side.

The UK will pursue a distinctive, independent and sovereign foreign and defence policy that meets British interests and promotes our values.

Helen Goodman: Mr Speaker, on my behalf and, I am sure, that of other hon. Members on the Opposition side, I would like to echo your words about Paul Flynn, whom I will always remember for his great independence of spirit and fantastic sense of humour.

I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his answer. On 7 January his junior Minister said, in response to a written parliamentary question, that in the event of no deal,

"the UK would have to withdraw from Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations".

What would happen to Operation Atalanta, which is against pirates, and Operation Sophia, which picks up refugees in the Mediterranean?

Gavin Williamson: Those missions will continue, and we will continue to have negotiations with the EU on how we can support those operations in the future.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I would like to echo your kind tribute to Paul Flynn, Mr Speaker. My thoughts and prayers are with his friends and family.

Is it not the case that the vast majority of our industrial collaboration with other European countries is done on a bilateral basis, which will very much continue once we leave the EU?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend raises an important point: 90% of all our collaboration with EU nations and EU defence programmes is done outside the framework of the European Union. I joined him in his constituency to visit Airbus and Boeing, and it was quite obvious how important those bilateral and multilateral relationships are to their growth. It is not through the European Union.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): What contingency measures will the Government put in place to protect the UK defence industry from losing the automatic right to bid for contracts within the European economic area in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

Gavin Williamson: As I touched on in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), most of our defence procurement and most opportunities in the defence industry are not through the European Union. We will continue to work with the European Union to have access to programmes. That is not only important for UK business; if the European Union wants to succeed in developing a defence sector, it needs countries such as Britain and the United States to be able to participate in these schemes.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Mr Speaker, I associate myself with your eloquent words about Paul Flynn, whom we will all miss very much and whose book I read before becoming a Back Bencher, which I may remain.

Will the Secretary of State expand on how, in our future defence relationship with the EU in the north Atlantic, we will invest in and show continued commitment to protecting that northern flank of Europe?

Gavin Williamson: The high north is an important part of the development of our strategy. At the weekend, I had the opportunity to see our Royal Marines in Norway and what they are doing to support the Norwegian armed forces. We will be deploying our P-8s in 2020, along with Norway and the United States, to deal with the increased threat that we face from Russian submarines in the north Atlantic.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I add the condolences of those on the Scottish National party Benches to the family of Paul Flynn and to the parliamentary Labour party on the loss of a thoroughly decent human being.

The Secretary of State and his predecessors have been clear that NATO is the cornerstone of the UK's security, but many leading experts, including Professor Beatrice Heuser of the University of Glasgow, see something of a devil in the detail. Much of the recent debate on Churchill missed out the fact that he was one of the architects of the Western European Union—a security-focused grouping that saw all its functions wound up into the European Union post Lisbon. Can the Secretary of State tell us what analysis his Department has undertaken on the difference between the UK's obligations under article 5 of the NATO treaty and article 42(7) of the Lisbon treaty?

Gavin Williamson: Article 5 is a mechanism that delivers security right across continental Europe and the north Atlantic area. That has been proven. Article 5 has only been used in one situation, which was following 9/11, and we feel that it is a much more substantial guarantee of European security than what is in the Lisbon treaty.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I am grateful for that response. I am glad that the Secretary of State visited NATO and the Royal Marines during their winter warfare training, and I know that the Norwegians and many members of the Defence Committee will be too. Article 5 obligates members to respond to an attack with

"such action as it deems necessary",

which, as put to me, could mean a conventional military response, just as it could mean a strongly worded letter. Article 42(7) of the Lisbon treaty, on the other hand, obligates states to react with

"all the means in their power".

Does the Secretary of State understand that many of our European allies are unnerved by this dilution of the UK's obligation towards the defence of the continent? What preparations are being undertaken by the Ministry of Defence to ensure that our adversaries do not exploit that loophole?

Gavin Williamson: We have never as a nation shied away from our obligations, and there has been a clear understanding that Britain will stand with our European friends and neighbours in delivering security. Our commitment to security on the continent of Europe was there long before the creation of the European Union or our membership of it, and long before the creation of NATO. We have always been there, and we always will be.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend clarify for the House that it is in fact NATO, not the European Union, that has been and will continue to be the cornerstone of European security and defence?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. When we speak to the new nations that have been created out of the collapse of the Soviet Union, to which organisation do they turn to guarantee their security? It is NATO.

Armed Forces Covenant

3. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the effective delivery of the armed forces covenant. [909266]

21. **Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the effective delivery of the armed forces covenant. [909288]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I am pleased to say that there is broadening support for the armed forces covenant, which is a priority for the Ministry of Defence. We now have over 3,300 organisations participating in it, and the veterans strategy consultation, which was launched in November, is looking at further ways in which we can expand its support.

Mike Kane: May I too associate myself with your comments, Mr Speaker? Any budding politicians out there should read the part of Paul Flynn's book where he describes setting on fire his oven's cooking instructions five years after moving into his flat.

On a more serious note, with an estimated 58 veterans' suicides last year and the charitable sector saying that it is struggling to cope with demand, does the Minister agree that there is too much reliance on the sector to support personnel leaving the service with mental health disorders?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important issue. We should not make the automatic assumption that because there is a suicide and the person is a veteran, it is because he is a veteran that there is a suicide. However, that should not prohibit us from understanding more about what is actually happening to those who serve and have served. We are working with the coroner's department to get better data on this, and we also have a new programme to make sure that people are aware of the mental health support that they can gain once they leave the armed forces.

Mike Amesbury: The Minister will know that there are few very reliable statistics on veterans who are homeless. What does he intend to do to improve that?

Mr Ellwood: This goes to the heart of what the covenant is all about. I want to see all homeless people looked after, and I want to make sure that if they are veterans, the covenant is recognised and enforced. However, if we are to do that, it is not the MOD that needs to do it; it is actually local government. Thanks to the veterans board, we are now enforcing the covenant and encouraging Government Departments to ask, "Are you doing enough?" Each local authority has an armed forces champion, who should be looking at these issues to make sure that the authority is tackling homelessness issues in its area. If there are any areas where there is a problem with that, please let me know.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): It is anecdotally alleged, although not necessarily backed up by statistics, that a disproportionate number of prisoners are veterans. What consideration has my right hon. Friend given to making better use of the MOD prison estate—particularly Colchester Prison, for example, which I understand is relatively empty at the moment? Would that not be more appropriate housing for soldiers and veterans who are in civilian prisons?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the experience that he brings to the Chamber. My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, and I would like to pursue these conversations—perhaps with the Prisons Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart)—to see what more can be done.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): What?

Mr Speaker: Well, the Minister is going to pursue it with the Prisons Minister.

Mr Jones: It is stupid.

Mr Speaker: Well, the right hon. Gentleman can make his own assessment.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): A recent investigation has revealed that black African soldiers in the East Africa Force, formed in 1940, which encompassed thousands of troops drawn from the British colonies and current Commonwealth countries, were paid only a third of the wage received by their white counterparts. Will the Minister tell the House whether there will now be a full and comprehensive Ministry of Defence investigation of this issue, and whether such an investigation would consider granting appropriate compensation to all surviving veterans?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, of which the Secretary of State is aware. It is a Foreign Office lead, and I hope that the FCO will be able to provide more detail on how to move forward given the information presented.

Warship Construction

4. **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): What progress his Department has made on its procurement exercise for the construction of new warships in the UK. [909267]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): In December 2018, the Department announced the award of three competitive design phase contracts for the Type 31e frigate programme. It remains our intention to award a single design and build contract for five Type 31e ships by the end of this year. Construction of the Type 26 frigates remains under way, with the second batch of five ships to be ordered in the 2020s.

Scott Mann: I thank the Minister for that response. Following the Secretary of State's recent successful visit to Plymouth, he will know of the south-west's military shipbuilding capabilities. May I suggest that Plymouth would make a fantastic base for the littoral strike group vessels?

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is an absolute champion for his constituency and the south-west. Her Majesty's Naval Base Devonport and the south-west of England continue to be vital to the Royal Navy and, as we plan to develop a concept for the littoral strike ship, we will look at how it goes. At the moment, no decision on basing has been made.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Many employees of GE Power in Rugby happen to live in the Warwick and Leamington constituency. Will the Minister update us on what discussions have been had with that company to preserve its quality manufacturing and skills in our country?

Mark Lancaster: I know that, for example, my colleague the Defence Procurement Minister has had several discussions with the constituency MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey). Although of course this is very much a matter for the company, the MOD will look to see in what ways we can provide support.

20. [909287] **Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that when decisions are made about the placement of orders for vessels for the Royal Navy, which have seen an encouraging increase in number, and about who wins them, contributions to UK prosperity will play an important role?

Mark Lancaster: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. May I take this opportunity to thank him once again for the valuable contribution he made through his report last year? He made, off the top of my head, some 41 sensible recommendations, and we are looking to address them shortly.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): Since the start of the last Labour Government, we have seen a 39% decrease in the number of Royal Navy ships and a 46% decrease in the number of frigates and destroyers. If the Secretary of State wants a carrier in the south Atlantic and one in the South China sea, where is the drumbeat of orders coming from when we have just lost another 150 jobs at our shipyard in Rosyth?

Mark Lancaster: Let us be clear that we are committed to maintaining the numbers of our frigates and destroyers. Indeed, later this year we will see the second of our aircraft carriers come out of Rosyth. Equally, it is this

Government who have secured shipbuilding jobs in Scotland all the way through to the 2030s. Indeed, there are probably some apprentices who will work on the Type 26 programme who are yet to be born.

Armed Forces Personnel

5. **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of armed forces personnel. [909268]

9. **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase recruitment into the armed forces. [909273]

11. **Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve recruitment and retention in the armed forces. [909275]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): We remain committed to maintaining the overall size of the armed forces, and we have a range of measures under way to improve recruitment and retention. The challenge is kept under constant review. Importantly, the services continue to meet all their current commitments, keeping the country and its interests safe.

Toby Perkins: Many people may see it as an incompetent accident that the Government continually fail to hit their supposed targets on Army recruitment, but is it not the truth that this is a Government without any sort of strategic vision for what they want our Army to do in 2019, and that their failure to get Army numbers up saves budget for the parts of the MOD that they do have a plan for?

Mark Lancaster: I could not disagree more. I think we have a clear vision as to what we want our Army to do in 2019. Equally, the hon. Gentleman should be encouraged by the fact that as of January we have had the highest number of applications to the Army in five years.

Mr Baron: I suggest that the Government should not take any lessons from Labour about manpower shortages, given today's news about desertions.

The National Audit Office has recently confirmed that Capita has not recruited the required numbers of regulars and reservists in any year since the contract began in 2012. Clearly, extra resources are needed. May I also suggest that the Government consider reinstating 2nd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, which was the best recruited unit in the Army when it was disbanded?

Mark Lancaster: I have been here long enough to be able to pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his consistent defence of the 2nd Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. The same National Audit Office report states that the Army has already conducted a full review of the current recruitment strategy. As a result, the contract with Capita was realigned and a comprehensive improvement plan introduced. That will take time to bear fruit, but as I said in answer to the previous question we are now beginning to see early signs of the improvement plan bearing fruit.

Stephen Kerr: Will the Minister update the House on the results arising from the Army recruitment poster campaign last month? Has it enticed more women to apply? Has it enticed more people from ethnic minority backgrounds to apply to join the Army?

Mark Lancaster: The Army's new campaign builds on last year's successful "Belonging" adverts, which, as I said, took recruitment to a five-year high. The early signs are positive. At the moment, 12.4% of recruits are women and 6.5% are from the black, Asian and minority ethnic community. We are yet to see the audited results for the campaign, but we are confident that progress is being made.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Public Accounts Committee has been looking closely at what skills we have in our armed forces. We know there are real shortages, particularly in cyber, with people leaving early. Will the Minister explain to the House how he is working with others across Government to ensure that we have the cyber skills we need in our armed forces?

Mark Lancaster: That is a very important question. The hon. Lady will be aware of the £1.9 billion investment in cyber across Government. I have taken a particular personal interest in this issue. I want to ensure that the career structure we offer in the armed forces matches these 21st century skills. Historically, it has not done so.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): In the past few years, Capita has been 3,000 recruits short. The chief of defence personnel, Lieutenant General Nugee, told the Defence Committee a couple of weeks ago that this year it will be over 4,000, maybe nearly even 5,000, recruits short. Applications are up, but enlistments—those actually joining—are down dramatically. The Secretary of State called its performance atrocious and it is. The Scots Guards are barely at 50% manned. I believe that Capita is so awful that its performance is becoming a threat to one element of our national security. When will the Government come out of denial and sack this useless, hopeless company?

Mark Lancaster: My right hon. Friend is entirely consistent in his views on Capita and I respect that. However, I would say that once again the signs are positive. Sandhurst is now 100% full in terms of young officers, an improvement on the past two years. The infantry training centre at Catterick is now 80% full. Yes, that is 20% lower than we need, but that is a significant increase and improvement on where we were last year. All the signs are pointing in the right direction.

Mr Francois: They are not.

Mark Lancaster: Yes, they are. The challenge we face is that while applications are up, the conversion rate is getting better and that will take time to feed through into the strength of the Regular Army.

Mr Speaker: Having known the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for 35 years, I hope he will take it in the right spirit if I say that I really do wish he would tell us what he really thinks.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Following on from what was said by the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mark Francois), the reality is that the size of the Army has fallen in every year since the Conservatives came to power. For all the talk, the fact is that the initial applications are not turning into enlistments. Will the Minister tell the House what the trained strength of the Army will be at the end of this Parliament if the current trend and record we have seen so far continues?

Mark Lancaster: I am confident that at the end of this Parliament, assuming that that is 2022, the trained strength of the Army will be higher than it is now.

Nia Griffith: I do not think that gives us very much reassurance. Let me tell the Minister now that, if the decline continues at the same rate it has been over the time the Conservative party has been in government, by May 2022 the Army will be down to just 68,000. Given that the promise to reach 82,000 soldiers was unceremoniously dumped from the Conservative manifesto at the last election, will the Minister tell the House whether the Government are still committed to reaching that number? If so, what is his plan for how to do so?

Mark Lancaster: With respect to the hon. Lady, she talks about "the Army". I assume that by that, she actually means the Regular Army—when she talks about 68,000. As far as I am concerned, the Army also includes the Army Reserve, giving a combined force of about 112,000. It also includes the approximately 3,500 soldiers who wear a uniform and are proud to call themselves soldiers but are currently under training. I think she needs to think about what definition she is using.

Veterans: Mental Health Support

6. **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to provide adequate mental health support for veterans. [909269]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The provision of veterans' mental health support is the responsibility of the NHS in England and the devolved Administrations, but the MOD is committed to ensuring veterans are aware of what support is available.

Daniel Kawczynski: I thank the Minister for that answer. The Covenant Fund Trust will play a vital role in providing important organisations such as the Shropshire armed forces community trust with additional resources to help veterans with mental health problems. Will the Minister give me an assurance that he will update the House on how he and his other colleagues are lobbying the Chancellor for additional resources for the Covenant Fund Trust?

Mr Ellwood: The Covenant Fund Trust has increased, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that it forms a wider package of measures. I join the Secretary of State in saying that we would like to see the defence budget increase not simply because of procurement or training, but because we need to look after our people. This is an illustration of that. We introduced the mental health and wellbeing strategy a year and a half ago. This has helped armed forces personnel to be more aware of what mental health support is available.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): There is still confusion among clinicians and veterans over how the armed forces covenant guarantee of priority treatment for conditions related to the veterans service is applied, so what discussions has the Minister had with the Health Minister in Wales to support our veterans there?

Mr Ellwood: The Defence Secretary co-chairs the veterans board, which looks at precisely this. We need to make sure, no matter whether it is in England or in the devolved Administrations, that no veterans are left without the support that they need. It is important, no matter which hospital or organisation it is, that they are aware of their covenant responsibilities in looking after our brave service personnel and veterans.

Leaving the EU: MOD Preparedness

7. **John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): What contingency planning his Department has undertaken for the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [909271]

12. **Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of his Department's preparedness for the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [909276]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): The Ministry of Defence has conducted extensive planning and preparation to ensure that defence is ready for a range of scenarios including that of a no-deal EU exit. We continue to work closely with other Government Departments, key suppliers and industry partners.

John Mc Nally: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Cyber-security is designated as a priority in the modernising defence programme, but given that we will lose the European arrest warrant, access to Europol and the sharing of data using EU frameworks, we face challenges that the programme simply does not seem willing to countenance. How is the Department going to replicate those vital benefits from day one of leaving the EU?

Gavin Williamson: The work that we are doing on cyber-security is done not through the European Union, but through NATO or bilateral agreements with other countries, so I cannot see that having any impact on our continued work on cyber-security.

Anna McMorrin: May I just echo your words about Paul Flynn, Mr Speaker? He was a brilliant, radical and reformist politician and will be greatly missed.

A "No-deal Brexit will make tracking terrorists harder and British public less safe". Those words are from the Minister for Security and Economic Crime, and this weekend we have heard another Defence Minister threaten to vote against the Government if they fail to rule out no deal. Will the Secretary of State put this country's security first, and before his own leadership ambition, and rule out no deal here and now, today?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady had an opportunity to vote for a deal just a few weeks ago, but she did not seem to bother.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Whether we leave the European Union with a deal or without a deal, will the Defence Secretary make it clear to his Spanish counterparts that it is completely unacceptable for their warships to try to intimidate commercial shipping entering British sovereign waters around Gibraltar?

Gavin Williamson: I will make it absolutely clear that we will always be there to defend our sovereign interests and to defend Britain's national interest.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I know the Secretary of State will agree that throughout European history there has always been an issue when there has been a separation between defending North America and defending western Europe. Will he confirm that his contingency plan for our leaving without a deal remains the fact that with our NATO allies we will still come to the aid of our European allies if they need it?

Gavin Williamson: Our commitment to our European friends and allies is sacrosanct. The Prime Minister has been consistent in saying that as we leave the EU our commitment to European security is one they can truly rely on.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): The recent reports that the MOD has begun stockpiling food, fuel, spare parts and ammunition at overseas bases just in case of a no-deal Brexit are extremely concerning, so will the Secretary of State now rule out a no deal and urge his Cabinet colleagues to seek an agreement with the EU based on a permanent customs union and a strong relationship with the single market?

Gavin Williamson: We have legislated to exit the EU on 29 March this year, and the hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to vote for a deal, but he chose not to. The Prime Minister will always deliver the very best for this country, and I very much hope that not only Government Members but the hon. Gentleman will support it.

RAF Marham: Tornado and F35

8. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What plans he has to visit RAF Marham to discuss the reduction in the size of the Tornado fleet and the introduction of the F-35; and if will he make a statement. [909272]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I visited RAF Marham on 10 January. It has been the home of our Tornado force and is now the home of our F-35 Lightnings. It is obviously with a heavy heart but enormous pride that we bid farewell to our Tornados—it is truly the end of an era—but it is right that we now look to the future. The combination of our state-of-the-art F-35s and Typhoons will keep us a world leader in combat air.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank the Secretary of State for paying tribute to the Tornado squadrons at RAF Marham. They have been at the forefront of every operation for the last 40 years and are about to start—this week, I think—their farewell flypast. Will he pay special tribute to the pilots and navigators who have shown supreme courage backed up always by their ground crew and their families at home in west Norfolk and elsewhere?

Gavin Williamson: It is a whole community that delivers the Tornado's fighting capability. In countless conflicts around the globe—be it the first Gulf war, the second Gulf war, or taking the fight to Daesh over the skies of Iraq and Syria—the Tornados have been at the forefront, and the pilots, navigators and ground crew have all been part of it. RAF Marham has an exciting future, however, with the two new F-35 squadrons and the additional training squadron.

Aircraft Carriers: Phalanx Weapons

10. **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): How many Phalanx close-in weapon systems will be fitted to each new aircraft carrier; and if he will make a statement. [909274]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): Three Phalanx close-in weapon systems will be fitted to each new aircraft carrier. Two are being fitted to HMS Queen Elizabeth during her current capability insertion period, with the third to be fitted towards the end of 2020. Three will be fitted to HMS Prince Of Wales in 2020.

Dr Lewis: May I add to the tributes to Paul Flynn by noting the remarkable physical courage he showed in battling crippling arthritis over many years?

In relation to the Phalanx systems on the aircraft carriers, I agree that, if nothing goes wrong, the fitting of three will offer 360° coverage and protection, but, given that there is a fourth station on each aircraft carrier that could take a fourth system, and given that there are spare systems in storage following withdrawal from operational theatres, would it not be sensible to give some extra insurance by fitting a fourth system, so that if one is lost, there will still be total coverage and protection for these vital naval assets?

Mark Lancaster: My right hon. Friend is, of course, right in his assessment that three Phalanx systems offer a 360° capability, and that there is scope, potentially, for a fourth. We have the ability to adjust that according to the threat. I should also remind the House that the carrier will be at the centre of a carrier group. Protection for that carrier will consist of different layers of security provided by both the frigates and the destroyers, so it will not rely solely on the Phalanx system.

RAF Scampton

13. **Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): What plans his Department has to support workers at RAF Scampton to find alternative employment in Lincolnshire [909278]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): We have had a series of debates about the future of RAF Scampton, not just in the Chamber but in Westminster Hall, and the hon. Lady is aware that it is, I am afraid, due to close. I can assure her, however, that the RAF footprint in Lincolnshire will increase.

Karen Lee: As the Minister knows, RAF Scampton is very close to my constituency. It employs more than 600 people, many of whom live in Lincoln and contribute to the local economy as well as to our communities.

What specific assurances can the Minister give MOD workers in Lincoln, and throughout Lincolnshire, who fear that they will be made redundant or forced to relocate should the closure go ahead?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to wish to ensure that we look after those workers—who are committed to the RAF—and, indeed, their families. However, as I mentioned earlier, Lincolnshire does well from an RAF perspective. It has RAF Waddington, with its intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance capability, and RAF Cranwell, with its training capabilities, not to mention RAF Coningsby, with its fast jet capability. I hope that most of the people who are transferred or moved will be able to remain where they live now, although their work will take them elsewhere in the county.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): As a Member of Parliament representing RAF Scampton, I thank my right hon. Friend for the work that he has done in trying to secure a future for it with our district council, West Lindsey. May I urge him, however, to consider the desire of all Lincolnshire people, which is based not on emotion but on sound, grounded fact, that the Red Arrows should stay in Lincolnshire? We can provide good employment for those 400 people. The three bases that he mentioned are within 15 or 20 miles of each other. We have superb airspace and a great RAF history, so please can we keep the Red Arrows in Lincolnshire?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's determination to ensure that this place recognises the work, the heritage and the history of RAF Scampton, which will, I think, be noted by his constituents and others. It is important for the museum there to continue.

As my right hon. Friend will know—*[Interruption.]* Is that okay Mr Speaker? As my right hon. Friend will know, the location of the Red Arrows is partly due to an operational capability to ensure that they are serviced. The airspace is run by the Civil Aviation Authority, and that is the subject of a separate discussion to be had with them.

Mr Speaker: We want to enjoy the benefits of the Minister's mellifluous tones. That was my only exhortation. It is quite understandable that a Minister looks back at a Member, but the rest of the House wants to savour the experience of hearing him.

NATO: National Security

14. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the importance of NATO to UK national security. [909280]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Last week I joined NATO Defence Ministers to discuss progress made towards fairer burden-sharing and increasing the readiness of all our armed forces.

Michael Tomlinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as we leave the European Union, we will of course continue to co-operate with our European friends and allies, but that it is NATO that is the bedrock of European security? Does also he agree that all talk of an EU army is an unhelpful distraction?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend has put his finger right on the issue. Talk of an EU army is indeed a distraction. It does not help; it does not build security. As we leave the European Union, 80% of NATO forces will be contributed by non-EU countries, but there is also a bigger point to be made. All European countries should be contributing more to defence, and they should all be spending 2% of their GDP on defence.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): May I, too, echo your generous words about Paul Flynn, Mr Speaker? He was a good socialist, and I therefore disagreed with nearly everything he said, but that is the nature of parliamentary debate.

As my right hon. Friend knows, the political declaration talks of co-operation with Europe on future defence operations. Surely, however, the most effective way of keeping the peace in Europe is to concentrate on the primacy of NATO, and in particular to encourage our American partners to keep paying 50-60% of the budget.

Gavin Williamson: We will always co-operate with all organisations right around the world, but my hon. Friend is so right: NATO is what delivers security in Europe. That is where our focus will be; that is what we will be focusing our time and resources on in delivering our security with our NATO allies.

Defence Procurement: UK Prosperity

15. **Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): What steps he has taken to promote UK prosperity in his Department's procurement decisions. [909281]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): Since 2015, we have published a national shipbuilding strategy, refreshed defence industrial policy to help strengthen UK competitiveness and launched the future combat air strategy. We engage with global primes to create opportunities for all tiers of the UK supply chain.

Mr Jones: In the light of the Ministry of Defence decision to open up the procurement process for the fleet solid support ships to international competition, will the Minister explain what weighting will be placed on national prosperity in awarding those contracts?

Mark Lancaster: The one thing we are clear about is that we are constrained in that process because the fleet solid support ships are not warships; they are not frigates, destroyers or indeed aircraft carriers. However, I can reassure the right hon. Gentleman that that competition will be judged not solely on price but also on various other factors, and I am delighted that a UK consortium will be bidding.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. As we are constrained for time, I advise the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) that his inquiry on missile defence capability can be shoehorned into the current inquiry.

17. **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): [909284] Does my right hon. Friend the Minister agree that MBDA, located in Bolton and manufacturing in Bolton, makes a huge contribution to our defence, especially by keeping one step ahead of the competition in terms of technology?

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he is also absolutely right to cite his constituency company as a fine example of how we can continue to compete on the world stage.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): First, may I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your kind words about our former colleague Paul Flynn, who was a great comrade over the years?

Following on from the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), why does the Minister not defer any action until after 29 March, when we will not be under EU procurement rules and we can award this ship—a £1 billion British taxpayers' order—to a British shipyard?

Mark Lancaster: The hon. Gentleman seems to have a crystal ball—I simply do not—to see exactly what the situation will be post 29 March.

Ex-service Personnel: Employment

16. **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of employment of ex-service personnel. [909283]

18. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of employment of ex-service personnel. [909285]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Some 15,000 armed forces personnel leave the Army, Air Force and Navy every single year. We have invested significantly in resettlement provision, and the two key organisations that help provide that are the Career Transition Partnership, which helps individuals in that preparation, and the Defence Relationship Management organisation, which partners with businesses to make them aware of what skill sets are available.

Douglas Ross: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. Copernicus Technology, based in Moray, was set up in 2008 with ex-RAF engineers and it provides excellent work for the US Department of Defence on an intermittent fault device. Will the Minister consider looking at the benefits of this in the UK, because it increases the availability of the elements that it is used on and reduces support costs for the US, and we could surely do with that here in the UK?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend raises an important point. In this and many other areas, we can learn from our US counterparts about what support we can provide for veterans. I will be delighted to meet my hon. Friend afterwards and discuss in more detail how we can move this forward.

Nigel Huddleston: Will the Minister join me in commending the work of Only A Pavement Away, which helps homeless ex-service personnel find employment particularly in the hospitality sector, and what else are the Government doing to help ex-service personnel who have fallen on particularly hard times?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to the charity my hon. Friend mentions. There are over 400 service-facing charities out there providing support for ex-service personnel. It is important that those who require support know where it is to be found, and I am pleased that more charities are working through the Veterans' Gateway, the single portal that allows veterans to know where help can be found.

Common Security and Defence Policy

19. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What recent assessment he has made of the potential effect on UK defence capability of ending co-operation on the common security and defence policy. [909286]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Europe's security is our security. Co-operation with our European partners and allies through NATO, bilaterally and through a security partnership with the EU will enable us to address shared threats and defend our shared values.

Tom Brake: May I also pay tribute to Paul Flynn? I suspect that he was less surprised than I was when I had to read out the words to suspend him from the House of Commons after he had accused a Secretary of State—the then Secretary of State for Defence, as it happens—of lying. On the subject of the European Union, the Secretary of State will know that the "National Security Capability Review" stated:

> "As we leave the EU, we want a partnership that offers both the EU and the UK the means to combine efforts to the greatest effect, both operationally, and in developing capabilities."

By what means will we achieve this partnership once we have left the common security and defence policy?

Gavin Williamson: What we set out in our negotiations with the European Union is the opportunity for Britain to opt into various programmes if it is in our national interest to do so. But it still keeps coming down to the most important point: what delivers our security in Europe is not the European Union; it is NATO. It is that framework that will continue to deliver that security.

Topical Questions

T1. [909289] **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I announced to NATO Defence Ministers last Wednesday a significant increase in our commitment to the alliance, making the UK contribution to the enhanced forward presence in Estonia the largest of any nation. At the Munich security conference, I met counterparts from the global coalition of countries tasked with defeating Daesh, and in Norway, I had the opportunity to further our discussions with the Norwegian Government about how we can enhance our security in the high north.

Dr Lewis: The Secretary of State is far too modest: I was sure he was going to tell us about his dip in the icy Norwegian waters.

On a very much more serious issue, the Secretary of State knows that there are between 200 and 300 war widows who lost their war widows pension on remarriage and who, if they were to divorce or lose their husbands now would have it restored and it could not then be

taken away, but who have not had it restored and are therefore in the perverse situation that if they want to get quite a few thousand pounds a year more, they should divorce and remarry their husbands. Everyone agrees that that is an absurd and indeed disgraceful situation, and I know that the Secretary of State wants to do something about it. The war widows have been to see the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and she has expressed sympathy. When will this matter be dealt with? What is holding it up?

Gavin Williamson: The next time I go to Norway, I will be sure to bring my right hon. Friend along so that we can go for a dip together.

My right hon. Friend raises an important issue, and it is one that has been ongoing for a very long time. I have had the opportunity to meet a large number of those affected, and we are keen to work across the Government to find a solution. This is a burning injustice, and I know that those women feel it very deeply. I am committed to finding a solution, and I very much hope that we can deliver that across all Departments.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The Public Accounts Committee's damning report has found that Ministers have made "little progress" in solving the affordability crisis at the heart of the Ministry of Defence's budget. Despite a year of bolshie headlines, the Secretary of State has completely failed to get a grip of the equipment plan in the modernising defence programme. Instead of spending his time causing diplomatic rows, when will he come forward with a costed plan to give confidence to the armed forces and our allies that we will be able to afford the equipment that his Government have committed to?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady has been saying that we will not hit our budget for over a year now, yet last year we delivered the Ministry of Defence budget on target and sort of within budget, and we will do that again this year. Over the past few years, we have made more than £9 billion-worth of cost savings, and as part of last week's announcements, we made a commitment to invest a further £100 million to ensure that we work more efficiently and that we can make more efficiency savings so that we can meet our commitments in the future.

Nia Griffith: The Government's own analysis shows that a no-deal Brexit would cause serious and lasting damage to our GDP. On the basis of sticking to our NATO 2% commitment, that would mean a massive cut of some 9.3% just because of the hit to our economy. With the Government failing so abysmally to manage the defence budget at present, will the Defence Secretary now drop the bravado and finally admit that leaving the EU without a deal would be so harmful to the UK that we must absolutely rule it out?

Gavin Williamson: Whether or not Britain has a deal with the European Union, we will continue to succeed and thrive. We did so before we were a member of the EU and will do so after we leave. We should have the confidence and belief in our nation that the Labour party obviously does not have.

T5. [909294] **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with the former shadow Chancellor, the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), when he questioned the Leader of the Opposition's ability on defence by criticising his pursuit of policies—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not want to be unkind to the hon. Lady, but she has taken too long to ask a question about Opposition policy, and we really cannot get into that. Questions are about Government policy, not that of the Opposition.

T2. [909290] **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): The introduction of a dry dock in Portsmouth for the nation's new carriers could create and protect hundreds of jobs in my constituency and be worth £1 billion to the local economy. I am keen to see the facility based in Portsmouth, which is home to the Royal Navy, so will the Secretary of State give a timeframe for the decision?

Gavin Williamson: I am not in a position at present to give that timeframe, but I will ask the Minister for Defence Procurement, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the plan. Portsmouth plays a vital role in all that we do with the Royal Navy, and we are incredibly grateful to the city for the support that it offers our servicemen and women.

Mr Speaker: I call Ross Thomson. Where is the fella? He is not here. I am sorry that he is not here, but Leo Docherty is.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): The Brigade of Gurkhas has given courageous and loyal service to this country for two centuries. Does the Minister agree that it would be a good idea for us to recruit more of them?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): I started my military career in the Brigade of Gurkhas, so I declare an interest in that I am biased for obvious reasons. My hon. Friend's question is timely. We recruit once a year and recruited 400 Gurkhas last year, which is within our agreement with the Government of Nepal. I am travelling to Nepal later this week for further negotiations with the Nepali Government about the future use of Gurkhas.

T3. [909291] **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Suicide claimed the lives of 71 military personnel and veterans last year, and mental ill health is a clear and present danger to our servicemen and women and to our veterans. What assessment have Ministers made of making an automatic link between those leaving the service and their local Royal British Legion to help them to ease their way back into civilian life?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising something about which we all need to be concerned because the numbers are worrying. We do what we can to offer a far greater relationship as people depart the armed forces. There is a cohort of veterans who served around the Falklands era who are not benefiting from the education that people receive as

they leave the armed forces today. We need to do more, and the hon. Gentleman provides an example of one thing that we can do.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Will the Royal Navy continue with freedom of navigation operations in the South China sea?

Gavin Williamson: Like so many nations, such as the United States, Australia, France, New Zealand and Canada, we believe in the rule of law and the international rules-based system. We will always be a nation that does not just talk, but one that acts to uphold the rule of law that has benefited so many nations right around the globe, so yes.

T4. [909292] **Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): I associate myself with the tributes to Paul Flynn. He was a great Welsh patriot, devolutionist and campaigner, and we will miss him.

According to a report by the National Audit Office, the RAF estimates that, at the current rate, it will be another 20 years before it has enough pilots. What urgent steps is the Minister going to take to rectify this?

Mark Lancaster: The pilot training programme has remained unchanged for many years. That is why we are looking at a complete review of the system, which will speed up the process and should rectify the current shortfall in pilots.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The Minister for the Armed Forces has already referred to the expertise of GE Energy, located in my Rugby constituency, in the manufacture of propulsion systems. Does he agree it is important to retain that capability as an important part of our manufacturing base?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend and I have met to discuss this on a number of occasions, and my Department, along with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, is doing everything it can to help. We are working with GE to see if there are different ways to pull work forward. It is an important capability, and I would very much like to see the technology, which was developed in the UK, continue to be manufactured in the UK. We have been very successful in selling the Type 26 around the world, including to Australia and Canada, and it would be great for Rugby to get that benefit.

T7. [909296] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I join you and other colleagues in paying tribute to Paul Flynn for his generous advice, which he gave all the time, especially to me when I was first elected in 2007.

Given the Cameron Government's decision to scrap our maritime patrol capability and this Government's decision, several years later, to buy maritime patrol aircraft off the shelf, why do we not yet have a capability in place? What is the Ministry of Defence doing to patrol our territorial waters in the meantime, particularly in the North sea?

Mark Lancaster: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I am delighted that we are committed to buying nine new P-8 aircraft, which will be arriving from next year. Because of the work we have done with the US before they arrive, they will have an almost immediate initial operating capability.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Snowflakes and gamers are being recruited into the Army, in recognition of the wide variety of talents that people have. In that light, my constituent Zach is interested in joining the armed forces but feels that his autism would be an impediment to his application. Will my right hon. Friend confirm whether the armed forces recruitment drive will consider a similar campaign for people with autism?

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend is right to champion this issue. Over the past year, we have held a number of medical symposiums in which we have been looking very carefully at what medical standards we actually require in the military, not least because of the length of military service. Many conditions do not actually become an issue until later in life, when recruits would potentially have already finished their military service.

T8. [909297] **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Paul Flynn was a funny, generous man, and we will miss him in Gwent.

Capita's performance on Army recruitment has been hopeless. When is the Secretary of State going to sack them?

Mark Lancaster: I feel this is a monthly exchange between the hon. Gentleman and me. All I can do is refer him to the answers I gave earlier in this session. The visible signs of progress are now there for all to see.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on how the carrier strike strategy is coming along in terms of the relationship on building it together with other Departments?

Gavin Williamson: As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, when we make major announcements, including on the delivery of carrier strike, they are shared across the Government. The deployment of the Queen Elizabeth and the carrier group to the Mediterranean, the middle east and the Pacific is an important sign that Britain is a global nation and a nation that wishes to play its role in upholding our interests and, of course, our values. As we have invested so much in our global carrier forces, it is important that we put them to sea and demonstrate Britain's global presence, our involvement and our ability to act when required.

T9. [909298] **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that a statutory association body, such as that provided for the police, would allow armed forces personnel to make representations to the Government on a wide range of issues—falling morale, for example?

Mark Lancaster: No, I do not, and, crucially, I sense that there is no appetite within the armed forces for such a body.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): The MOD's announcement that all posts in the military would be open to women was certainly welcome. Will the Minister kindly inform the House what specific

measures are being taken to ensure that women and girls in school are made well aware that there are no no-go areas for them in the military?

Mark Lancaster: I refer my hon. Friend to the Royal Air Force advert that aired this week, which almost exclusively featured women, as a clear demonstration that not a single role in the RAF, or, now, in the other services, is not open to them

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): We have heard this afternoon about Capita's abject failure in recruitment. While we are haemorrhaging personnel, there are clearly issues in the armed forces that have to be addressed, so will the Secretary of State support the Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), which will be heard on 8 March, to give personnel a voice, through an armed forces representative body with a statutory footing?

Mark Lancaster: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Rock2Recovery provides mental health support to service personnel from those who have already served. Does the Minister agree that they can play an important part in solving mental health problems?

Mr Ellwood: I was delighted to meet Rock2Recovery not very long ago and I pay tribute to the work it does, along with all the other charities, as this is so important. No one size fits all in supporting our veterans; there are many avenues by which we can ensure that they get the support and credit that they deserve.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Is the Secretary of State in favour of other Departments spending a few million so that he can save hundreds of millions from his budget? If he is, will he put the weight of the Ministry behind our drive, with BAE Systems and the community, to make Barrow even more attractive a place to come and stay in, so that we can improve the productivity of the workforce?

Gavin Williamson: Having had the opportunity to visit Barrow a number of times, I know that the town offers so very much. We are very dependent on the residents of Barrow for the amazing work they do in developing our nuclear deterrent. I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss how we can work across the Government to deliver that vision.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Following conversations at the recent Munich security conference, does the Minister believe that all European countries are committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence?

Gavin Williamson: It is fair to say that some are more committed than others, but we have to hammer the message home. We need European countries to be spending a minimum of 2% of their GDP on defence, not because it is an issue raised by the United States, but because they should be spending that money on defence for their security and for Europe's security. That is the reason they need to be spending a minimum of 2%.

UK Nationals returning from Syria

3.58 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con) *(Urgent Question):* To ask the Home Secretary if he will make a statement on Government actions in dealing with UK nationals returning from Syria.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): May I start by paying my respects to the hon. Member for Newport West? Our sympathies are with his loved ones and all those in this House who were close to him.

I welcome the urgent question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord). My priority as Home Secretary is to ensure the safety and security of this country. We cannot ignore the threat posed by those who chose to leave Britain to engage with the conflict in Syria or Iraq—more than 900 people took this path. Without the deradicalisation work of our Prevent programme, there could have been many more. Whatever role they took in the so-called caliphate, they all supported a terrorist organisation and, in doing so, have shown that they hate our country and the values we stand for. This is a death cult that enslaved and raped thousands of Yazidi girls and that celebrated attacks on our shores, including the tragic Manchester bombing, which targeted young girls. Now that the so-called caliphate is crumbling, some of them want to return. I have been very clear: where I can, and where any threat remains, I will not hesitate to prevent that. The powers available to me include banning non-British people from this country and stripping dangerous dual nationals of their British citizenship. More than 100 people have already been deprived in this way. We must, of course, observe international law, and we cannot strip someone of their British citizenship if doing so would leave them stateless. Individuals who manage to return will be questioned, investigated and, potentially, prosecuted.

Our Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, which received Royal Assent just last week, provides more powers to prosecute returnees. It extends the list of offences committed overseas that we can act on, and it creates new laws to ban British citizens from entering designated terrorist hotspots without good reason.

Our world-class police and security services closely monitor all who return if they pose any risk. We do not hesitate to use the range of tools at our disposal. That includes using temporary exclusion orders to put in-country restrictions in place, and managing risks through terrorism prevention and investigation measures—so-called TPIMs. Members will have seen the comments that Shamima Begum has made in the media, and they will have to draw their own conclusions. Quite simply, if someone backs terror, there must be consequences.

Dr Offord: There is huge concern in this country about the return of Shamima Begum. This is an individual who willingly travelled to Syria to become a supporter of a terrorist organisation. She has shown no remorse about her decision, and it appears that she wishes to return to the United Kingdom only because of the benefits that this country can offer her. Many people are very angry about that. Her case highlights the problem facing this country and the Home Secretary: as a British national without any form of dual nationality, Begum cannot be refused entry. Does the Home Secretary accept that the removal of citizenship from Britons who travelled abroad to join Daesh is prohibited under international law?

Figures from the Home Office show that 900 British nationals travelled to Syria, and up to 400 have returned. On 11 June last year, the Minister for Security and Economic Crime told the House that of those who had returned from Syria:

> "Approximately 40 have been prosecuted so far".—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 666.]

That is a reduction on the 54 that, in May 2016, Lord Keen advised had been prosecuted, and it is still only 10% of those who went to Syria and returned.

How many British nationals have returned from Syria? How many have been prosecuted for offences? What offences were they charged with? How many have been convicted? If we do not address this issue, not only do we risk the security of the United Kingdom but we put into doubt the safety of thousands of our Muslim constituents and we put them at risk of discrimination, abuse and violence. I make a great distinction between my hard-working, law-abiding Muslim constituents and the actions of a reckless child from east London. I ask the Home Secretary to take action on this vital matter.

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the important questions that he has just put to me. He asked me about the case of Shamima Begum, and I hope he will understand that I am not at liberty to discuss the case of any particular individual. As I have just said, however, we have all seen and heard the remarks that she made in the media, and we can all draw our own conclusions.

My hon. Friend went on to ask me a number of related and important questions. He said that in some cases we can remove British citizenship. That is what I have referred to as deprivation. As I have said, the Government have done so on more than 100 occasions. If someone who has more than one nationality—British nationality plus another, or perhaps more than one other—is deemed a threat, and I consider this to be conducive to the public good, we can deprive that individual of their British nationality, and thereby prevent their return to the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend mentioned some numbers. From the best numbers we have available, we estimate that, in recent years, 900 people who have been deemed of national security concern in some way or another went to Syria or Iraq to join terrorist organisations. Of those, we estimate that 20% have been killed in the battlefield, and around 40% have returned, leaving about 40% still somewhere in the region.

My hon. Friend asked about those who have returned in recent years. In all those cases, we would seek to make sure, first, that that individual is questioned, investigated and, where there is enough evidence, prosecuted. We would seek to manage that return, so even if they are a British citizen, we can issue temporary exclusion orders. That will remove their passport and require them to travel on a specifically issued designated travel document into a specific port of entry. At that point of entry, they are monitored by police and face a number of other restrictions. If appropriate, we can also use TPIMs to place further restrictions on them while we

may or may not be waiting for prosecution. Of course, we will also work with authorities, particularly if young children are involved, to make sure they get the mental health, psychiatric and other types of help that may be necessary.

Finally, my hon. Friend rightly mentioned communities and making sure that, whatever we do, we work towards building more cohesive communities and winning the understanding of all communities, and that is something we always try to do.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): May I begin by joining the Home Secretary in his tribute to the late Paul Flynn? Paul was the first person to show me around the House of Commons, and he was an inspiration to me and many others in terms of entering politics. My thoughts today are with his wife, Sam, and all his family and friends.

The public have a right to protection from anyone thought to pose a threat to this country, and paramount for any Government is the security of their citizens. Will the Secretary of State confirm, first, that UK citizens are entitled to return to this country under international law, but that they should be held to account on their return for their actions?

Under international law, as the Home Secretary said, the Government cannot make people stateless, but they can sensibly take a number of practical steps to safeguard people in line with our respect for the rule of law. The designated areas offence introduced by the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act has received Royal Assent in recent days. The Opposition worked with the Government on developing that mechanism, which provides the legal framework to deal with the issue of returning so-called foreign fighters. However, the Government now need to designate areas to ensure that those returning face justice and due process. Is the Home Secretary considering designating parts of Syria in line with that legislation?

Recently, attention has focused on those who have travelled to Syria to join the so-called caliphate. Given that people may start to return to the UK and will face legal proceedings, I will not comment further on individual cases. However, will the Home Secretary confirm that anyone returning to this country as a UK citizen should expect to face justice for their actions, in a legal process in which our police, our prosecutors and our courts will take into account the individual circumstances of each case?

Sajid Javid: I welcome the questions from the hon. Gentleman. First, he asked whether UK citizens are entitled to return. So long as they are still UK citizens, they will have a right to return, but even in that case it is possible to place certain restrictions on them. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, I mentioned temporary exclusion orders, which I have used on a number of occasions to put in place a number of restrictions by removing the passport but issuing different types of travel documents that control entry.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act and the measures in it to combat terrorism—especially the designated areas offence. I welcome the support of the whole House for the Act and particularly for that offence. He asked whether we are looking at designated areas, and of course we are. In anticipation of the Bill becoming an Act, we had already commenced some work on that. It would not be appropriate at this point for me to say which areas we looked at specifically—for an area to be designated, it has to come before the House and it has to be the will of the House to designate that area, and I do not want to prejudge that—but it is worth pointing out that it will not be retrospective, and the House should keep that in mind.

The hon. Gentleman talked of "if and when" people start to return. As I said a few moments ago, over the last few years several people have returned, and in all such cases I can assure him that we always seek first to try to control entry and question the individual. We investigate the individual, working with the police and the security services, and where appropriate we prosecute. That has always been the case and that will not change.

If we deem someone to be a serious threat to this country and it is in the public interest to prevent them from re-entering the UK and we can do so by legal means by depriving them of citizenship, or preventing entry in the case of a non-British national, we would always look to do that.

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): With regard to those terrorist fighters suspected of the most barbaric crimes, does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to avoid British or other nationals ending up in a new Guantanamo, we may need a new international agreement about how such cases are to be handled, and perhaps even an international terrorist court to make sure that they are properly prosecuted?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend speaks with experience of fighting terrorism and he is right. The issue of foreign fighters is faced by several countries, including our European allies, our American allies and others. We are working closely with them to see what more we can do to ensure that in every case justice is done and, where possible, is done in the region.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I echo the comments that have been made about the sad death of Paul Flynn: he was a one-off and will be missed by all of us.

The SNP share the concerns of everybody else in the House and the country about the terrorist threat from Daesh and other extremist ideologies. Nevertheless, the UK still has a responsibility to UK citizens who left to join Daesh and, as the Home Secretary said, the UK is obligated under international law to allow re-entry to UK citizens without claim to another nationality. Shamima Begum, whatever her degree of culpability, was a child when she left the UK and is thought to have been a victim of a grooming campaign, like many other UK children at the time. She is a vulnerable young woman with a newborn child, and the Government should follow international law and allow her to return to face the consequences of her actions.

By showing our commitment to the rule of law, we demonstrate the strength of the democratic system and help to prevent others from being radicalised. Can the Home Secretary confirm whether Shamima Begum was a target of Daesh grooming and whether he has information on the number of UK children targeted by Daesh? I have a particular interest in the issue after meeting Safaa Boular on a visit to Medway secure training

[Gavin Newlands]

centre: what steps is the Home Secretary taking to ensure that a similar wide-scale Daesh grooming campaign could not happen today or in the future?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman has asked me about a particular individual and it would not be appropriate for me to be drawn into that.

On a more general note, if individuals have left Britain to join Daesh or other terrorist organisations in that region, we can understand why they are considered a threat to individuals and to our values in this country, and to our allies across the world. Those individuals have made that decision, and the Government's first priority is to protect this country and do whatever is necessary. If those individuals have more than one nationality—again, I will not be drawn on a particular individual—we have the ability where appropriate to strip them of their British nationality. I have done that on several occasions and will continue to do so where I deem it appropriate. If that is not possible, we have other ways to manage the risk.

The hon. Gentleman asked specifically about the grooming of young people by extremists and terrorist organisations, which sadly we have seen in this country and elsewhere. The Government are working with other public bodies to try to stop that, for example through the Prevent programme, which has been very successful to date. It is about safeguarding vulnerable young people who are susceptible to extremists.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): This is a controversial area for our constituents, but surely the Home Secretary has got the balance right in what he has said today. It is important that these people are not left stateless in ungoverned spaces, floating around or consorting with those of ill intention. We have in this country courts and judicial structures, the rule of law and the security institutions of the state. Will he confirm that we have to take responsibility for dealing with these people, and that we cannot just close our eyes and pull up the drawbridge?

Sajid Javid: I thank my right hon. Friend for making that point. Of course it is very important that we take responsibility for doing what we can to reduce the risk to Britain and our people, but we also work with our allies to reduce the risk to them, for example through our deradicalisation programmes, and indeed through the work done internationally by the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development to help stabilise those regions.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Not all UK nationals trying to return from warzones in the middle east have been consorting with terrorists; some are trapped there through no fault of their own. Will the Home Secretary work with his Foreign Office colleagues to make sure that people like my constituent, who is being held by Houthis in Sanàa and is a UK national, can get back to Britain as easily as possible, even though they do not have documents?

Sajid Javid: Obviously, each case is dealt with on a case-by-case basis and we must consider the individual issues raised. It is important to note that, as we have heard with other cases raised in the House, the travel advice for all British citizens is not to travel to Yemen or Syria. It is important that people realise just how dangerous those areas are. Even if they have some benign intent, they should really think twice about going into a danger zone. But if someone is not connected to terrorism or is not deemed a danger in any way, we should absolutely look at what options are available for offering assistance.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Although the law on treason is antiquated, the act of treason most certainly is not. From what the Secretary of State has been saying, it is quite obvious that there will be many people coming back for whom it will not be possible to establish by normal standards in a court of law that they committed crimes while volunteering and spending time in the so-called caliphate. I draw his attention to the recommendation by Professor Richard Ekins of Oxford University, published yesterday in *The Sunday Telegraph*, that Parliament should

"restore the law of treason, specifying that it is treason to support a group that one knows intends to attack the UK or is fighting UK forces."

Will he seriously address that point?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. This is a complex situation and we should always be looking to see what tools we have at our disposal to ensure that those who are guilty of terrorism, or of supporting terrorist groups, are brought to justice. That means ensuring that we have the right laws in place. I referred earlier to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act, which received Royal Assent only last week, which gives the courts more powers. There are already powers in existence, including those covering extra-territorial jurisdictions. He made another important point about something else we could look at. I have read that article and heard what Professor Ekins has said in the past, and I think that it is worth considering it carefully.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): May I pay my party's respects to the late Paul Flynn, whose contribution to this House and to British politics will be sorely missed?

Does the Home Secretary agree that our country's long-term security is best served by understanding precisely why a young British girl would go to Syria in the first place? Is it not therefore better for UK security to interrogate and investigate this British citizen in the UK, rather than waste this opportunity to learn incredibly valuable lessons?

Sajid Javid: Again, I cannot speak about a particular case or an individual, but I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it is better in every case to talk to someone who has left to join a terrorist group to try to find out why; I do not think that that is the case. The driving factor on every occasion should be what is best for the security and the national interest of this country. He is right to point to the issue of why so many people—as I said, it is approximately 900 over a number of years, and many of them are British—have been drawn to leave these shores to go and join such a vile terrorist organisation. We at the Home Office and our partners in the police, the security services and others take that work very seriously. When we start to understand more why that happened, we must use those lessons to safeguard more people, especially young people.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: It is time we heard from a Berkshire knight—I call Sir John Redwood.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): How will the UK authorities go about finding the evidence concerning those UK citizens who went abroad to join a terrorist organisation and to fight or intervene in acts of brutality or support those who did?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend highlights an important issue. Members will understand why it is very difficult to gather evidence when someone has gone to a completely ungoverned space where we have no consular presence and no diplomatic relations of any type, and nor do our allies.

That said, we put a huge amount of effort—I take this opportunity to commend our security services, the police and some of our international partners—into gathering battlefield evidence and having that ready to use whenever appropriate. If we can supply that evidence in some cases to our partners for cases that they wish to bring in front of their courts, we will try to work constructively with them. The UN has also been looking at this. New measures are being considered on battlefield evidence conventions, and Britain, through the Ministry of Defence, is making an incredibly important contribution to that.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I completely understand that the Home Secretary wants people who have gone abroad to commit terrible crimes to face the full force of the law, but if they are British citizens, they have the right to be brought back here. So too do their offspring. What steps is he taking to recover, safeguard and protect the newborn baby, who I believe may be a British citizen, now languishing in a refugee camp?

Sajid Javid: I am sure the hon. Lady will understand that I cannot get drawn into a particular case, but I will respond to her general point. As a father, I think that any parent would have sympathy for a completely innocent child who is born into a battle zone or even taken there by their parents. But ultimately, we must remember that it is their parents who have decided to take that risk with their child; it is not something that Britain or the British Government have done. They have deliberately taken their child into a warzone where there is no British consular protection, and there is FCO advice that no one should go there.

Furthermore, if that person is involved with a terrorist organisation, they have gone to either directly or indirectly kill other people's children, and we should keep that in mind. Lastly, if we were to do more to try to rescue these children, we have to think about what risk that places on future children in the United Kingdom and the risk that they may be taken out to warzones by their parents.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The armed forces of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria have done most of the fighting and dying, as our allies, in liberating parts of their territory from ISIS. They now have custody of many foreign fighters, including British citizens who found themselves in those ISIS areas. What is our obligation to the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria?

Sajid Javid: We work closely with our allies in the coalition forces in northern Syria, and both through the Ministry of Defence and other means, wherever appropriate and sensible, we provide support. There is limited information exchange on detainees, but where we are supplied with information, we would of course look at that and try to use it to bring about justice and make sure justice is done. Our priority will always be to see whether justice can be done in the region.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Home Secretary for his strong stance and leadership. I have been contacted by a large volume of constituents on this matter—probably because I am a tender-hearted person, I believe. I usually believe that if people have made a mistake and are repentant, we should be forgiving. However, in this case there is no repentance and certainly no apology, and someone who is "unfazed" at decapitated heads in a bin shows no remorse whatever. This is not a mistake; it is a matter of national security. She married a Dutch national, and if we strip her of her citizenship, she will have weight for her and her child in that nation and will therefore not be left stateless. Will the Secretary of State outline his opinion on this case?

Sajid Javid: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I cannot speak about an individual case—it would not be appropriate for me to do so at the Dispatch Box—although I do understand the points that he has made. As I said earlier, many people, including of course the hon. Gentleman, will have heard the comments of Ms Shamima Begum and they will be drawing their own conclusions.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): On 1 September 2014, I raised the question of returning jihadists with the then Prime Minister—after the murder of Lee Rigby and before the murder of many other people in Manchester, Westminster and elsewhere. I did say that I thought this was not something that might happen, but would happen. I mentioned article 8(3) of the 1961 United Nations convention on statelessness, which does provide the tools to which my right hon. Friend has referred, if the Government are prepared to take them up. It says that a person may be rendered stateless if he has acted

"inconsistently with his duty of loyalty",

behaved in a way

"prejudicial to the vital interests of the State",

or declared

"allegiance to another State"

and shown evidence of repudiation of allegiance. Will my right hon. Friend be good enough to look at that again? I have raised it several times, including with the present Prime Minister when she was the Home Secretary. Will he take another look at this because I do think the situation is now becoming more than critical?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend, as we have heard, has long taken an interest in these issues and has contributed greatly in so many ways in trying to fight terrorism. He has raised another important point. In the past, our lawyers have looked at these issues, but he has asked me whether I would be willing to look again. I will certainly do that, and I will write to him.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): When will this Government stop maintaining that they cannot liaise with British citizens until they leave Syria? They know

[Anneliese Dodds]

that there are many British citizens, including one of my constituents, who cannot leave Syria because their jailers will not release them unless it is to the home country of that captive. Ultimately, these individuals should surely be taken back to the UK, where they can face justice in our courts, rather than our Government totally absolving themselves of any responsibility.

Sajid Javid: First, it is worth pointing out again that the Foreign Office's advice when it comes to Syria, for many years now, has been that it is very dangerous. No British citizen should be travelling to Syria. If a British citizen has ignored that advice, they will know that there is no consular support there and that we have no diplomatic relations with Syria. If the individual concerned is a foreign fighter who went to join a terrorist organisation to kill, rape and cause enormous damage, there is no way that this Government will risk the lives of British personnel—British soldiers, Foreign Office officials or others—to go and rescue such a person. No way.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): When we cannot prevent their return, what about internment until they have been sufficiently quarantined?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend might be reassured to know that when we cannot prevent someone's return, we will in all cases seek to question them, investigate them and, where appropriate, prosecute them. Even if they are mono-national, if they are British citizens, we can strip them of their passport, have temporary exclusion orders and manage their return.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Wonderful tributes have been paid to Paul Flynn, and few things demonstrated his place as a wonderful contrarian so well as the fact that he lent his support to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) in the 2015 leadership contest despite the fact that he seemed to disagree with all her major policy points. Amid those tributes, I am sure that the House will want to register its thanks to Sir Charles Farr, the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee, who passed away last week.

The Home Secretary talks about people facing consequences for supporting terror, but he knows that far too many of them do not face consequences. He talks about doing whatever it takes to bring people to justice, so why is he not making the very valuable designated area offence, for which many of us campaigned, retrospective? Does he really think that the law as it stands, under which people can go to Syria, make themselves jihadi brides and offer their support to foreign fighters yet not have their prosecution guaranteed, is strong enough? Surely it is not. What measures will he take?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to mention Charles Farr, who has sadly passed away, and to point out the huge contribution that Charles made to the security of this country, both at the Home Office and as the chairman of the JIC. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman mentioned that, and he was absolutely right to do so.

The hon. Gentleman talks about the laws that are available and the tools for prosecution, and particularly about the new powers in the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019. These are far-reaching powers, and we tried to prepare a Bill that had the support of the House while being well balanced and offering due process. As for the designated powers procedures, as I said earlier, we started work on that in anticipation of Royal Assent, which has now happened. We hope to bring an order to the House as soon as possible.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): In the European Court of Human Rights, the case of K2 *v.* the United Kingdom was about taking away nationality in the context of terrorism, and that was found to be manifestly ill founded. Why does that not apply here, since the defendant in that case had only one nationality at the time?

Sajid Javid: I am not familiar with the details of that case, and I do not have them to hand, but if my hon. Friend wants to send me more details I will give a more detailed response. As I said earlier, the tools available to us to remove someone's British nationality—to deprive them of it—can be used only when they have more than one nationality.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Thames Valley police has lost several hundred officers thanks to Government cuts. Will the Home Secretary tell the House how he thinks such cuts will affect the police's ability to monitor returnees from Syria?

Sajid Javid: On security, the hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of resources for our world-class police, including those in Thames Valley. That is why I am sure that he would welcome the record increase of up to £970 million in England and Wales for the police. It is a shame, given his concern, that he actually voted against that increase.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): With the collapse of ISIL we are going to see more cases like this. Could the Home Secretary remind us of how many fighters, whether male or female, have returned to this country already, and how many are being observed by our security services?

Sajid Javid: What my hon. Friend highlights is that this is not a new problem. We understand why it is so prominent right now in the press, but people have been going to join terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq for a number of years. He is right to point out that with the weakness of Daesh at the moment it is possible that more will seek to return. He asks me how many. We only have estimates. There is no accurate information, but as I mentioned earlier we think approximately 40% of the 900 who we estimate left the UK to join those groups have returned. In every case, we seek to manage that. He also asked me how many are under certain measures, such as TPIMs. That is not something that would be appropriate to discuss.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The case of Shamima Begum is of course highly emotive and any of us who have read the interview will find it difficult to be sympathetic. However, I have grave concerns that vulnerable young children or vulnerable young people who have been groomed by extremists could be left stateless. Can the Home Secretary assure us that

that will not happen? Will he also detail to the House the steps his Department is taking to tackle online grooming by extremists?

Sajid Javid: I can assure the hon. Lady that we would not knowingly make anyone stateless.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): The sight of decapitated heads lying in a rubbish bin did not faze Ms Begum. Should the British people be fazed if this individual is left to reap what she sows? No taxpayers' money should be used in any way to repatriate this individual.

Sajid Javid: Again, I hope my hon. Friend understands that it would not be appropriate for me to talk about an individual or an individual case, but he makes a very important and powerful point. In many cases, the people who left Britain knew exactly what they were doing. They were full of hate for our country and hate for our values. They went out there to murder, to rape, to support rape and to commit many violent and vile acts. We can absolutely imagine why hardly anyone among the British public would have any sympathy for them.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I speak from the Back Bench because of the inimitable Paul Flynn, who in his superb book "How to be an MP" advised that one's profile is best displayed from the Back Bench.

May I ask the Home Secretary how many returning combatants have been prosecuted and how many are subject to TPIMs?

Sajid Javid: A number of people have returned from the wars in Syria and Iraq. We have been able to gather evidence through questioning and other means, and they have been prosecuted for a number of offences. A number of TPIMs have been issued; I would not want to get into the exact numbers at this point. There are concerns about what might happen if we publish some of those numbers so readily, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that where we can, we do prosecute and will continue to prosecute individuals.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): How effective has the Prevent strategy been in dissuading British people, especially young people, from travelling overseas to join organisations such as ISIS in the first place?

Sajid Javid: The Prevent programme is working; it has been successful. Since 2015, some 780 vulnerable people have been successfully supported away from terrorism. It is worth pointing out that the programme is voluntary and confidential. Over 180 grassroots projects support the Prevent strategy. The Channel programme, which is part of the Prevent process, supports those projects. If it is helpful, I should say that in 2017-18 over 7,000 people were referred. Of those, just under 400 received support from the Channel programme. If I may, Mr Speaker, it is also worth pointing out that, in the last year for which we have full information, about a quarter of referrals were for far right extremism.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Like the Home Secretary, I have little sympathy for those who headed out to the middle east—to Syria and Iraq—to support a form of medieval barbarism that sought to enslave an entire people and that committed genocide while they were there as well. Does he agree that the important point now is to ensure that those who have survived this murderous campaign are brought to justice either here or in an international tribunal?

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. The overriding aim with all these individuals, whether they are from Britain or have left countries that are our allies, is to work together to make sure that justice is done in every case. As I said earlier, we will seek to work with our allies to make sure, first of all, that justice can be done in the region, but if that cannot be done, we will look to work with our allies on other means.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Is it the case that the lawyer of the individual concerned has described British law as akin to that of the Nazis? If that is how it was described, will my right hon. Friend condemn that because we are a proud country with our traditions of democracy and the rule of law, and particularly given that ISIS itself was a Nazi, medievalist death cult?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that point. There are reports today that one of the lawyers who is representing one of the foreign fighters described British law as akin to Nazism. If that is true, these are absolutely outrageous comments. They will be found to be deeply offensive, for example, by holocaust survivors and their families here in Britain and elsewhere, and if this lawyer has an ounce of dignity, they should consider apologising for these wholly insensitive remarks.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): We would not want to fall foul of the European Court of Human Rights, would we? However, as a member of the Council of Europe, I refer the Home Secretary to recent judgments of the Council and the Court that one cannot deprive somebody of citizenship in an arbitrary way. Without asking him to comment on any individual cases, surely as a matter of law, it would not be arbitrary to strip someone of a passport if they willingly go out to join the jurisdiction of a terrorist organisation that has beheaded people, and all the rest, so I urge the Home Secretary to be robust on this matter. He will have the support not only of the whole country, but even of human rights lawyers.

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend has raised an important issue, within which there are two separate issues. One is removing someone's British passport, which is not necessarily the same as removing their citizenship. It is possible—I have done this on a number of occasions, as have my predecessors—to remove someone's passport using the royal prerogative if that is deemed in the public interest. Separate to that but related, is, under some circumstances, depriving someone of their British citizenship—I mentioned this earlier at the Dispatch Box. In all cases, none of that can be done—of course it cannot—in an arbitrary way. There is a due process to be followed, but if either of those things are necessary to protect the public, that is exactly what I would do.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am sure that it is the view of most people—it is certainly the view of the majority of my constituents who have written to me—that when someone has made

[Tim Loughton]

their bed, they lie in it, but clearly the course of law must prevail here. My concern is with the children. Since 2013, more than 150 cases of children subject to threats of radicalisation have been heard in the family courts. That figure will rise and our courts are little provisioned to deal with them. What conversations is the Secretary of State having with the family courts and children's services to make sure that suitable and timely interventions are being, and can be, made with similar such children in future?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend rightly highlights the work we do with partners across Government and public agencies through the Prevent programme. That work is all about safeguarding—in many cases, young people and children of all ages—and working with authorities, including social services, local councils, schools and others, to safeguard those children. In terms of deradicalisation, it is one of the most important things we do, and we take it very seriously, which is why I welcome the commitment we made earlier this year to undertake an independent review of the programme to see how we can improve it even further.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those found guilty of the sort of sick atrocities he described will face a whole-life sentence?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend will know that when someone is charged, ultimately it is for the court and judge to decide any eventual punishment, but he can be assured that we want to ensure that justice is done in every single case, either in the region, by helping our allies or in some other way. Justice will be key in every case.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Will the Home Secretary confirm that the safety of no British officials, civilians or military, will be put at risk in an attempt to extract those suspected of supporting terrorism in countries across the middle east?

Sajid Javid: I am very happy to confirm that to my hon. Friend. As I mentioned earlier, anyone who has gone to Syria in recent years will have known the huge risk they were taking, and we certainly will not risk the lives of any British officials or soldiers, or anyone else, to help or rescue those who went to support terrorism.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What powers and resources does my right hon. Friend have to ensure that any British citizen returning from the so-called caliphate in whose case the burden of proof does not permit a criminal prosecution will face mandatory and robust deradicalisation programmes?

Sajid Javid: As I have mentioned, this is not a new challenge—we estimate that one way or another more than 300 people have returned in the last few years. When someone manages to return, we first make sure, in the interest of justice, that they are questioned, investigated and, where appropriate, properly prosecuted. Where youngsters, in particular, are involved, however, we also make sure they get deradicalisation help through specific programmes; in some cases, through mental health support; and through support in other ways too. In each case, we will work with partners to create a bespoke programme for that individual and do all we can.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Hon. Friends have mentioned the possibility of withdrawing passports. If a minor has been counselled by Prevent or any other authority in this country and is still intent on going to ISIS or some similar organisation, is there not a strong case for withdrawing their passport for their own safety?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Generally in the circumstances he describes, if further action is needed, such as the withdrawal of the passport—other measures are available—we would not hesitate to take it.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Nine hundred British nationals have gone to support Daesh in Syria and Iraq; just 40 have been prosecuted. This simply is not good enough. Daesh may have been defeated in theatre, but Daesh and its sympathisers are in effect tying us up in knots in our own courts, and these people are getting away with it. The Home Secretary has admitted that 360 of these individuals are still at large and likely to return to this country. My constituents do not feel safe with the Government's response to this threat. I urge him urgently to revisit the legal advice he has been given in several areas, because we need to do better, don't we?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right. We do need to do more to ensure that we have more tools to prosecute people who have helped or supported terrorist organisations, whether they have actually gone to Syria—some examples have been mentioned today—or whether they are in our own country, helping those organisations in other ways. Since I became Home Secretary, I have been determined to provide more of those tools. I was pleased that my hon. Friend, and indeed the whole House, supported the Bill that became the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, which will give us far more tools that can be used for law enforcement. We have increased sentences in many instances. The Act will also enable us to step up the work that we have been doing with our allies across the world to gather more battlefield evidence, because evidence is also crucial, especially if we are seeking higher sentences.

My hon. Friend is right to issue that challenge and to say we need to do more, and I agree with him.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I, and the constituents who have contacted me, find it hard to understand how someone who has joined an organisation whose aims are to destroy the values that we hold dear can then cite those same values in an attempt to justify being repatriated to the United Kingdom. May I therefore urge the Home Secretary to stand firm and use all possible legal means to keep these people out of our country?

Sajid Javid: I will not talk about a particular case, but I absolutely understand the sentiments that my hon. Friend has expressed, and I think that they are the sentiments of the vast majority of the constituents

whom we are all here to represent. We must indeed use all the legal means that we have to ensure that those who have supported terror groups, either at home or abroad, are always punished for that, and are brought to justice.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): May I pursue the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), and mention another—I would argue—ill-judged comment? In an attempt to build sympathy, the lawyer representing Miss Begum has also compared her to a first world war veteran suffering from shell-shock. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is deeply insulting to many thousands of former servicemen and their families? Those servicemen suffered deep trauma fighting for this country and defending democracy, rather than joining a terrorist group that was out to destroy it

Sajid Javid: That is another of the points that Members have made today about a particular case. Again, the solicitor should be very careful about the remarks that are made, and reflect very deeply on them. My hon. Friend has raised a good example of why that is so important.

Flybmi

4.32 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)*(Urgent Question)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on airline Flybmi going into administration.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): On 16 February British Midland Regional Limited, the east midlands-based airline which operates as Flybmi, announced that it had ceased operations from that date and filed for administration. The group has surrendered its licence to operate in the United Kingdom, which means that it is no longer able to operate flights.

There has already been significant speculation about the reasons behind Flybmi's failure. Ultimately, this was a commercial matter for the airline. Flybmi operated in a very competitive industry and was exposed to wider pressures faced by the global aviation industry, such as increasing fuel prices. It is very disappointing that it has gone into administration, and we know that this will be a very difficult time for those who have lost their jobs as a result. Many of those affected are highly skilled. We are confident that they will find suitable employment opportunities, and we welcome the moves by the sector to offer such opportunities.

The Insolvency Service's redundancy payments service is working with the administrators of Flybmi to ensure that former employees' claims from the national insurance fund, which may include redundancy pay, holiday pay, arrears of pay and compensatory notice pay, are assessed as quickly as possible. However, given that the sector is ready to recruit, I hope that new jobs will be found soon.

I also recognise that this is a disruptive and distressing time for passengers, and the Government's immediate priority is fully focused on supporting those affected. We are in active contact with airports, airlines and other transport providers to ensure that everything possible is being done to help them. We and the Civil Aviation Authority are working closely with the travel industry to ensure that the situation is managed with minimal impact to passengers.

There are enough spaces on other flights for passengers to return home on other airlines, and we welcome the sector's move to offer rescue fares for affected passengers. For example, Flybmi has codeshares across the Lufthansa group and passengers on these flights will be subject to the EU passenger protection rules. They will be provided with assistance and rerouted to their final destination. Travel insurance and credit card bookings are worth noting here, and most passengers were business travellers so will be covered through their work. In addition, the Civil Aviation Authority is providing detailed information for affected passengers on its website, including how people can claim back money they have spent on tickets.

The Government recognise the importance of maintaining regional connectivity, which is why we fund a public service obligation route from Derry/Londonderry to London, which was recently extended from 1 April 2019 for a further two years, the norm for PSOs. The chief executive of Derry council has the power to transfer the PSO contract to another airline for up to seven months to allow for a new procurement process to be conducted. Subject to due diligence we expect the council to sign contracts and appoint an

[Ms Nusrat Ghani]

airline later this week, and we expect services to resume swiftly. Derry City and Strabane Council takes forward that part; it is its responsibility.

All affected regional airports have been contacted, and while they are disappointed, we are confident that this will not cause them significant issues. A number of airlines have already indicated that they will step in to replace routes previously served by Flybmi. For example, Loganair has publicly announced that it will cover routes from Aberdeen, Bristol and Newcastle. Our priority is to protect employees, passengers and local economies. We are fully focused on supporting those affected and remain in close contact with the industry and the CAA to ensure that everything possible is done to assist.

Andy McDonald: It will not have escaped anybody's attention that the Transport Secretary is sitting on the Treasury Bench yet has not come to this House to make a statement. He seeks to hide behind his Minister; she has been dropped in it. Perhaps he has been dealing with the bombshell dropped by Honda this morning.

Eighteen months ago Monarch Airlines left taxpayers with a bill for more than £60 million. Clearly the Government have failed to learn the lessons from that disaster. In fact, the Transport Secretary has dithered and delayed for nearly a year, allowing Loganair to cherry-pick the profitable parts of Flybmi before putting it into administration. The Government have clearly done nothing to stop a repeat of Greybull's asset-stripping of Monarch.

Flybmi has been in difficulty for some time, so what plans did the Department for Transport have for an airline's collapse? Have not the Government left both Flybmi's passengers and staff high and dry? Why was the airline allowed to sell tickets only hours before administration? Why are the Government not helping people get home this time?

On Thursday last week, the Government agreed to extend the subsidy for Flybmi's London to Derry route. Was the DfT aware that the airline was about to collapse when it agreed this commitment of public money? What checks did Ministers do on the airline prior to agreeing this? The Government's aviation Green Paper boasts of growth and connectivity; in reality, Flybmi is the second UK airline to fail within months, while the UK's direct connectivity has declined.

The Government's complacency is staggering. Flybmi has said that

"the challenges, particularly those created by Brexit, have proven to be insurmountable",

and:

"Current trading and future prospects have also been seriously affected by the uncertainty created by the Brexit process, which has led to our inability to secure valuable flying contracts in Europe and lack of confidence around Flybmi's ability to continue flying between destinations in Europe."

So when will this Government wake up to the undeniable truth that their shambolic handling of Brexit is leading our country into an economic disaster?

Ms Ghani: I have never been a woman who has been "dropped in it"; it is my job and I am disappointed that the shadow Transport Secretary wanted to see a he and not a she at the Dispatch Box, but hopefully I can respond to his questions in the best way I can. I am also a little disappointed that the shadow Front-Bench team are all in their seats today considering the bold decisions their colleagues have taken to leave the Labour party because of a number of issues, including leadership and institutionalised antisemitism. We are talking about disappointment, but we should focus on the passengers.

We were made aware of Flybmi going into administration at the weekend. A number of conversations have been taking place. The Aviation Minister has spoken to the Cabinet Secretary responsible for transport in Scotland.

The Secretary of State has spoken to the Northern Ireland Secretary and to the local MP, the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell). Information is being made available on the Civil Aviation Authority website to alert passengers about how they can get home. We must focus on the passengers who may be struggling to get home, but there are lots of alternative flights and that information is being made available. More than 300 staff have been impacted, but it is interesting to note that Loganair and Ryanair are making jobs available and recruiting heavily. The British Airline Pilots Association is also exploring options for pilots with partner airlines.

The hon. Gentleman noted the business case for Flybmi. It was possible to recognise, looking at its accounts, that it had been struggling for a while, including before Brexit and before the referendum. It is not an easy market for airlines to be in, especially regional and local airlines. He mentioned Brexit as a reason for Flybmi going into administration, but it is important to note that several other smaller airlines in Europe have also gone into administration, including Germania, VLM, Cobalt and Primera, and there are lots of different reasons why this takes place. We cannot always blame Brexit when we do not understand the business case.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the public service obligation and wanted to put the blame at the door of the Department for Transport. In case I did not make myself clear in my opening statement, Derry and Strabane Council is responsible for maintaining and managing the contract. We of course support the route via the public service obligation because it is a lifeline route. I know that that reply must come as a disappointment to him, but that is where the responsibility lies. Derry and Strabane Council has made it clear to the press and to us that it is very positive that an alternative airline will be in place soon enough. It is important to note that the aviation sector in the UK is thriving and that passenger numbers have gone up by almost 60% compared with the numbers in 2000, but it is a very tricky sector to be in, especially for the small regional players in this very large market. I hope that those responses will not be too disappointing for the hon. Gentleman.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is there any known interest from other aviation companies or entrepreneurs in buying assets and taking over the staff in greater numbers, rather than in just cherry-picking the routes?

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. The staff are all highly skilled and very professional, and it is important to note that Loganair has already made it clear that it is keen to recruit. I also believe that Ryanair has set up a stall in some of the regional airports to try to bring some of those professional staff on board. We are very positive that they will be able to secure jobs, although this must be a very distressing

time for them, as it must be for the passengers. A number of airlines are showing interest in the routes, and Derry Council has made it clear to us that it has some interested parties lined up to take on the route from Derry airport. It will make that information public as soon as it can.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Our thoughts at this time are with the staff, whose future is uncertain, and with those who have had their travel plans thrown into disarray, who are out of pocket or who are stranded as a result of the collapse of Flybmi. I am pleased that Loganair has announced that it is stepping in to cover the routes from Aberdeen to Bristol, Oslo and Esbjerg from 4 March. At a time when Aberdeen is feeling the impact of the loss of easyJet flights, the news of Flybmi going into administration is deeply worrying, particularly because it explicitly mentioned Brexit uncertainty as one of the reasons for this happening. Recent studies have shown that Aberdeen is set to be the UK city that will be the hardest hit by Brexit. It would be helpful if the Minister told us what the Government are doing to protect slots at Aberdeen and other regional airports after Brexit and what they are doing to ensure that airlines are encouraged to use those slots and that our regional airports have access not only to hub airports but to destinations.

Ms Ghani: The hon. Lady makes some important points, focusing on passengers and ensuring that they can continue their journeys and on the staff involved. One of Flybmi's issues was that its flights were not always full, but the number of people who could have been impacted has been reduced as result. However, everyone whose journey home or to work has become difficult must be taken care of, and I ask them to pay attention to the CAA website for further information. Flybmi's business model was just no longer working in a competitive market. Its public accounts show that it was in trouble before the referendum, so putting the blame on Brexit really does not wash. The hon. Lady makes a powerful point about Aberdeen, and we will do what we can to ensure that we support all our regional airports.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): While the failure of Flybmi's business model and the loss of 100 jobs in my constituency is a setback causing obvious distress for employees and disruption for passengers, it comes at a time of considerable growth and development in and around East Midlands airport, with over 7,000 new jobs being created over the next two years. Will the Government do all they can to ensure that Flybmi's highly skilled employees are returned to employment as soon as possible, just as they did in 2012 when Flybmi's parent company, British Midland, ceased trading with the loss of 1,100 jobs in my constituency?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate for his constituency and makes some valid points, particularly about the loss of skilled jobs. We were only made aware that Flybmi was going into administration over the weekend, and it is interesting to note the number of other airlines that have nipped in to see who they can recruit. I am confident that jobs will be found. My hon. Friend refers to passengers. The UK has a healthy aviation sector, and we must not dwell on undermining it. We had 284 million terminal passengers in 2017—an increase of 6% on 2016—so the market is healthy.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Government have been consulting on arrangements for airline insolvencies for almost a year, so will the Minister explain how yet another UK airline can fail without the Government taking any action? Can I press the Minister to explain why the airline continued to sell tickets just hours before going into administration?

Ms Ghani: An independent review of airline insolvency by Peter Bucks is due to report, and it will make clear what happens to airlines when difficult decisions are made. There is an interesting point to note about how airlines can continue to sell tickets when they are struggling, which is one of the peculiar things that happens in the sector. If an airline were to stop selling tickets, that would make it clear that it was about to go into administration, so airlines do keep selling tickets quite close to the point at which they are about to go into administration. The Peter Bucks review will no doubt examine that point.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I welcome the Minister's restated commitment to the PSO in relation to Derry and Stansted. Given this latest news, what further assessment is necessary of the long-term viability of Derry airport and of the welcome improvements to the A6 between Londonderry and Dungiven, which will increase connectivity to Belfast International airport? What further support does the Minister anticipate in the light of the Derry City and Strabane regional city deal?

Ms Ghani: It is good that my hon. Friend notes the importance of Derry City and Strabane District Council's role in procuring and maintaining the contract, and it is interesting to note the council's positivity about other airlines taking on the route. I noted over the weekend that Ryanair was offering flights for less than £10 for those who wished to travel from Belfast, although that means making another journey. We are obviously committed to supporting our regional airports, to holding the CAA to account so that it monitors what airlines are doing when they are struggling and to examining what we can do to help passengers to continue their journeys across the UK.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): It is quite frankly astonishing that the Minister did not mention Brexit in her initial comments, because the company certainly did. Flybmi said that uncertainty around Brexit and the possible costs of needing both UK and EU licences in the event of a no-deal Brexit were factors in its decision to go out of business. Will the Minister now make it clear whether all airlines should be planning for a no-deal scenario and looking at how to get dual licences?

Ms Ghani: The EU has been very clear that the UK aviation industry can continue as it is. We have been having good conversations with the EU on this, and we have tabled a number of statutory instruments and regulations to make sure we can continue flying. I just do not buy the argument that planes will not fly.

Mr Betts: These won't fly anymore.

Ms Ghani: No, but Flybmi's accounts show that, as far back as 2014, it was not as healthy as it could have been. If a company undertakes flights that are barely at 50% capacity, it is making a loss. To make an assumption that it is all down to Brexit just does not wash.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): As the Minister mentioned, Loganair has picked up many of the routes from Aberdeen International and is owned by the same holding company as Flybmi, Airline Investments. Will she join me in encouraging Airline Investments to give regional flights priority at this time? Will she reaffirm her commitment to regional airports? And will she make sure the slots are not reassigned to other routes, so keeping these vital regional routes open?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend makes three powerful arguments, and I agree with him. The Department, under my noble Friend the Aviation Minister, is undertaking the "Aviation 2050" consultation, which will no doubt reconfirm our commitment to regional airports.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): This is clearly very bad news for staff and passengers. I know the Minister does not like mentioning the B-word—Brexit—but the fact is that Flybmi has said that Brexit uncertainty was a factor. Not the total reason but a factor, as it was for Jaguar Land Rover, Ford and, as we will no doubt find out shortly, Honda. Is it not time for the Prime Minister to do two things: one, rule out no deal; and, two, establish a Brexit redundancy fund to support businesses that have been put out of business as a result of Brexit?

Ms Ghani: If the right hon. Gentleman wants to rule out no deal, he should vote for the Prime Minister's deal.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): It is welcome news that Loganair is taking on some of Flybmi's routes, but my constituents want assurances on their new nearest airport in Dundee. We do not want to see the airport taking on other routes and losing the vital routes from Dundee down to London.

Ms Ghani: It is a very competitive market, and no doubt my hon. Friend's constituents will be well represented here today. If she would like to meet the Aviation Minister, I will ensure that a meeting takes place. We are committed to all our regional airports.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Aerospace is one of the most important and successful of our sectors. Although the Minister may be having lots of good conversations with our friends in the European Union, there is no regulatory certainty. Does she think that is a good thing or a bad thing for our aerospace industry?

Ms Ghani: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to have 100% certainty, he needs to vote for the Prime Minister's deal. *[Interruption.]* We have had assurances from the EU that the airline sector can continue to operate in the way it is currently operating. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister is answering the question and there is quite a lot of sedentary chuntering on both sides, and no shortage of gesticulation, either. I am sure that Mr Knight will now behave with his usual statesmanlike reserve.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Minister is clearly deeply concerned about this collapse and the wider issues affecting aviation across Europe. Will she assure the House that she will do everything she can to support our regional airports—Birmingham airport, despite its successes, is running at 35% capacity—because they are so important to our country and our regional economic diversity?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend has my assurance, and I would be at fault if I did not mention Birmingham airport, which I grew up very close to and to which we are obviously committed, as he can no doubt tell by our commitment to High Speed 2 stopping at the airport. We are committed to all our regional airports, which is why we have the "Aviation 2050" consultation under way to make sure we do all we can to ensure the sector continues to remain healthy.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): In the event of a no-deal Brexit, there could be no expansion of airline routes from the UK to the EU. That is what is causing the huge uncertainty for operators in the UK. After two and a half years of negotiation, can the Minister not see the damage being done to the sector?

Ms Ghani: I believe the hon. Gentleman is mistaken, as we are working with the EU to deal with deal and no-deal scenarios: we have published no-deal technical notices; we have tabled a number of statutory instruments, which are progressing well; and the EU has confirmed that it will maintain the connection between the EU and the UK to allow flying to continue. But if he is concerned about a no-deal scenario, he should vote for the Prime Minister's deal.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The collapse of Flybmi is to be very much regretted, but does the Minister accept that connectivity is about more than one airline and that she should continue to establish growth in airlines across the country?

Ms Ghani: Absolutely. Even though the airline sector is a tricky market to be in and it obviously favours larger airlines—for example, it is a little easier for them to buy fuel than it is for smaller airlines—my hon. Friend is right to say that competition is good and we should do what we can to support not only our airports, but our regional airlines.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): My hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) was in touch with the Minister to seek reassurances about this. Flybmi has said that its decision is predominantly an economic one; it was averaging only 19 people per flight, which is not sustainable for any company or business. The public service obligation air route, the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, has been in place since 2017, and the Minister has referred to it. I am thankful for the assurance that the Government will continue to subsidise the route until 2021. Will she please outline whether provision will be made to expand that commitment for a further two years beyond that to encourage other airlines to take on the contract and the route?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the PSO, but it does run for this specific period, up to 2021. He noted that the Secretary of State has spoken to the local MP, the hon. Member for East Londonderry, and made a valuable point about the number of passengers per flight, which would have had an impact on the airline's business model.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Of course Brexit has been blamed for other ills. Will my hon. Friend confirm that in the three years leading up to the Brexit referendum in 2016, Flybmi was losing more than £25 million and that its failure has more to do with fuel costs, European regulation and market forces?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. If we look at Flybmi's accounts, we see that they were not healthy for many years, even before the referendum. Smaller airlines across Europe are also struggling, and I mentioned some earlier: VLM in Belgium, Germania, Cobalt and Primera. So this is not a UK thing; it is tricky for small airlines to operate, especially if they are regional, in a global sector.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): If I was the chief executive of a recently failed business, I would probably blame Brexit, too, but the reality is that Ryanair warned only last month of significant overcapacity in the budget airlines sector. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is far more about competitive markets than it is about Brexit?

Ms Ghani: Absolutely. The reason for Flybmi going into administration is that the business has just reached the end of its road. We have an overcapacity here and the power is with the passengers in the choices they make. Those passengers who are now struggling to get home and in distress must be recognised as well, but that is the market we are in.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the Minister for her statement and the reassurances she has given those who are directly impacted. Does she agree that the UK aviation industry is actually a success story? We have the third largest aviation sector in the world and we would like that to continue to be the case. Will she therefore assure me that she and her Department are working with the industry to make sure that it is planning effectively for all Brexit scenarios? Perhaps the Opposition would like to help out on this by reducing uncertainty by voting for the deal.

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. People who are nervous about uncertainty need to vote for certainty, which would be the Prime Minister's deal. We should not undermine the UK aviation sector. It is incredibly healthy, even though there are a number of challenges, especially in respect of how passenger numbers are going up. Interestingly, there is far more capacity than there are passengers, so shopping around for a good deal is important. What has come out of Flybmi going into administration over the weekend is that we should remember to make sure we are securing our tickets in a way that means they are insured, so that we can get compensation or refunds.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Flybmi's 50-seater planes carried, on average, only 18 passengers per flight. No airline could carry on on that basis. Although Flybmi's demise is regrettable and very sad, does the Minister agree that it is important to get it into context? East Midlands airport is a huge success story. It has an expansion programme, and passenger and cargo growth is 8% a year. The airport is located in north-west Leicestershire, which has the fastest economic growth of anywhere outside London and the south-east.

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about his part of the world. He is absolutely right; East Midlands airport is thriving, competitive and nimble when it comes to the changes that passengers require and the kinds of services that they want. Even though it is regrettable that Flybmi went into administration over the weekend, it is important to note that the UK has a very healthy aviation sector.

Points of Order

5 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Following on from your very warm tribute earlier, which I know has been much appreciated, I wonder whether I might be permitted, as a constituency neighbour, to put on record condolences to Paul Flynn's wife Sam and family following the very sad news of his death yesterday.

Paul was certainly one of a kind, and it is hard to know how to even begin to describe his contribution in this place and in his beloved city of Newport. His representation of Newport West spanned 31 years of unbroken service. He was a ferocious campaigner for many causes, in many of which he was far ahead of his time, and he was a tireless advocate for his constituents. He did so with a wit and a humour that cut through any tendency to pomposity in this place, although it is fair to say that he was not the easiest to whip; I say that having been his Whip.

Paul had a few stints on the Opposition Front Bench, most recently taking through the Wales Bill as the shadow Secretary of State for Wales—a role that delighted him not least because, as he said, octogenarians were under-represented on the Front Bench. His grasp of social media put most of us to shame, particularly his incisive tweets and blogging. However, as you said earlier, Mr Speaker, it was the role of Back Bencher that he loved most.

Above all, Paul was an absolutely passionate Newportonian who took every opportunity to champion our city. I know that this weekend he would have been especially proud of Newport County. Their manager is also a Flynn, which led Paul to declare that Flynns "always deliver for Newport".

On a personal note, Paul was the most generous of constituency neighbours. He was genuinely the most wonderful company, and he was a huge support to me and others in Newport West, including Welsh Assembly Member Jayne Bryant. I know we will all miss him in this place—in the top corner of the Chamber, looking to catch your eye, Mr Speaker—but I know his legacy will live on through his campaigns, through those he inspired and through his books. We send our love to Sam and family and friends.

Mr Speaker: I must say to the hon. Lady that that was the most gracious and beautifully crafted and delivered tribute to Paul Flynn. I know that it will be warmly appreciated by Sam, by the family, by all his constituents, by people across Wales and by his many admirers in this House and indeed, for that matter, in Parliaments across Europe and around the world, where he was very well known. I cannot help but feel that after he left the Front Bench, he felt deep down that he had been promoted to the Back Bench.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I would be most grateful if you permitted me to add my own words about Paul Flynn. As Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, I inherited him as a long-standing artefact of the Committee who had contributed to and had a huge knowledge of the Committee's work over a great many Parliaments. I have to say that he and I contributed to some creative and very productive friction on the Committee. Nevertheless, every member of the Committee had a very high regard for his extraordinary commitment and his sense of principle—the fact that at times he was the conscience of the Committee, on issues such as conflict of interest—and we will greatly miss him from our work. I send my best wishes to his family.

Mr Speaker: That was a parliamentarian's tribute; I do not think I can speak more highly of what the hon. Gentleman has said than to make that observation. I thank both colleagues.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I knew Paul long before he was a Member of Parliament, when he was a county councillor in Gwent in the 1980s. I would just like to add to the wonderful tribute from my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) by saying that all of us fall into different categories as politicians: some are factory farmed, and some are free range, but Paul was the most free range, organic of politicians, and we should all aspire to follow his example.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I just wanted to mention that I served on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe with Paul Flynn, and he was highly respected in that body by people from all the countries represented in it—he was a very active member of it. He also teased me in his book, and we used to laugh about that quite a bit. He was a very nice man and a very effective parliamentarian, and I just wanted to put that on the record. Obviously, our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I would also like to add to the very warm-hearted comments from the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). I first got to know the hon. Member for Newport West when I came to this House in 2010. We had many issues we agreed on. There were also many things we probably did not agree on, but we agreed on one thing, and that was human rights. Whenever there was a debate in Westminster Hall, or a debate or a question on that in this Chamber, he would be there putting forward his viewpoints in support of human rights. I was always very pleased to be alongside him, taking the same stance on those things, which we agreed on. In later years, I wondered about his incapacity, and I said to one of my colleagues in the Chamber one day, "If that man was not in that chair, he would move this House by himself, such is his energy and his strength."

The hon. Lady referred—you will know what is coming, Mr Speaker—to the Flynn of Newport County beating my team, Leicester City. They won against us at football, and I am sure Paul Flynn enjoyed every bit of that—I am afraid I did not, but that is by the way.

I just wanted to add to all the comments that have been made. I found Paul Flynn interesting and funny and a joy to be beside. I know we did not agree on things sometimes, but I was very pleased and honoured to have him as a friend in this House.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said. I spoke to Paul's widow, Sam, on the telephone this morning. It is perfectly possible that she has listened live to these tributes to Paul. However, in any event, I hope the House will be reassured to know that I shall certainly be sending her a copy of the *Official Report* with a covering letter. In these very difficult and harrowing times, I hope she will derive some succour from knowledge of the affection and esteem in which Paul was held across the House of Commons.

Defence

5.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I beg to move,

That the draft Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 24 January, be approved.

It is a pleasure to seek the support of this House for the order. In doing so, may I immediately begin by paying tribute to those who have worn the uniform and who wear the uniform, both as reservists and as regulars? I also pay tribute to those who support those in uniform; it is those in the armed forces community that we must also pay respect to, and we should be thankful for the sacrifices they make in supporting those who serve in the Army, the Air Force and the Royal Navy.

In Defence questions, we spoke about the duty of care—something that is critical to making sure we continue living up to the standards we have shown over the years. We have an enormous standard of professionalism in our armed forces, as a deterrent. Our allies revere us and want to work with us, and our foes fear us because of who we are.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I entirely support what the Minister says about our recognition of those who support members of our armed forces; the armed forces community is very important. I know the Minister has that community very much in his heart and has their best interests in his mind, and he will be as concerned as I am that satisfaction with pay and pension benefits is the lowest ever recorded. What is being done in armed forces legislation and in the policies of the Government to try to increase morale and satisfaction among the people the Minister paid such warm tribute to?

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for highlighting that important point. I will be honest with the House and say that pay is becoming an issue. It was not before—people signed up because of what lay ahead of them, not because of the money. Today, however, the competition that we have in civilian life is such that when people make the judgment as to whether to step forward or not, pay is becoming an issue. We do not want it to be a deterrent to people joining the armed forces.

We are going through the armed forces pay review process, as we do every year, and I will do my utmost to make sure that we are able to pay our service personnel what they deserve, so that it does not become a reason for people not to step forward. I can say the same about accommodation. The reason I articulate these points is that we are shortly to have the spending review. When we talk about the spending review and the armed forces, the immediate assumption is that we are talking about equipment, training and operations. I do not take away from the fact that they must be invested in, but for my part of the portfolio it is critical that we look after the people, and pay is one aspect of that; accommodation is another. I am not able to build accommodation fast enough because of limits in funding.

As we make the case to the Treasury for further defence spending, I simply say that welfare issues must be considered in addition to the other big-ticket items that are normally discussed. Is the hon. Gentleman content with that answer?

Toby Perkins: It is the first time I have ever been positively encouraged to intervene—it could catch on.

I share the Minister's views about the wider issues alongside pay. One of the other issues raised with me by members of the armed forces community is the sense of strategic vision on what the Army is for now. I challenged the Minister on this in Defence questions an hour or two ago and he said that there was a strong strategic vision for the Army in 2019. Can he tell us a bit more about what that is, because it is not entirely understood by some people who serve?

Mr Ellwood: I apologise for intervening on the hon. Gentleman while he was in a sedentary position.

I will come to defence posture shortly, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear with me.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Before my right hon. Friend gets on to defence posture, can he tell us whether he has taken note of the Army Families Federation's recent report, which suggests that the future accommodation model is a major cause of concern among Army families, and a disincentive to remain in the armed forces?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's service and the work that he has done in this area. I would not go so far as to say that the new FAM is causing the problems that he suggests. It needs to be rolled out faster. Those who are serving want to be able to get on the housing ladder, for example, and perhaps invest in a property outside the wire. We want to give individuals three options—to stay inside the garrison, which they might want to do when they sign up; to rent a property outside the wire; or to invest in a property, perhaps using the Help to Buy scheme, for example. My hon. Friend is right that it has taken longer than we wanted to roll out the pilot schemes to test the model, and I hope that will happen in the near future.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right to talk about improving pay, conditions and accommodation. In addition, it is important that we collectively continue to say thank you and appreciate the work that our armed forces do. Will he join me in thanking the Royal Anglian Regiment, which happens to have the freedom of the town of Basildon, and all my constituents who serve in the regiment and across our armed services more widely?

Mr Ellwood: I am more than happy to pay tribute to the Royal Anglian Regiment. I served in the Royal Green Jackets, which was another infantry regiment—it is now the Rifles, I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), who served in the Scots Guards. The Anglians show the benefit of having a local relationship and recruiting from the community. That is how the Army has developed in strength, with reservist communities and so forth. I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to that regiment.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Society of Conservative Lawyers recently published a pamphlet on the decision to go into a conflict situation. In its foreword, General Lord Houghton makes the point that it is very important for Army morale that a decision made by the Government can be implemented immediately, that the element of surprise over an enemy can be garnered in that way, and that therefore it should not always be necessary to have a parliamentary vote before committing armed forces. What does my right hon. Friend think?

Mr Ellwood: I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. I am probably going to get into trouble by saying that—thankfully the Whips are not listening at the moment, so I can get away with much. I absolutely agree. The main example in my lifetime is August 2013, when we invited Parliament to make a judgment on whether to send in troops. One MP—I will not say who it was—did not feel qualified to decide and so invited members of the public to inform them of which way to vote. We should be able to make such a judgment—an Executive judgment—ourselves. Sometimes the delay in making a judgment on whether to step forward allows the adversary to regroup, hide or move on.

Sir Oliver Heald: Does my right hon. Friend also agree that we might want to commit forces for something like a hostage rescue, in which case it would be ridiculous to have to telegraph our plans in advance through Parliament?

Mr Ellwood: I say this out of interest, rather than because it is where I want to go, but the United States has the War Powers Act, which obliges the President to go to Congress to seek to continue any campaign that he or she might implement. I think it is absolutely imperative that we get back to that point. It is almost a matter of opinion; I appreciate that. However, if we are to become less risk-averse, we often need to move very quickly. As I will say shortly, there are ever fewer nations that are ready to stand up and protect our values in a fast-changing world. We are one of them, and we should not be held back by having to go through a parliamentary process.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): I would just like to dispel some of the gloom that has been spread by the Opposition in relation to the morale of our armed forces. I frequently meet members of the armed forces in my constituency of Aldershot, which is the home of the British Army. I meet fine young men and women from 1st Battalion the Scots Guards, 1st Battalion the Grenadier Guards, 4 Rifles and the Queen's Gurkha Engineers, and their morale is extremely high because they are involved in an array of operational engagements overseas, and soldiers like to be busy. Young people watching this debate should be reassured that there is no better time to join the British Army, because they will be operationally deployed and morale is extremely high.

Mr Ellwood: I am pleased to hear that, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he does in his constituency—I have joined him there and am aware of those important contributions. I also speak to the families federations, who ensure that my feet are kept on the ground and that I understand the reality of the challenges. Youngsters joining today expect different standards from those that he and I experienced when we joined—they want single-living accommodation and wireless internet access, for example. They want a different set of standards from those that we appreciated in our time. My hon. Friend makes a very valuable point.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for what he has said. We are fortunate to have a Minister who has a heart for his job, understands the job and responds to the issues that Members across the House bring to his attention; he does that extremely well. He mentioned accommodation. I gently remind him of the issue of recruitment and the fact that Northern Ireland was able to recruit a greater percentage than the rest of the United Kingdom, which may be an opportunity. Some of the soldiers joining up tell me that they would like the opportunity to train overseas. I want to ensure that that opportunity will be in the strategy, as well as help for the families.

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to those who serve and step forward in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman knows that I have visited his neck of the woods a number of times, and I am very grateful for what they offer. He touches on our important commitment to improve accommodation. We have a £4 billion process of upgrade. That requires tough decisions to relinquish some of the armed forces' assets that we have accumulated over the last couple of hundred years, but it also means that we can regroup and consolidate into super-garrisons, which are fit for purpose and, I hope, will attract the next generation to serve their country.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Stephen Metcalfe *rose—*

Mr Ellwood: I am pleased that we are holding this debate in the Chamber, because I have never had such interest when we discuss these annual updates of support for the armed forces up in Committee Room 14.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Minister for giving way, and it is welcome that we are talking about the armed forces on the Floor of the House. We have heard in some remarks a focus on how we can encourage people to sign up, but does he agree that it is more about how we retain people, particularly when they get to the stage in their career when they have a family and perhaps need property beyond the barracks accommodation that they were happy with when they signed up?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The chances are that when someone joins the armed forces, they are single and have little responsibility. As they move ahead in life, they are likely to develop a family and so forth, and therefore their accommodation requirements will change. The armed forces must accept and be ready for that. That is the single issue that the families federations state as the reason for people choosing to leave, and it needs addressing; there is no doubt about it.

Stephen Metcalfe: Seeing as we are discussing this important issue on the Floor of the House, it might be worth speaking to a wider audience and reminding people that when they join the armed forces as a young person, the training they receive is often through the formal provision of an apprenticeship. Our military services are one of the biggest providers of apprenticeships in the country, and people leave the services with full and proper qualifications.

Mr Ellwood: I am looking around the Chamber, and I see that there is life after the armed forces, with so many characters who have served and ended up here. That is fantastic. On a more serious note, the skillset that people develop in the armed forces arguably is second to none, compared with other areas of life. Grit, tenacity, determination, leadership skills, commitment and team-working are all transferrable skills, and it is so important to recognise that. If we have a challenge, it is the fact that the cohort of people who are familiar with what the armed forces have to offer is getting smaller, because the armed forces do not have the same direct exposure. Our challenge is to ensure that every HR director, personnel officer and person charged with recruitment in a business is aware of what our brilliant armed forces can offer.

It is worth spelling out the wider aspects of what our armed forces do, because we are here to give consent to their continued existence.

Sir Oliver Heald: My right hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way. Does he agree that the real significance of the order is that it continues the system of command and of justice that applies through command in the armed forces? It is therefore crucial that we renew for another year, so that the system of command and discipline can continue.

Mr Ellwood: I do agree, and that goes to the heart of what we are debating. It is important that the disciplinary aspects of the armed forces continue; because they change, we are obliged to come back to the House and re-confirm them.

It is important to recognise that our armed forces do much more than what we see day to day in the newspapers. As Operation Telic and Operation Herrick are removed from the frontlines, and we see less about this on the front pages and hear less and less about these issues, we should recognise what amazing work our armed forces do in keeping UK citizens safe in this country and, indeed, abroad. We play a leading role in NATO, providing collective assurance and deterrence in the posture that we build. Along with our international partners, we are also conducting and targeting counter-terrorism activity.

We support multinational peacekeeping operations and build stability overseas, which ensures the freedom of navigation and the UK's access to global resources. We safeguard strategic choke points and protect essential lines of communication, not least across our oceans. We also keep the skies safe—not just in the UK, but in Europe and beyond. Newer to the portfolio, we are ensuring we monitor movements in outer space. The House will be aware of what we do to tackle piracy on the seas and high seas, and to reduce poaching in Africa—we have done much to tackle the illegal wildlife trade in Africa—and we of course assist in delivering overseas humanitarian aid relief during emergencies and disasters.

All that involves a wide variety of skillsets, which our armed forces are expected to understand and execute. It is important that we recognise that these are not things we see every day in the newspapers, but they are things that this House expects them to do when a crisis happens. It is to them that we turn when diplomacy fails and when this country faces challenges.

Leo Docherty: My right hon. Friend is being extremely generous with his time. In describing the expansive nature of our military presence globally, does he agree with me that the new naval facility in Bahrain, and the activities and patrolling carried out by the Royal Navy there, are an important demonstration that we are committed to the security of the Gulf and to providing reassurance about the free passage of trade around the peninsula?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend cites an acute example of exactly what we are doing. HMS Jufair is a fantastic illustration of our having permanent exposure, with a permanent facility, and of our working not just with the Bahrainis, but with others in the middle east. We set standards and values and share tactics and operational capabilities, and we improve governance, the rule of law and so forth in doing so. I pay tribute to those who have made that facility work. If memory serves, I actually visited the facility with my hon. Friend in the recent past.

Leo Docherty: I declare an interest in that we both visited that facility, with several other parliamentary colleagues, on a very useful visit last year.

Mr Ellwood: We have touched on the long-established reputation of our armed forces in defending not just our shores, but our values. At this juncture, I would comment on how the world is changing rapidly. It is getting more dangerous and it is getting more complex. The threats are more diverse than ever before. I would argue that if the instability we are seeing is unchecked, it will become the norm. These are threats not just from a man-made perspective—extremism and resurgent nations, as well as cyber-security—but from climate change. We are reaching or testing the limits of what our fragile planet can actually do, and if we do not act soon, there will be huge consequences with migration, the movement of people and so forth, as well as the stockpiling of food and a threat even to our ability to grow the crops we actually need.

The world is changing fast and it requires a collective effort if we are to meet some of these challenges. Britain has been a nation that again and again steps forward to lead the way—not always to do the heavy lifting, but certainly to show leadership. I certainly believe that, as I say, this is an important juncture at which to regroup and look at the rules—established mostly through Bretton Woods, after the second world war—that are now out of date. They need to be reviewed to recognise the new world that we actually face, before this becomes the norm and we are unable to change and set the standards for the next number of years.

The rate of change and level of uncertainty are outpacing governance and unity. The old rules need to be updated, and, because of human empowerment, it is easier for individuals to have greater access to means of causing harm, through computers and so forth.

Stephen Metcalfe: My right hon. Friend is painting a picture of the complexity and severity of the challenges we face. That threat has changed over the years, to the point at which the level of skill required across a broad range of disciplines is growing. I was fortunate enough to be the envoy for the Year of Engineering last year and saw how our armed services use engineers both on the ground and behind the scenes to tackle some of those threats, particularly on cyber-security. Will he therefore join me in promoting engineering within the armed services as a way of meeting and tackling the challenges that he is talking about?

Mr Ellwood: I fully concur. It was a pleasure to participate in the Year of engineering last year. It is important that we encourage STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—and we are doing that, as was mentioned earlier, through our apprenticeship schemes. The skillsets that even the basic infanteer requires from a technology perspective are enormous, and so different from when I served. It is absolutely important, through schooling, apprenticeships and all aspects of our armed forces, that we encourage these things.

I was talking about the fact that the tried and tested diplomatic instruments and conventions that we have relied on are no longer fit for purpose and about the importance of the fact that we are now threatened with greater human empowerment through technology.

It used to be said that atomic weapons were the biggest threat we faced. I was moved by a book written by David Sanger, a New York journalist and a specialist in cyber-warfare. He now says that cyber-warfare has taken over as the biggest threat that we face, because attacks can be conducted state on state and there are no repercussions and no rules. There is no Geneva convention to say, for example, that elections or hospitals are out of bounds for a cyber-security attack. There are no repercussions or recognition above board of what the penalty or punishment is, or even of what rules a cyber-security attack breaks.

This is more dangerous because, unlike with nuclear weapons, it is not just states that use such attacks—any individual can. That shows the requirements and the pressures of what our armed forces are up against in today's changing world, with accelerating technological advancement, the increasing environment of stress that I mentioned and, of course, the change in population growths and habitats.

Leo Docherty: My right hon. Friend is painting an interesting picture of our defence requirement. When it comes to cyber-security, both in terms of defence and offence, is he confident and reassured that cyber-capability will be front and centre in the modernising defence programme as it moves from adoption to reality?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes an important point. As we discuss upgrading and recommitting the existence of our armed forces, it has traditionally been around those conventional capabilities of Army, Air Force and Navy, and now it must expand to this fourth dimension, which includes cyber and space. These are the volatile and vulnerable areas that we absolutely need to invest more in, and I am pleased to say that that is exactly what is happening.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): My right hon. Friend is articulating a rather alarming picture of the changing nature of the challenges. He has mentioned the resources required. Does he agree that although we are committed to paying 2% of our GDP on defence to make sure that these international threats are adequately attacked, other countries also need to make similar commitments?

Mr Ellwood: I am on the record as saying that we need to spend more than 2%, as that is a very arbitrary target. Ultimately, the important thing is whether people turn up for the fight as well. If we take Operation Ellamy, which was in Libya, as an example, many NATO countries did not bother turning up even though they were NATO signatories. I appreciate the 2% and, yes, we want countries to pay, but ultimately they need to be ready to fight as well.

Toby Perkins *rose—*

Mr Ellwood: I will try to make some progress if I may, after this last intervention.

Toby Perkins: I am very grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene again. I just want to take him back to the comments he was making a moment ago about cyber-warfare and hybrid warfare. Does he consider cyber-warfare to be warfare? If so, who are we at war with?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. There are no accepted rules, and post Brexit Britain and the rest of world collectively need to recognise that. From a NATO perspective, article 5 does not apply. If there are no rules, how can we punish anybody? How can we identify who is responsible for what? This is a whole world that we need to address very soon indeed.

That point allows me to move on to a point about having an honest conversation with the public—this touches on the 2% issue. The general public have a huge admiration for our armed forces, who are the most professional in the world. However, I would also say that there is a collective naivety about what we can actually do. We are facing some very real threats that we need to wake up to.

I do not mean to digress too much, but because this place made so much noise about potholes, which was because local government made so much noise about potholes, the Chancellor then provided the money to address the problem of potholes. We are not making enough noise about our capabilities and where we are versus the threats we actually face.

Our main battle tank is 20 years old. It has not been replaced in that period. Meanwhile, France and Russia have upgraded their tanks two or three times over that period. We have some fantastic kit coming on board, but there are other areas where we need investment. We need to tell the public that if they want Britain to be able to step forward when it is required, we need to pay for that. That is the conversation we need to have, as well as talking about the threats we have touched on and have articulated quite adequately today. As I say, ever fewer nations are willing to step forward.

Toby Perkins *rose—*

Mr Ellwood: I will not give way. I need to make progress because I am getting that look from Madam Deputy Speaker—other hon. Members want to participate as well.

It is important to recognise where we are and to have a more real debate with the public. There is a Russian proverb that says that it is better to be slapped in the face by the truth than kissed with a lie. Without being too provocative, I believe that we are trying to sell a capability of the armed forces, which we are very, very proud of, but that the nation is in denial about the real threats appearing over the horizon. It is our duty as the Executive, as the Government and as parliamentarians to express that to a nation that, if it fully understood the picture, would be more willing to say, "Yes, let's spend more money." I hope that message will come through in the spending review.

I turn to the Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2019. We seek the consent of the House through the annual consideration of the legislation governing the armed forces: the Armed Forces Act 2006. The draft order we are considering this afternoon is to continue in force the 2006 Act for a further year, until 11 May 2020. This reflects the constitutional requirement under the Bill of Rights that a standing Army, and by extension now the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, may not be maintained without the consent of Parliament.

I am sure the House will be familiar with the fact that the legislation that provides for the armed forces to exist as disciplined bodies is renewed by Parliament every single year. That is what we are doing here today. The requirement for annual renewal can be traced back to the Bill of Rights 1688. Time prohibits me, Madam Deputy Speaker, from going into detail on that, but I am happy to write to hon. Members if they would like further information on that front.

Every five years, renewal is by an Act of Parliament. The most recent was in 2016 and the next will be in 2021. Between each five-yearly Act, annual renewal is by Order in Council. The draft order that we are considering today is such an order. The Armed Forces Act 2016 provides for the continuation in force of the Armed Forces Act 2006 until the end of 11 May 2017 and for further renewal thereafter by Order in Council for up to a year at a time, but not beyond 2021. If the Armed Forces Act 2006 is not renewed by this Order in Council before the end of 11 May 2019, it will automatically expire. If the 2006 Act expires, the legislation that governs the armed forces and the provisions necessary for their maintenance as disciplined bodies will cease to exist. Discipline is essential. It maintains the order necessary for the armed forces to accomplish their mission to serve our country, whether at home or abroad.

The Act contains nearly all the provisions for the existence of a system of command, discipline and justice for the armed forces. It creates offences and provides for the investigation of alleged offences, the arrest, the holding in custody and the charging of individuals accused of committing an offence, and for them to be dealt with summarily by their commanding officer or tried in a court martial. Offences under the 2006 Act include any criminal offence under the law of England and Wales and those that are peculiar to service, such as misconduct towards a superior officer and disobedience to lawful commands. We should not forget that the Act applies to members of the armed forces at all times, wherever they are serving in the world.

If the Act were to expire, the duty of members of the armed forces to obey lawful commands, and the powers and procedures under which this duty is enforced, would no longer have effect. Commanding officers and the court martial would have no powers of punishment for failure to obey a lawful command or other disciplinary or criminal misconduct. Members of the armed forces would still owe allegiance to Her Majesty, but Parliament

[Mr Ellwood]

would have removed the power of enforcement. Service personnel do not have contracts of employment and so have no duties as employees. Their obligation is essentially a duty to obey lawful commands. The Act also provides for other important matters for the armed forces, such as their enlistment, pay and redress of complaints.

In conclusion, the continuation of the 2006 Act is essential for the maintenance of discipline. Discipline, in every sense, is fundamental to the existence of our armed forces and indeed, to their successes, whether at home in supporting emergency services and local communities and protecting our fishing fleet and our shores; playing their role in counter-terrorism or in combating people and drug smuggling; distributing vital humanitarian aid; saving endangered species; or defeating Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

We owe the brave men and women of our armed forces a sound legal basis for them to continue to afford us their vital protection. I hope that hon. Members will support the draft continuation order.

5.41 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Before I begin, I echo Mr Speaker's words from earlier this afternoon, and the very fitting tribute paid by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), in respect of Paul Flynn, who served Newport West with absolute distinction and tremendous wit. He was also a great friend to many of us and we shall miss him sorely.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. Our armed forces represent this country across the world, fighting to liberate civilians from the scourge of Daesh; providing vital training to other nations; serving on peacekeeping missions; and stepping in to provide humanitarian relief in the wake of hurricanes and other disasters. Most importantly, of course, they stand ready to defend this country day and night. Across the House, we are all immensely proud of our personnel and Labour Members will be supporting the order this afternoon. However, I want to press the Minister in greater detail on a number of issues that we touched on at Defence questions this afternoon concerning our armed forces.

I will deal first with forces numbers and the alarming downward trend across each of the services. When Labour left office in 2010, we had an Army of 102,000 regulars, an RAF of 40,000 and a Royal Navy of 35,000. Now they are all substantially smaller. The Army and RAF have been cut by 25% each and the Navy is down by nearly 20%. The trajectory is most worrying of all: every single service has fallen in every year since the Conservatives came into office. The latest figures are due to be published on Thursday and I sincerely hope that they will buck the trend, because at a time when this country faces growing security challenges, it is simply not acceptable for the Government to be failing to deliver its manifesto pledge to

"maintain the overall size of the armed forces"

year after year.

At Defence questions earlier this afternoon, I asked the Minister for the Armed Forces to confirm that the Government are still committed to a Regular Army of 82,000. While I would not like to suggest that the Minister did not understand that we were talking about the number of full-time personnel, he did seem to get slightly confused and started talking about reservists, so I wonder whether his more courteous colleague, the Under-Secretary, can confirm that the target of 82,000 does still stand.

While I welcome any upturn in interest that recent adverts have stimulated, Members across the House have repeatedly raised the failings of Capita and its botched recruitment contract. It is simply not doing its job of recruiting enough personnel to the Army. I am sure I am not the only Member who has had complaints from constituents because of lengthy delays. I am talking about young people who actively want to join the Army and serve their country but whose enthusiasm is being undermined by Capita's incompetence.

We have said very clearly that Labour would terminate this contract, and I am glad that the message may finally be getting through. The Secretary of State said recently:

"If it becomes apparent in the next financial year that Capita are continuing to fail in what they do, we are going to have to look at different options in terms of the contract."

That is welcome, but it does seem to be yet another example of kicking the can down the road in terms of holding Capita to account. It is over a year since the same Secretary of State said he would give Capita a red card if it did not perform. Can the Minister set out what action the Government will take right now to get to grips with the problems?

This is not just an issue of recruitment; it also comes down to retention. The steady decline in service morale is a significant worry. The proportion of Army personnel reporting high morale in 2010 was 58% for both officers and those of other ranks, but that fell to 46% for officers and a mere 36% for other ranks in 2018. As well as it being wrong in principle for personnel to feel this way, we simply cannot afford to have servicemen and women choosing to leave the forces because of their view of service life. What plan does the Minister have to deal with this?

Satisfaction with pay remains at the lowest levels ever recorded, and given the seven years of below-inflation rises, that is hardly surprising. We all welcome the long overdue rise that personnel have received in the current financial year, but that was delayed and paid retrospectively. Will the Minister set out where we are with this year's settlement?

The Opposition have previously expressed our concern about the future accommodation model and the possibility that it may be used to push more personnel and their families into the private rented sector, with all the uncertainty and added cost associated with that. New research from the Army Families Federation highlights a number of flaws in the information provided on FAM. Forty-eight per cent. of respondents said they had received no information at all about FAM and only 2% said they had received a great deal. Where people had received information, most of it had come from the federation itself, as opposed to the MOD or the chain of command. Uncertainty around FAM was also a feature of the federation's comments on the covenant report late last year. Will the Minister commit to doing much more to make personnel and families aware of the changes?

Finally, in January, we were all deeply concerned by the report of the Defence Safety Authority that identified serious concerns. Will the Minister update the House on the progress made in implementing all the recommendations in that report?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. This is a fairly short debate—it needs to finish at 6.38 pm—and the Minister will want to make a short winding-up speech. If colleagues stick to about six minutes, we should get everyone in.

5.48 pm

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): This statutory instrument is vital and not Brexit-related. It is an annual requirement that Parliament restate its approval for the raising of our standing Army, Navy and Air Force in the modern world. Without it, we could not defend our citizens from enemies or send our armed forces to assist our allies around the globe.

We have many dedicated and highly skilled armed forces personnel. Our Royal Marines are working with allies to train in the toughest conditions on the planet hundreds of miles north of the Arctic circle, as our Secretary of State for Defence discovered for himself this weekend—we are all grateful that he did not die plunging into the frozen ice. As the House knows, I have visited twice to learn about the survival training that our young commandos undergo in order to take on some of the most challenging military tests. We are also training US marines up there and working closely with Dutch forces to build this uniquely challenging skillset. Furthermore, with the approval of this statutory instrument, we hope this year to see the development of the littoral strike group to allow the Royal Marines to go back to sea—back to their roots.

As the defence lead on the Public Accounts Committee, I hope to see the MOD making efficient and value-for-money purchasing decisions for the ships they will be using. Getting the right kit—not necessarily gold-plated—is so important if we are to offer our exceptional Royal Marines the skills that will enable them to cross the globe to where they are needed, whether for military or humanitarian intervention.

As part of our world-class and worldwide-respected Royal Navy, our Royal Marines will also be an element of the carrier strike group which we hope will develop in the coming year. The new carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, are world-leading national assets. I look forward to hearing Ministers set out more fully the Government's strategy for our aircraft carriers. For all the young sailors who are already serving on HMS Queen Elizabeth, it is an exciting and challenging posting, and many will look forward to serving on her in the years ahead. The last commanding officer of HMS Prince of Wales has probably not been born yet, so we will need many more before that last posting is required.

Our Royal Navy reaches across the globe to deter enemies, above and below the oceans, and to keep our sea routes safe for civilian trading traffic. Below the surface, quietly, members of our submarine service are out and about 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. For 50 years this April they have provided a continuous at-sea deterrent to protect our nation, support our allies and ensure that enemies are deterred from taking us on. That is a terribly important part of military procedure, because the nuclear threat is so great. It is, in my view, the greatest weapon of peace that man has ever invented, because it deters—forever, we hope—those who would start world wars.

Those submariners are often forgotten, because they are not seen and we do not generally talk about them, although I do occasionally. We forget, so often, the important and continuous work that they do. While they are under the oceans and the Navy is on the oceans, our own islands are kept safe 24/7, thanks in great part to the quiet but critical work that is done at RAF Boulmer in my constituency. The air defence that is provided by the aerospace surveillance and control system force commander—I had to read that out, because I would never get it right otherwise—is crucial work. It takes place, unseen, in a bunker deep below ground, with remote radar heads across our far northern borders watching the skies.

From RAF Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides—which I was privileged to visit a couple of years ago—to RAF Brizlee Wood, which is in my constituency, to RAF Buchan and the new RAF Saxa Vord on Unst, the most northern of the Shetland Islands, RAF personnel who live in my constituency watch and manage all the data provided by the radar heads, watching for enemy aircraft and so much else. I had the privilege of visiting the bunker recently, and was taught how to identify space junk, the international space station—which comes round twice a day—and much else besides. Extraordinary technicians have learnt to identify those who enter our airspace illegally, and, if necessary, are able to call RAF pilots to challenge them. All that happens quietly underground at RAF Boulmer.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Space junk intrigues me. Does the hon. Lady think that a piece of nut—that big—can be identified from her constituency?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I was not given that much training, but I think it is safe to say that one of the most extraordinary things that was explained to me is that there is now so much space junk—objects that have broken up over the years—that it is incredibly difficult to find a clear route in order to launch any new satellite into space. The ability of our RAF personnel to understand what is there, and to recognise it as it comes round on the radar screens again and again, means that they are vital components, understanding and supporting the civilians who want to work in space and the military who continue to view it as one of the new potential areas of combat. I am enormously proud to represent that team of exceptional RAF personnel, and also to represent their families.

I set up the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant when I was first elected, because I was shocked by some of the poor housing in which RAF families have to live. I was confused by the fact that the Government had not done more to act on the multiplicity of evidence that clearly exists to show that family comfort is critical to our retention of the highly trained personnel, in whom we have invested so heavily, to serve their country for as long as they want to do so. When the families are unhappy and feel that they cannot cope with the challenges that military life brings, we

[Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

lose some of our most wonderful personnel. Moreover, they have cost us a fortune: we have invested millions of pounds in some of our most sophisticated and highly trained RAF pilots, for instance. To lose them because family housing is too much of a problem is a bad investment decision, quite apart from the human cost.

In the knowledge that the Minister is passionate about getting this right, let me ask again whether the Government will consider changing their financial models so that we can make joined-up decisions on, for instance, housing investment and how the Defence Infrastructure Organisation spends its money. We do not want to find that commanding officers cannot secure the decisions that they need in order to keep the personnel they want. We should be able to make joined-up decisions on access to schools, so that the Department for Education understands that if a family is moving outside the normal cycle there must be a framework to ensure that the children get into the right schools, and on access to healthcare when families are suddenly posted elsewhere and are no longer able to be on the same waiting list. The theory is there, but the practice does not always work. Our military families, who support the extraordinary people who have chosen a career which, as part of their contract, means that they agree to put their lives on the line for us all, can know that Parliament values them if it demonstrates that through policies that work.

5.55 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is always a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), whose constituency is just across the border from mine.

This is a very important debate, although it may not seem so to some Members who are watching it outside the Chamber. Two members of the Defence Committee are present: its Chair, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty). He and I have similar surnames; I will leave it at that.

The Minister set out the requirements for our armed forces, although I wish he had faced the Chamber while he was making his speech; that would have made things a wee bit easier. He told us what was required for the systems of command, discipline and justice, as well as designating the remit of the services police for the jurisdiction of the powers of commanding officers and the military. On a personal level, I fundamentally get that. I have a brother who served both in Iraq and twice in Afghanistan, and I know that the husband of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) is a submariner. As was mentioned by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, submariners constitute a section of the armed forces that is seldom mentioned. Many elements of the armed forces do not have a voice, including the medical element, which provides services on the battlefield that save lives—not just those of our own wounded, but even those of adversaries.

I will be brief, because I know that others want to speak. The Minister said that members of the armed forces were not employees. I think that, in the 21st century, that is a dreadful situation. We hear a lot about the state of housing for members of the armed forces and their families, and we hear a lot about pay, which the Minister also mentioned, but where is the voice of the armed forces when it comes to improving those elements?

We are told about the service families who do such a fantastic job—some of them recently gave evidence to the Defence Committee—but when it comes to employee rights, we need a armed forces representative body. That is what my hon. Friends, at least, believe, and indeed, during Defence questions, not only my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West but a Labour Member called for it. It would not have the ability to strike—no one would call for that—but it should be possible, in the 21st century, for members of the armed forces to be able to call themselves employees and to enter into negotiations with their employer. That is possible in many of our NATO allied armed forces systems. It is disappointing that that is not mentioned in the statutory instrument—but of course it would not be, because it is an element that has to be gone through every couple of years—but I hope that the Minister and some of his team, and perhaps Labour Members as well, will be in the Chamber on 8 March, when I will present a private Member's Bill on the establishment of a representative body, thus making a commitment to my party's manifesto.

I think it important that we recognise the service given by members of the armed forces. As was pointed out by both the Minister and the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), we should recognise that service not only in the context of military capability, but in the context of the assistance that they provide through peacekeeping. I often reminded myself of these words:

"Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war."

5.59 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and not to be last, which is my usual position in the batting order. I will keep my remarks reasonably brief—I say particularly to those who have had the joy of sitting through my speeches on Fridays—to ensure that the two Members who are waiting get an opportunity to speak in this debate as well.

This order is welcome. It is a practical part of ensuring our armed forces continue and that their structure, law and governance, particularly the court martial system, continue. It is also symbolic, as it is a reminder that the armed forces serve our country—our nation and our democracy. This is not a country where the military can exert power over the institution of the state; it is one where they defend the nation and the democracy that lies at the heart of this nation. Indeed, many people over the past couple of hundred years have sacrificed their lives in doing so, showing the truth of the expression that freedom is not free. Too many times in our history, our military and armed forces have had to be called upon to make those sacrifices.

We must address how we can ensure those in the military today feel that they wish to be doing their job and to give that service. The Minister rightly said people do not just join the military for the salary package or because they think there might be an opportunity for some foreign travel; they join because they fundamentally have a calling to want to serve this nation. That is the core of why people volunteer to serve in our military. Indeed, it is a fact that many volunteer; there has not been conscription in this country for decades. At least two generations of men have not been conscripted into

our forces, yet so many do still want to join, but it is important that we do not just rely on their spirit of service always coming first.

That is particularly relevant to the issue of accommodation. The escalating cost of housing over recent years means we have to be practical about the financial and other packages we offer and also about the lifestyle generally that is offered. Those in Torbay who have served in the military often talk about what life was like when they were commissioned; they would go on tours and their wives—as they would have been at that time—were pretty much expected to follow them. At that time, it was highly unlikely that their wives would have careers of their own, but that is clearly no longer the case, and indeed many spouses will be serving officers themselves with an equal commitment to our nation, given the welcome move to open up all roles in our military to both sexes. It is therefore important that those packages are considered.

The Minister touched on looking at the estate. I grew up in Plymouth, seeing the Royal Citadel there. Ironically, it had more guns facing over the town than the sound. That was because of history: it was built by Charles II and he wanted to remind Plymothians what might happen if they rebelled against him as they had rebelled against his father, holding out for Parliament and thereby denying a crucial port to the royalist forces. It is right that 300 years later we move on to having a more modern military estate. Some of my family grew up in Stonehouse and have memories of the Stonehouse barracks. They might be worthy of history, but 300-year-old barracks with dormitory accommodation are not the sort of place where the most elite soldiers we train should be housed in the 21st century.

We must not, however, turn the military into just another form of employment. While I agree with much of what was said by the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), I do not think going down the path of this becoming like any other job is what the vast majority of the military would like to see; nor would it be a sensible decision for our nation. Being in the military is a unique role: it brings with it obligations of service but also a huge amount of respect in exchange for taking on board those obligations. It clearly would never be possible to have some form of strike arrangement, and I suspect the hon. Gentleman made that clear in his contribution, but going down the path suggested would be neither useful nor appropriate. Our system has served us well.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): How would the hon. Gentleman suggest serving members of the armed forces should raise concerns if they do not have a voice like a representative body?

Kevin Foster: I think it safe to say that one thing that has been consistent since the armed forces were formed is that there have always been gripes and comments put up by those who serve, and rightly so, but we would expect them to be dealt with by chains of command and in appropriate areas. Having a separate representative body of the military would not be the best way forward, and I do not see that as the solution.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Does my hon. Friend agree that military families sometimes do not feel that they can, as civilians, contact their own MPs to raise concerns—not about military matters their partners might be involved in, but about matters for the family unit? There is often a real lack of confidence that families can talk to Members of Parliament, and we should be doing much more to help them in that regard.

Kevin Foster: No one should feel afraid to contact their Member of Parliament in any scenario. At the end of the day, we are here to act as our constituents' advocates and champions, and ultimately, if necessary, to do so confidentially. I am always clear that my surgeries are open.

Leo Docherty: I frequently see serving soldiers in Aldershot, the home of the British Army, some of whom were previously in my own command when I was back in the Scots Guards. I am always there to help them, and any serving member always knows that if they have any kind of personal problem, they can go and see their platoon commander.

Kevin Foster: It is great to hear of the service my hon. Friend is still offering to his constituents where he was once their commander but is now offering that as their Member of Parliament. He brings vital experience to this Chamber from his own military experience, representing the home of the British Army.

I have been going on for seven minutes now and am conscious that other Members are waiting to speak. This motion needs to be passed, and I do not think it will attract any particular opposition given that that would be rather bizarre, even though there might be one or two fringe views in this Chamber about abolishing our military, which we sometimes hear. This motion has my full support, and it is vital that it passes today.

6.6 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I rise to support the motion, as my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) did. While this is a motion that many might have expected was limited in scope and was likely to be passed without much comment, the Minister, of whom I am a big admirer in the job he does, has broadened its scope and other Members have taken him up on the challenge he posed. He made a remarkable speech; I cannot think of many times where a Minister has stood at the Dispatch Box and been so implicitly critical of the Government they speak on behalf of. I entirely support his call for greater investment in our armed forces and will expand on some of the arguments he made about our investment in equipment.

Mr Ellwood: I would not want the hon. Gentleman to mislead the House and say I was somehow not supportive of the Government. I am absolutely, of course, supportive of the Government—a loyal Minister. I am simply encouraging the advancement of policy; I think that is how I would delicately put it.

Toby Perkins: People will read the right hon. Gentleman's speech and make up their own minds on whether he was urging the Government to take action in a different direction, but if he wants the advancement of policy, he is in exactly the right place to do that as a Defence Minister. He was right to say that we absolutely recognise the professionalism of those who serve and to point to the admiration he has—and I have, and Members right across the House have—for people who dedicate their lives to our armed forces, but we must

[Toby Perkins]

also ask ourselves some serious questions about the way in which we support them, and I will come to those in a moment.

If I was to have an area of disagreement with the Minister, it would be on his challenge to the public about the fact that we need to have an honest conversation with them. It does not seem to me that it is the public who are preventing the Government from spending more on our armed forces or meeting greater than the 2% spending commitment. We had a debate here about having greater spending on our armed forces and there was widespread agreement across the House that that should happen. I have never had a member of the public say to me in my surgeries or when I am out door knocking on a Saturday that they disagree with greater spending on the armed forces. I do not think that we need to convince the public of the need to spend more; in fact, it is the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister who need to be persuaded to spend more money on our armed forces.

The Minister spoke about his commitment to the armed forces community and his disappointment that there was such low morale on pay and pensions. He introduced accommodation as another real bone of contention, and I support him entirely on tackling those issues. He and the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) both said that we should not regard a job in the armed forces as being similar to any other job, and I agree with them. Of course there is a level of commitment required from members of the armed forces that is not present in other jobs, but that does not let the Government off the hook when it comes to pay and pensions and to treating people who serve with the respect that they have the right to expect. When it comes to saying to the loved ones of members of the armed forces that we value their support, pay and pensions and accommodation are among the ways in which we can show that we recognise their commitment. I absolutely recognise that working in the armed forces is not the same as any other job, but that does not let the Government off the hook when it comes to ensuring that the pay for members of our armed forces keeps pace with inflation and that they are no worse off at the end of the year than they were at the start of it. That is a very basic commitment.

Another very basic commitment is that we make the necessary investment in equipment, in training, in deployments and in the commitment that we expect of members of the armed forces. We need to pose some serious questions to the Government about those things as well. The Minister said that we had the most professional armed forces in the world, but it is important that we should not be complacent. As he mentioned, the battle tank is 20 years old. As a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I have had the privilege of speaking to members of the armed forces, and they absolutely want me to hold the Government to account over investment in equipment. They share many of the reservations that he has. They also share reservations about the level of experience of some of the people in our armed forces. Huge numbers are leaving, many of whom had been through engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq and were absolutely match fit. The people who are now in those roles, while well trained, are much less experienced than the people who would have been in those arenas eight or nine years ago. I absolutely express our admiration for the people in our armed forces, but we must never be complacent about what we actually have on the ground.

I had the pleasure of going over to Kenya as part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme to visit the British Army training unit Kenya—BATUK—but I know that many training courses have been cancelled over the past year or so and that that facility is being used a lot less than it was previously. That investment in the training of members of our armed forces to ensure that they are used to the different theatres they might face is incredibly important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) mentioned the Tory manifesto pledge for the Army to be 82,000 strong. Will the Minister give us absolute clarity on whether the Government still consider themselves bound to that commitment, or whether, as it was not featured so explicitly in the 2017 manifesto, it is now more of an aspiration than a commitment? Either way, it is a commitment that is not being met. I entirely support the motion, but I also share many of the concerns that have been raised today. I absolutely pledge my support to the Minister in his campaign to persuade the Treasury to give our armed forces the support that they need and deserve.

6.14 pm

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak in the debate today. I am pleased that the Minister chose to use this opportunity to lay out the challenge of transformation that our national defence faces in this era. I have been pleased to see the outline that the Ministry of Defence has given this in the modernising defence programme, following the doctrine of the need to mobilise, to modernise and to transform. I think we are reassured that this document—the modernising defence programme—is a clear statement of intent that takes us forward to the comprehensive spending review and really goes into battle for a strong national defence. I for one am right behind it, but the proof will be in the pudding when it comes to how much money is secured in the comprehensive spending review. If we want what the document describes as the Joint Force 2025—a maritime task group, a deployable land division with three brigades including a strike brigade, a properly resourced combat air group and a special forces task group—we will have to pay for it. We will also have to pay for the equipment programme, which involves some excellent new platforms but also has some significant financial holes. As I have said, the proof will be in the pudding.

As well as needing to pay for all this, there are other things that we will need to do if we are to make the vision in this document a reality. We must ensure value for money, and that is about ensuring that we use big data to make the management of our military much more efficient, especially in areas such as fleet management and the management of large numbers of people. We have to use big data in order to become more efficient, and we need to reform the way in which we do defence procurement. We also need to win the data war. We have heard from the Minister about the cyber threats that we face, and we need to up our game in that regard. We need to acknowledge that the world is connected in

a way that it has never been connected before. That is not just a matter of defence; it is also a matter of offensive cyber.

We also need to adopt a global posture. The global deployments in Bahrain, in other middle eastern countries and around the world are a force multiplier, and I am proud that soldiers from my constituency are involved. The Scots Guards are deployed in Cyprus, the Grenadier Guards are in Iraq and Afghanistan, and 4 Rifles—a specialised infantry battalion that is absolutely match fit and purpose built for engagements that involve the training of foreign troops—are deployed right around the world. They are a terrific force multiplier, and that is something we should be proud of.

Alarmingly, the document does not mention our defence response to China. That is a central challenge that we will have to grapple with in this new era of transformation. I invite the Minister to mention that in his closing remarks. Whether we like it or not—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Hopefully not, because it is not in the debate. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to carry on, but he must not drag the Minister into something that is not covered in the debate.

Leo Docherty: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Moving on swiftly—we will also bring our allies with us. We are committed to NATO, but we need to demonstrate that commitment by exercising at scale. Perhaps we could do a "brigade plus" exercise in Poland to show resolve against threats on our eastern flank. We need to nurture sovereign industries, such as the ones in my constituency, which in turn nurture incredible defence innovation. We also need to get the legal framework right for foreign deployments. If we are to have a military that deploys with confidence to inflict violence on our behalf, soldiers need to be able to do that without fear of being pursued through the courts on their return.

I want to turn to the central argument in all of this. It is the argument, which we need to win, about hard power. The Minister mentioned this, and it is the central argument that we will be making as we move forward to the comprehensive spending review. We have been somewhat bruised by the past 18 years of the war on terror, which has informed this generation's understanding of conflicts abroad, and it is easy to think that the public have a limited appetite for foreign intervention or foreign deployments. However, I actually believe that the reverse is true.

The British military conducted itself in Iraq and Afghanistan with such remarkable professionalism and courage that, whatever one thinks about the politics, there is wholehearted support among the British public and an acknowledgement that our armed forces can and will do a remarkable job on our behalf when deployed. There is absolutely no hesitation at all among the British public when it comes to supporting increased defence expenditure, as the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) noted. That argument is wrong, we need to debunk that myth, and we need a new commitment to a fully funded national defence in the comprehensive spending review. I look forward to making that argument in a clear, resolute and confident manner for the sake of a strong national defence in this great era of transformation.

6.20 pm

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): The Minister made the point that this renewal—this continuation statutory instrument—is not normally discussed on the Floor of the House, but being able to do so is a great opportunity. The SI goes to the heart of the existence of our armed forces, because the British armed forces quite simply cease to exist without it. The Bill of Rights 1689 contains an assertion that the Army, and by extension the RAF and Navy, cannot exist without the explicit consent of Parliament. Provisions within this SI also enable the chain of command to deliver good governance within the armed forces themselves.

I do not intend to rehearse the arguments that may come about during the proceedings on the Armed Forces Representative Body Bill. It is an interesting idea that has been taken up by other armed forces around the world, but I think that the responsibility and the nature of the relationship between the chain of command in the British armed forces and the soldiers, sailors and airmen and women that they command is dependent on a fundamentally different relationship, which I think a representative body would be in danger of undermining.

Carol Monaghan: I ask the hon. Gentleman to look at how representative bodies work in other NATO countries.

James Cleverly: I have, and I do not like it.

Also inherent in this SI are provisions for enlistment, pay and the redress of complaints, and all those things at heart are J1 considerations, so I intend to restrict my short speech to the people carrying out the J1 function—the men and women who serve in our armed forces—and our responsibility and, as the Minister mentioned during his opening speech, our offer to them.

The armed forces currently face a challenge with regard to recruitment and retention. Ironically, it is a challenge that has been brought about through good news. The British economy currently has record low levels of unemployment, including record low levels of youth unemployment. It is the sad truth that it is a lot easier to recruit into the armed forces when there are few jobs available in the civilian world. Therefore, because actually unemployment is at a record low, the talented young men and women that we seek to recruit into our armed forces have other credible options.

The shadow Minister mentioned that the delay in the processing of recruitment applications through Capita has had a detrimental effect on our ability to recruit the brightest and best young people whom we need and want in our armed forces. People who are credible—people who have other employment options—are exactly the people we want to recruit and exactly the people who will be snapped up by civilian employers, who are currently competing with our armed forces to recruit them. We have a duty to improve and speed up the recruitment process—not just a duty, but a self-interest.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Does my hon. Friend agree that we must ensure that we change part of the medical assessment program for recruitment? Those who are diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder—often Asperger's—should not automatically be disbarred from applying. We are looking to select young men and women who have that sort of skillset—that particular

[Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

unique kind of mind—and we need to find a way to ensure that the system is changed so that those people make it through the system.

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend makes an important point—one that I will touch upon briefly later in my speech—about the changing nature of conflict and the skills mix that we require from young people coming into the armed forces. We need to ensure that we are able to be a meaningful and relevant set of armed forces in the here and now, rather than think about the conflicts that we have had in the past.

Toby Perkins: I agree entirely with what the hon. Gentleman is saying about recruitment, but that is only one side of the picture. The other side is the huge number of people who have left the armed forces in the past few years, and people left because they were kind of encouraged to do so by the Government, who made it absolutely clear that they were looking to reduce the size of the British Army. This is not just about recruitment, but about the skills we have lost.

James Cleverly: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the loss of skills, and that is particularly true of what may be thought of as legacy skills. We have been very focused on two main conflicts over the past decade or so—Operation Telic and Operation Herrick—but it is important that we are able to be active in a whole range of future potential scenarios or conflicts. This is not necessarily true of the old cold warriors, but we do not want to lose the skills of people who were trained in a more diverse range of potential conflicts. We must ensure that they are able to pass on that knowledge and experience to new generations.

I turn to recruitment. The British Army advert that was rather lazily described as the "snowflake" advert was greeted with a degree of derision. In my experience, that was unfair, and this goes to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan). There was a time in the not too distant past—about a century ago—when there were passionate advocates for the retention of the horse as the main method of conducting conflict, and they fought hard against the mechanisation of the British Army. We have a habit—this has also happened in militaries around the world and throughout history—of fighting the last war, rather than gearing ourselves up to fight the next war.

Bob Stewart: The definition of a snowflake—I had to look this up—is apparently someone who whinges a lot. I did 28 years in the Army, and I have never known a soldier who did not whinge, so the snowflakes outside will be joining the snowflakes inside the armed forces.

James Cleverly: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for that intervention. I was once told by my commanding officer that I did not need to worry about much, but if my soldiers stopped moaning, I needed to start worrying. However, the point about the recruitment campaign is that it highlighted the need not only for people who are physically robust and self-reliant, but for people who have empathy and are able to develop and deploy soft skills. When the toughest soldiers in the British Army, the Special Air Service, were deployed during the Malaya insurgency, they really understood the requirement for hearts and minds. Winning conflicts through kinetic means—through bombs and bullets, to pick two words at random—is one way to do it, but doing it through hearts and minds really matters.

I am getting those looks again, so I will draw my remarks to a conclusion shortly. We must make sure that the skills of the young people we recruit and retain in the armed forces match the threats and risks presented not just in the here and now but in the timeframe of their service. The people we are recruiting in the here and now have to be ready, able and capable of matching the threats that could present themselves in 10, 15 and 20 years' time. That means people with adaptability as a core skill and who have the intellectual flexibility to take on new skills. Lifelong learning should not just be available to people in the civilian world; it should be available to people in the armed forces, too.

I am particularly proud of two things that my party has introduced in government. The first is flexible working throughout the armed forces. It would be unacceptable if talented, well-trained, experienced soldiers, sailors and airwomen were prevented from fully reaching their potential because they have taken maternity leave. Soldiers, sailors and airmen who also wish to make good on their family commitments should also have the opportunity to take periods out of frontline service so they can discharge their familial duties as well as their military duties and not feel that their promotion will be held back because of it. We do not have the luxury of seeing such talented people as disposable items, and we have to make sure they are valued throughout their time of service.

Finally, allied to that is that all roles in the military are now available to any woman who is good enough to discharge them. Quality should be the only metric against which selection is made. The fact that we have now done that and that our armed forces are now gender blind and focused purely on quality is a step in the right direction.

6.32 pm

Mr Ellwood: This has been a far more thorough and wide-ranging debate than I imagined it would be, and I welcome that. I hope that in future years, when we come to update the House on the continuation of the armed forces, we can have the debate in the main Chamber.

I hear what the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) says about recruitment and Capita—she raised the point in Defence questions, too. The Minister for the Armed Forces is better able to respond, so I will ask him to write to her with more details. The future accommodation model is about choice, and I have touched on that.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the Defence Safety Authority and its report, which I take very seriously. I stress to the House that there have been fewer fire issues than in previous years, but the issue is about management, and every effort is being made to make sure we honour the report's recommendations. Again, I will write to her with more details on how that will be achieved.

My good and hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) made a wide-ranging speech. She underlined the importance of the bond between US marines and the Royal Marines and their work to create a formidable relationship, which has

developed over the years. She also praised the Secretary of State for jumping into the Norwegian sea—he is doing a fantastic job. She also touched on the Kessler effect, and a spiral of junk satellites bumping into each other is a huge concern. It would take us back to the 1950s, and we are working on it.

Bob Stewart: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Ellwood: I am afraid that I do not have time to take interventions.

The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) mentioned peacekeeping, and anyone in uniform will recognise its importance. It is not so much about defeating the enemy as enabling the local population, and nowhere is that more pertinent right now than in Iraq and Syria. Murders are happening every day, and ISIL is still active. ISIL is not in our headlines, but that is not to say it has dispersed. We need to make sure that we help with stabilisation, peacekeeping and rebuilding those nations in whatever way we can, obviously with their agreement.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) spoke about being honest in our conversation with the public. I make it clear that France is about to overtake us in defence spending. We have to make the case to the nation, because we queue up with every other Department in asking for more funds from the Treasury. If we take the nation with us in calling for it, we are more likely to get where we want to go.

I have mentioned tanks, but we had 30 RAF squadrons in Operation Ellamy, and we are now down to seven. We cannot build two new aircraft carriers without extra money and not have an impact on the rest of the surface fleet. These are important issues, which is why the Defence Secretary and Defence Ministers are all making a potent case through the defence modernisation programme, which my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) mentioned, to say that we need to upgrade the defence budget. I am pleased with my hon. Friend's contribution; he touched on the importance of cyber. If we think the last 10 years have seen a change in our world, wait for the next 10 years. Artificial intelligence, 5G and the internet of things will change our world fundamentally, and I am not quite sure whether we are ready.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) speaks with such experience. He talks about our offer—what is our offer to our armed forces?—and that is so important for us to recognise and understand. More than 20 operations are taking place around the world, and Operation Toral, the continuation in Afghanistan, is just one of them. They do not make the headlines, so they are not the recruitment sergeant that Iraq and Afghanistan have been. Because of the greater employment rate, it is a testing environment to let people recognise how the armed forces can be a fantastic career. He also touched on flexible working, which is important, and how roles have been opened up to women right across the piece.

Following this full debate, I hope the House will support the draft order and recognise its contribution to upholding the constitutional position that the armed forces may not be maintained without the consent of Parliament.

My final words are to anyone thinking of signing up. I could not encourage you more. You will learn things about yourself that you did not know, you will do things that you never thought possible, and you will visit places that you never thought you would be able to visit. When you finally march off that parade square, after you sign up, you will not only be serving your country but you will be making your mum and dad so proud of you.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 24 January, be approved.

Exiting the European Union (Financial Services)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): With the leave of the House, we will debate the two instruments on financial services together.

6.38 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): I beg to move,

That the draft Public Record, Disclosure of Information and Co-operation (Financial Services) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 21 January, be approved.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take the following motion:

That the draft Money Market Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 24 January, be approved.

John Glen: As the House will be aware, the Treasury has been undertaking a programme of legislation under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to ensure that if the UK leaves the EU without a deal or an implementation period, there continues to be a functioning legislative and regulatory regime for financial services in the United Kingdom. The two statutory instruments being debated today are part of this programme. The disclosure regulations, as corrected by the corrections slip published on 12 February, will address deficiencies related to the UK's implementation of EU rules that govern the exchange of confidential information between European economic area and third country regulatory and supervisory authorities. Once the UK is outside the single market and the EU's joint supervisory framework for financial services, amendments will be needed to these rules so that they continue to operate effectively in a scenario where the UK leaves the EU without an agreement. The money market funds regulations will fix deficiencies in UK law on money market funds and their operators to ensure they continue to operate effectively post exit. The approach taken in these pieces of draft legislation aligns with that of other statutory instruments being laid under the 2018 Act, providing continuity by maintaining existing legislation at the point of exit but amending it where necessary to ensure that it works effectively in a no-deal context.

Let me deal first with the Public Record, Disclosure of Information and Co-operation (Financial Services) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. As Members across the House will know, an important function performed by financial services regulators is the gathering of supervisory information from firms. Regulators use this information so that they can ensure that regulated firms are operating in a way consistent with regulatory requirements and so they are alerted to any development that may need supervisory intervention. As a great deal of financial services activity takes place across borders and across regulatory regimes, the ability of national regulators to co-operate with each other and to exchange information is vital if they are to discharge their supervisory functions effectively.

The information gathered by regulators is often confidential and often commercially or market sensitive, so it is right that there are strict rules and safeguards on how regulators share such information with other regulatory authorities. EU law currently plays an important role in setting these rules. In order to ensure the effective functioning of the single market in financial services, the EU has developed a joint supervisory framework for national regulators and supervisory bodies in the EEA. This makes co-operation and the sharing of certain supervisory information between EEA national regulators mandatory.

In addition, the EU has established the European supervisory authorities—ESAs— which are responsible for co-ordinating the approach of EEA national regulators. Co-operation and sharing of certain information with the ESAs is also mandatory for EEA national regulators. As well as setting out what information should be shared, EU rules also include restrictions and safeguards. In the UK, these rules are implemented in Part 23 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Disclosure of Confidential Information) Regulations 2001.

For third country authorities, there are additional restrictions when disclosing confidential information. The UK regulator may need to be satisfied that the third country authority has protections for confidential information in place that are equivalent to those of the EU. There may also be a requirement to enter into a co-operation agreement with the third country authority. In addition, if the UK regulator is disclosing confidential information to a third country authority which originated from an EEA authority, the UK regulator may need to seek the consent of the EEA regulator which originally disclosed the confidential information.

If the UK leaves the EU without an agreement, the EU has confirmed that it will treat the UK as a third country and the UK will also need to treat EEA states as third countries. The UK will be outside the single market and the EU's joint supervisory framework, so references in UK legislation to this framework, and to EU legislation and EU bodies, will be deficient and will need to be corrected so that the UK's disclosure rules for confidential information will work effectively. In particular, the rules will need to be amended to reflect the third country relationship that will exist between the UK and EEA states. After exit, it would not be appropriate to provide for different rules and protections on the disclosure of confidential information by UK authorities depending on whether confidential information is being shared with EEA authorities or the authorities of non-EEA states. If this is left unamended, the UK would afford additional protections and less onerous restrictions to EEA states compared with other third countries. In addition where there are currently requirements to seek the consent of an EEA authority before the onward disclosure of information, these requirements will be retained only if an equivalent requirement also exists in relation to seeking consent from non-EEA authorities.

This instrument also provides for a transitional arrangement that will ensure that any confidential information received by a UK regulator before exit day will continue to be treated in accordance with the relevant provisions that existed before exit day. While it is necessary to amend the UK implementation of rules around disclosure of confidential information to ensure that they continue to operate effectively once the UK is outside the EU, it must be stressed that these amendments are in no way intended to diminish the level of co-operation that exists between UK and EEA regulators.

The Government and UK regulators believe that effective co-operation and co-ordination is essential for the effective supervision of financial services. UK authorities will be doing everything possible to ensure that effective co-operation continues. UK regulators have always been key players and key voices of sanity in the global supervision of financial services, as is demonstrated by the close and co-operative arrangements we have with regulators in countries outside the EEA. After exit, it will be necessary for the UK regulators to enter into co-operation agreements with EEA national regulators and with the ESAs. These agreements will help ensure that a high level of co-operation and information sharing will continue.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am seeking some clarity on the first of these SIs and which day the Minister expects the disclosure of information regulations to come into operation. Am I right in thinking that exit day means exit day unless there is an implementation period, in which case it means at the end of the implementation period?

John Glen: These SIs relate to a situation where we have no deal. So if there was not a deal or an implementation period after 29 March, these SIs would then take effect.

Kirsty Blackman: With respect, that is not what it says in the explanatory memorandum for the first SI, which suggests that it is needed in the event of any Brexit and not just in the event of a no-deal Brexit. The second one covers a no-deal Brexit, but I had understood that the first one was needed for any Brexit.

John Glen: I will examine that and, if I may, I will come back to it and seek to clarify it when I wind up this debate.

Both the Government and UK regulators attach very high priority to putting these agreements in place, and I am pleased to report that UK and EU regulators are making good progress in their discussions to finalise these agreements. The Treasury has been working very closely with the Bank of England, the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority in the drafting of this instrument, and there has also been engagement with the financial services industry, including the publication of this instrument in draft, along with an explanatory policy note on 9 January. In summary, the Government believe that the proposed deficiency fixes are necessary to ensure that the UK has a clearly defined and operable set of rules for the disclosure of confidential information.

I turn now to the Money Market Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which relate to the establishment, management, and marketing of money market funds. Such funds invest in highly liquid instruments, and provide a short-term, stable cash-management function to financial institutions, corporations and local governments. They are commonly used by investors as an alternative to bank deposits. The regulations formed part of the response to the 2008 global financial crash to preserve the integrity and stability of the EU market, and to ensure that money market funds are a resilient financial instrument. They do so by ensuring uniform rules on prudential requirements, governance and transparency for managers of these funds.

Money market funds can either be structured as undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities—UCITS—or as an alternative investment fund. Therefore, they are regulated as UCITS or as an alternative investment fund, in addition to being regulated as a money market fund. The regimes for UCITS and alternative investment fund managers have been separately amended to reflect the UK leaving the EU by the Collective Investment Schemes (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and Alternative Investment Fund Managers (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were taken through Committee, where I believe I was joined by the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), and have now been approved in both Houses and will be made shortly. In a no-deal scenario, the UK would be outside the EEA, and outside the EU's legal, supervisory and financial regulatory framework. EEA money market funds, which currently provide the majority of money market services in the UK, would not be able to continue to service UK clients. The money market funds regulation therefore needs to be updated to reflect this and ensure that the provisions work properly in a no-deal scenario.

First, these draft regulations remove references to the Union which are no longer appropriate and to EU legislation which will not form part of retained EU law. These references will be replaced by references to the UK and to relevant domestic and retained EU legislation. Secondly, in line with the general approach taken to the onshoring of EU legislation, the SI will transfer functions currently within the remit of EU authorities; from the European Securities and Markets Authority to the FCA, and from the European Commission to Her Majesty's Treasury.

As the UK's regulator for investment funds and the current national competent authority for money market funds, the FCA has extensive experience in the asset management sector, and it is therefore the most appropriate domestic institution to take on these functions from the European Securities and Markets Authority. This statutory instrument transfers all powers exercised by ESMA to the FCA. The FCA will become responsible for technical standards on how funds should stress test their funds, and it will gain two operational powers to establish a register and reporting template for money market funds.

This statutory instrument transfers any power currently exercised by the Commission to the Treasury, in line with the other statutory instruments that we have taken through. Those powers all relate to creating rules concerning standards for money market funds, such as their liquidity and quantification of credit risk.

As I have mentioned, EU money market funds are structured and further regulated as UCITS or alternative investment funds. This statutory instrument makes provision to ensure that EU money market funds can use the temporary marketing permissions regime, as legislated for in the Collective Investment Schemes (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and the Alternative Investment Fund Managers (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018. Following an assessment by the FCA and the submission of a written statement to both Houses, the Treasury will be able to extend that by a maximum of 12 months at a time. It will also allow for EU money market funds that are currently marketing into the UK, and any subsequent UCITS sub-funds, to continue to market into the UK for up to three years after exit day.

[John Glen]

This statutory instrument amends the scope of the regulation to apply to the UK only, with the effect of only allowing the marketing of UK-authorised MMFs or MMFs managed by UK fund managers. However, further amendments maintain the eligibility of EEA MMFs with temporary permissions to continue to market in the UK at the end of the temporary marketing permissions regime if they gain the required permissions to market as a third country fund under the UK domestic framework.

Money market funds that are UCITS will be required to gain authorisation under section 272 of FSMA, while the managers of money market funds that are alternative investment funds will need to notify under the national private placements regime. The UK currently has a very small domestic market that relies heavily on EEA money market funds, so these provisions address the cliff-edge risks that could arise as a consequence of defaulting to a UK-only market. That will ensure that local government, businesses and other UK investors can continue to access their investments and have a choice of money market funds to use for cash management.

As with the previous statutory instrument, the Treasury has been working very closely with the FCA in the drafting of this statutory instrument and engaging with the financial services industry. I would like to put on record my gratitude to TheCityUK for convening appropriate representative bodies throughout the process. In November the Treasury published the statutory instrument in draft, along with an explanatory policy note, to maximise transparency to Parliament and industry.

In summary, the Government believe that the proposed legislation is necessary to ensure that the framework for money market funds continues effectively, and that the legislation continues to function appropriately if the UK leaves the EU without a deal or an implementation period. I hope colleagues will join me in supporting the regulations.

I would like to respond to the point raised by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman). Parliament will amend the regulations as necessary for a deal scenario. If we have a deal, an amendment process would apply to all the regulations that we have taken through. Most of them would need to be repealed, but we would do so according to the terms of the deal. I have nothing more to say at this point, and I commend these regulations to the House.

6.54 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): First, may I associate myself with the heartfelt tributes that have been paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), and I express my sympathies to his family?

We are here to discuss two no-deal statutory instruments appertaining to financial services. Members will be aware that the Conservative Government refused to allow a debate on the Floor of the House about arguably the most significant such SI—the one concerning the markets in financial instruments directive, which was sufficiently complex to require a Keeling schedule. The Government did agree to a recent debate on an SI concerning securitisation, but of course that was not a no-deal SI, and the debate only happened when the Opposition prayed against the SI. Members may be forgiven for scratching their heads about why the Conservative Government have adopted such a different tactic this time; I am sure Members can come to their own conclusions on why this debate is taking place on the Floor of the House today.

These statutory instruments make provision for a regulatory framework after Brexit in the event that we crash out without a deal. The volume of such legislation is deeply concerning for accountability and proper scrutiny. The Government have assured the Opposition that no policy decisions are being taken as part of the no-deal process. However, establishing a new regulatory framework inevitably involves matters of judgment and raises questions about resourcing and capacity. Secondary legislation ought to be used only for technical, non-partisan and non-controversial changes, because of the limited accountability it normally allows; instead, the Government continue to push through far-reaching financial legislation via this vehicle.

As legislators, we have to get this right. The regulations could represent real and substantive changes to the statute book, and as such, they need proper and in-depth scrutiny. I am slightly surprised to see some Government Members shaking their heads at the idea that we need appropriate scrutiny. It is incredibly important, and in the light of that, the Opposition would like to put on record our deepest concerns that the process regarding regulations in the event of no deal is not as accessible and transparent as it should be.

The rationale for these SIs is preparation for a no-deal Brexit—something that continues to be retained on the table by the Conservative Government despite clear evidence of the harm that that is doing to our economy. Last week in this Chamber, I mentioned the concerning slowdown in growth rates and the shift into recession of our manufacturing sector. The financial sector has not been immune; quite the opposite. As many Members will know, Ernst and Young has created what it calls a Brexit tracker, which monitors the public statements of more than 200 of the biggest financial services companies operating in the UK. As of January this year, the tracker showed that more than a third of the financial services companies that were tracked indicated that they are considering moving or have confirmed that they will move some of their staff or operations outside the UK. As we consider these two financial services SIs, we must reflect on why the current Government continue to retain the so-called option of no deal, especially given that the House has emphatically shown its opposition to such an outcome.

The first SI appears to cobble together three sets of legislative changes to a variety of parent legislation. The Minister, as he always does, made a valiant attempt to present a coherent case, but we are talking about three different sets of changes. As with other SIs that the Opposition have contested, the parent legislation includes primary legislation, not least, as the Minister acknowledged, FSMA. Yet again, we see here the operation of Henry VIII powers.

In connection with that, I note that as of last Thursday, 288 changes have been made to FSMA as part of the preparation for no deal. That is an enormous number of changes to primary legislation, and it has been delivered in a completely piecemeal manner. We have no indication of when Government will present us with a finalised and integrated version of the new no-deal legislation,

coupled with the primary legislation that it amends. Perhaps the Minister, in his concluding remarks, can tell us whether his Department has such an overview and, if so, whether it would be willing to share it with the House and the public so that we can better understand what the financial services regulatory system would look like in the event of no deal.

The explanatory notes for the regulations were truly a masterpiece of the kind we have come to know well from no-deal SIs. I note that Her Majesty's Treasury uses the crystal mark on some of its documents. I am sorry to speak so bluntly, but HMT would perhaps have done well to use the crystal mark's drivel detector—its words, not mine—on the explanatory notes. All they did was to list the bits of legislation that were being changed. In no case did they explain why, aside from maintaining that doing so was necessary to address deficiencies. Yet again, we find questionable decisions being taken with no explanation.

Not all the changes in the regulations appear even to relate to the EU. For example, there are changes relating to disclosure requirements and to the Panel on Takeovers and Mergers—in regulation 2—but there is no indication why those changes have been made. Again, definitions are changed, such as that for short selling regulation information, but it is not clear whether that definition will be replaced elsewhere or, indeed, why it had to change in the first place.

Perhaps most worryingly, we see yet again a shift away from EU requirements, which suggests that these measures are potentially going beyond direct transposition and instead diluting existing provisions. For example, the wording of one article of the EU regulation on short selling and certain aspects of credit default swaps—sorry, that is not a lovely name to pronounce—is amended from "shall, where possible" to "may". From my reading, the amended provisions relate to the obligation to liaise with third countries concerning the identification of where shares are traded, but it is not clear why that obligation should be watered down. There is a similar change to the 2014 market abuse regulation, where "shall, where necessary" is altered to "may". It appears that the UK's co-ordination with non-EU countries and its relations with the EU27 are being altered through these measures. The withdrawal Act does not provide the authority to do that.

The Minister appeared to suggest that this was to do with the exchange of confidential information and that we needed to have a different process. Surely, however, there are different ways of responding to the issue; there could have been measures in this legislation to deal with the problems and to ensure that information was appropriately guarded against anybody who might use it in an inappropriate way. However, we do not have that; instead, we have these provisions, with no explanation why.

Relatedly, there is no clear indication of the process to be used to determine which countries might be chosen for the conclusion of disclosure agreements mentioned by the Minister, or of the process required for those agreements. I absolutely agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman). Obviously, she was referring to the overall import of these regulations, but there are other ambiguities about timing. When it comes to the conclusion of disclosure agreements, does the process have to be completed by exit day? If it does, has that process started? If it has started, on whose authority has it started? Presumably, it is not the authority of this House. In addition, it would be helpful to understand why the Government have decided to follow a bilateral approach, rather than one that might have been integrated, with an integrated disclosure agreement that could have been signed with the European Securities and Markets Authority.

Finally, we are again informed that an impact assessment has not been conducted on this instrument, even though the explanatory memorandum states that there has been engagement with relevant stakeholders concerning the SI. It would be helpful if the Minister provided further details about that engagement.

Let me move now to the Money Market Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019—I will just talk about MMFs from now on. Obviously, the regulations are intended to implement the EU's MMF regulation of 2018. As described by the Minister, that regulation was intended to make money market funds more resilient against disturbances in the financial markets, reduce the risks of runs in the markets, limit cross-border contagion and improve investor protection. That regulation immediately applied to new MMFs, from July of last year, but it came into practice for existing MMFs very recently—just last month. I will not go into all the details of the use of MMFs, but I would just add charities to the list the Minister talked about—there are a number of different bodies that use these funds.

The process of creating the regulation was led by a UK Labour MEP in the European Parliament, Neena Gill. As many Members may be aware, the process was controversial; it was not entirely straightforward, and there was huge debate about whether the UK should exactly follow the US approach or not. There was a lot of scepticism about whether the system of MMFs, in and of itself, should be encouraged. Many have described it as a system of shadow banking, because of its relative lack of transparency.

As with other SIs tabled by the Government, there are a number of problems with this legislation. First, it provides a new definition of money market funds that is arguably circular. It describes them as

"instruments normally dealt in on the money market which…satisfy…Article 2a(1)"

of the regulation. That is quite a different approach from the one taken by the EU, even back in the days of the Committee of European Securities Regulators. Before ESMA was created, there was an inclusive list of activities that would lead to classification as an MMF. A different approach is taken here.

Secondly, again as with other pieces of no-deal financial services legislation, there is no indication why and how the FCA, in particular, is meant to adopt the regulatory approach suggested in this SI. Regulation 6 provides it with the power to regulate MMFs, but without explaining how that will impact on its existing activities. The Minister intimated the different kinds of activities that the FCA will have to take on as part of this process, but they are very onerous. Just in relation to reporting templates, ESMA produced a 135-page report after consultation with stakeholders about what should go into those templates. I assume that similar levels of detail might be required for the FCA. This will not be a light-touch area to move into. Again, there is a lack of clarity about the extent of industry consultation on this SI.

[Anneliese Dodds]

As has often been the case with these SIs, we have had some rather strange throwaway comments in relation to this SI. The guidance accompanying it states that it does not include provisions that may be necessary to ensure Gibraltarian financial services firms can have continued access to UK markets in line with the UK Government's statement in March 2018 and other provisions dealing with Gibraltar more generally. It also says that, where necessary, provisions covering Gibraltar will be included in future SIs. Does that mean that provisions for Gibraltar should have been covered but that there just was not time to consider them properly, or is there a procedural reason why they are not covered here? Again, will we need an omnibus SI at some point covering regulatory arrangements for Gibraltarian financial services?

John Glen *indicated assent.*

Anneliese Dodds: I am really pleased to see the Minister nodding, and I look forward to his explanation of why this has been an issue.

Above all, we see secondary legislation being used expansively here, with no overall indication of how it will interact with other pieces of secondary legislation and, indeed, primary legislation. There appears to be no rhyme or reason why the Conservative Government wish certain SIs to be taken on the Floor of the House and others to be taken in Committee—aside, that is, from a desire to fill the timetable for this week, after their mismanagement of the Brexit process. Issues of such importance as our nation's financial stability and resilience surely deserve better than this.

7.7 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called in this important debate. I must say that I am at a bit of a loss as to why the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) has such an issue with these statutory instruments. They are simply about bringing current legislation from the European Union into domestic law; there are no significant policy changes. I was also a little mystified as to why she thought this was an appropriate time to take no deal off the table, particularly when this is such a sensitive time in our negotiations.

I would like to raise a couple of points and to take this opportunity, as we bring this legislation back from the European Union, to press for some sensible changes in regulation, principally to make our regulation more effective. Obviously, some of this legislation gives more power to our regulator—the Financial Conduct Authority. As my hon. Friend the Minister will probably recognise, the FCA has had some shortcomings in terms of its regulatory capability. I would like us to move towards having less of an expectation that the regulator will be responsible for all regulation and more towards giving individuals more power to hold our financial institutions to account.

The FCA will always be a watchdog at best, and not a bloodhound—it cannot be in all places at all times. What I have seen in my role as the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking and finance—a role my hon. Friend the Minister is very familiar with, because we have talked about these issues many times—is the abuses of small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly over the last 10 years. Some 16,000 businesses got very poor treatment from the Royal Bank of Scotland, in particular. At Lloyds HBOS, a number of senior managers ended up going to jail, with a collective sentence of 47 years. Other banks were involved—the CYBG and others—in swaps, interest rate hedging products and payment protection insurance on the consumer side of things.

It was not the regulator that brought those matters to light. Incredibly, 3,500 people work at the FCA and its predecessor, the Financial Services Authority, but it was not those bodies that found out what was going on in the banks; it was determined and committed individuals. A guy called Lawrence Tomlinson, who worked for the Business Secretary at the time, first established what was happening in those financial services organisations and banks, and how they were treating our small businesses. Even when these matters were brought to the attention of the FCA, action was not taken for some years. At HBOS, it was Nikki and Paul Turner who established what was happening. The bank tried to repossess the Turners 22 times, but the regulator did not step in to protect them, even though the evidence that they had produced was later verified and crucial in the investigation and subsequent prosecution. Similarly, at Lloyds HBOS the whistleblower Sally Masterton was disgracefully treated when she brought these matters to the attention of the FCA and the bank. Action was not taken to support her.

We have to try to move away from simply thinking that regulation and regulators can solve all the problems, because they patently do not always do so, and move to a situation in which we give individuals tools to hold the institutions to account. The Minister has done a fine job in persuading the banks to bring forward mechanisms to do that in the historical cases review that will hopefully be brought forward in the not too distant future. UK Finance has come forward with a voluntary scheme—it needs to be voluntary, because many of the cases are outside the statute of limitations. As business banking is not regulated, it also had to use a fair and reasonable test that would not apply in a court of law today. That is welcome progress, although we have some distance to go before we get this right. I thank the Minister for his excellent efforts in persuading UK Finance to come to the table.

The Minister knows that I think that we need to make sure that robust measures are in place alongside the regulator—we are not scrapping the regulator—to allow individual voices to be heard. That is why the all-party group thinks that we should have a financial services tribunal. That proposal has support across the House, and I know that the Minister will continue to look at this. We do not want a huge amount of regulation of commercial lending, because we want to make sure that banks are still confident to lend, but it is reasonable that banks treat their customers fairly and reasonably, and that those principles are actionable if things go wrong. That is not the case at the moment, as he knows, but we want to see that simple change to regulation and a tribunal that works similarly to employment tribunals—if employees are mistreated by an employer, they know they have an affordable mechanism for justice that means they can hold the employer to account. Most employers would do a good job anyway, but they are careful to ensure that they adhere to employment law,

because they know that if they do not they could end up at a tribunal. It is pretty easy for an employee to take a case.

We do not need armies of regulators to regulate employment law. In my business, we do not have an employment regulator coming in to inspect our files. We do not need that: we know that we will be held to account if we get it wrong. The same principle should apply in the business banking world, where there is a huge imbalance of power between banks and businesses. If people have the mechanism to be able to hold the bank to account if things go wrong, we will not need armies of regulators. We simply need a simple process. That is far more important than a regulator.

If I had to choose between the FCA—even though some very fine people work there—and a financial services tribunal, I would take the tribunal every time, and I say that as a business person. Many people I speak to who have lost out through the actions of banks feel the same.

I just sound a note of caution, as we bring this legislation back into domestic law, that we should see this as an opportunity to make banks and other financial organisations more accountable, without being over-burdensome in terms of regulation. That would have a profound effect on confidence between businesses and banks and, therefore, UK plc.

7.15 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am impressed by the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) making a valiant attempt clearly not to stretch the time out, but to make an excellent speech. It was unfortunate that he did not listen a little more carefully to the speech by the Labour spokesperson, who raised the issue of powers that were being changed beyond the scope of simply rewriting the EU law into UK law. Powers are being changed in that regard.

In relation to the disclosure of information SI and to be fair to the people who wrote the explanatory memorandum, there are two whole pages on the deep and special partnerships that the UK desires to have with the EU, although not on the substance of the information in the SI. I commend them for including all that information, although it could have been written in any SI, to be honest.

The instrument redesigns the requirements on EU member states in various pieces of EU legislation that are to be read as applying to the UK after exit, according to a line in the explanatory memorandum, which did not make a huge amount of sense to me. The explanatory memorandum seems to suggest that this UK SI is amending EU legislation that applies to EU countries, which it clearly cannot do, because the UK Parliament does not have the power to amend EU legislation as it applies to other EU countries.

The SI contains some interesting stuff about the requirement to seek the consent of EU organisations and countries before disclosing information. There is currently a requirement for the UK to seek the consent of EU countries before passing on the financial data that it may need to pass on. The SI would remove that requirement. How does that accord with the UK being keen to have a deep and special partnership if it is removing the requirement to seek consent? Removing a requirement to seek consent seems like a bit of an odd thing to do, given that the requirement to seek consent presumably ensures that there are more safeguards in place. We seem to be reducing the number of safeguards in relation to EU countries but not in relation to third countries, because currently we do not need to seek that consent. It is a bizarre thing to do.

My other question is whether the EU has announced plans to change its legislation so that it does not need to seek consent from the UK to pass on financial information. I have raised this issue before and the Minister will know what I am about to say. In some cases, the UK seems to be agreeing on reciprocity—my understanding is that it is on a case-by-case basis by whoever happens to be heading the Department's SIs and there is no overall policy from the Government on whether they will agree EU reciprocity on such matters, but will the EU change its law? Has it signalled its intention to change its law and is that why we are seeking to change our law?

The explanatory memorandum states:

"The UK and the EU have agreed the terms of an implementation period".

I am little confused about the definition of "UK" in this regard. The House certainly has not agreed to the terms of an implementation period. The Prime Minister's deal lost by 230 votes, so we cannot say that it has been agreed. It may have been negotiated, but I would not go so far as to say that it has been agreed. The Prime Minister certainly seems keen to reopen negotiations on the withdrawal agreement, so surely it cannot possibly have been agreed at this point.

The explanatory memorandum states:

"The powers in the EUWA"—

the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018—

"are not intended to be used to make policy changes",

yet the powers in both SIs are being used to do just that, by changing how the law operates, and not just replacing EU regulators with UK regulators. They contain more wide-ranging changes.

The explanatory memorandum states that it would be "inappropriate" to continue sharing information. I am not sure how that would be inappropriate. If we are switching from "shall share information" to "may share information", surely there will be cases in which it would be appropriate to continue sharing information.

I have a question about the co-operation agreements that will potentially be signed for the disclosure of financial information. I am interested to know how much work will be involved in negotiating those co-operation agreements. Clearly we do not have to do any such negotiating with the EU currently because we are part of the single market and of that framework. Brexit will be overwhelmingly bad, whatever happens. Even if we have a deal, we will end up at a huge disadvantage, compared with our current position. On this specific point, how much additional work will be generated as a result of having to negotiate and sign those co-operation agreements, and at how much of a disadvantage will we be put as a result?

I am still dealing with the first SI, on the disclosure of information. The regulations were published in draft on 9 January this year, but the corrections were made less than a week ago, on 12 February. The copy that I got from the Vote Office did not include the corrections, so I had to find them online. I am interested to know why corrections were needed.

John Glen: There were typos.

Kirsty Blackman: If they simply correct typos, that is absolutely fine. I was worried that they might have been the result of concerns raised about the legislation. I welcome that clarification.

The explanatory memorandum states that no consultation was undertaken. Once again, I think that consultation should have been undertaken on the SIs, and particularly the one that makes changes to the legislation. The explanatory memorandum states that no impact assessment was done, but it does say that

"a de minimis impact assessment has been carried out."

This is the first time that I have seen that phrase used in an explanatory memorandum on a financial SI, and I do seem to be spending quite a lot of my life dealing with them—I am sure that the Minister is spending even longer. I do not know what a de minimis impact assessment is, and I do not know where I could find it, because it is certainly not provided on the website. I can find no further information on this thing that has apparently been done to assess the impact.

We have criticised the Government before for not carrying out impact assessments. I think that it would have been useful to have an impact assessment on this. In fact, I fully intend to challenge the Government on this. They carry out an impact assessment only when there is likely to be an impact of £5 million or more on businesses. They do not carry out impact assessments when there is likely to be an impact of millions, or indeed hundreds of millions, on consumers or individuals living anywhere in these islands. It strikes me that, according to the Government's own better regulation guidance, this process is entirely unfit for purpose, given that it involves literally hundreds of SIs coming through, many of which could do with an impact assessment.

I will move on to the Money Market Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which is a no-deal SI. The Labour spokesperson made a comment about taking no deal off the table. *[Interruption.]* Mr Deputy Speaker, it would be easier to speak if it was a little quieter in the Chamber. We are not asking the Government to take no deal off the table now—the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton said that we were doing so at a critical point in the negotiations; we have been asking them to take no deal off the table pretty much since the Brexit process started, because it should never have been an option in the first place. We are not asking for it to be done now; we were asking for it to be done almost three years ago.

The regulations also change the powers of the Financial Conduct Authority. I have raised concerns before about the powers of the FCA, and the fact that the Government are making piecemeal changes without any kind of overall strategy on what they expect it to look like at the end of the process. I know that the FCA can request more money from Parliament, and I assume that it will have to do so in order to carry out the additional functions that are being delegated to it as a result of all the SIs coming through.

The explanatory memorandum for the money market funds regulations states that HM Treasury will have

"the power to make delegated acts specifying quantitative and qualitative liquidity requirements on MMFs."

I would appreciate it if the Minister could seek some divine intervention on this and let us know how those delegated acts will be introduced. Will SIs be introduced under the affirmative or negative resolution procedure, or will the Treasury simply be allowed to make its own regulations without any recourse to Parliament? It would be useful if Parliament were across this, given that it is an area that Parliament is not in the habit of dealing with, because it has been an EU area. I think that, in the event of no deal, Parliament would benefit from having some input into those requirements on MMFs.

The commencement provisions for both SIs state that they will take effect on "exit day." Now, I understand that exit day is defined in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act, which sets out a definite date and time. I am told that the SIs that refer to "exit day" mean that date and time. However, the withdrawal Act also gives the Government the power to vary exit day. If the Government vary exit day, presumably the SIs would come into effect only on the day that they have decided is to be exit day.

I want to know what will happen if we approve these SIs. The process is as follows. If an SI is approved, it does not get Royal Assent—that is not something that happens to SIs. Instead, it basically sits in a pile of SIs that are waiting to be "made", and they are "made" at a date and time of the Government's choosing. I was unable to get any further information on that, other than that it is the Government who decide—is it the Cabinet Office or the Prime Minister?

When we were asked to approve these SIs, I genuinely thought that the first one was not to do with a no-deal Brexit, because nowhere in the explanatory memorandum could I find the words "no deal". The second SI, however, is very clearly to do with no deal. We are being asked to approve the money market funds regulations, which the explanatory notes state will come into effect only if there is no deal, but there is nothing to stop the Government from making this SI, or indeed any other, at a time of their own choosing; it would then apply after exit day. The House of Commons is basically being asked to agree to all these SIs coming into force on exit day, and then the Government have carte blanche to make any of them whenever they desire.

The Minister and I were both a little confused about the provisions of the disclosure of information regulations, given that I thought they applied in any circumstance. I am not sure what will happen if there is a deal now, because I do not know how the disclosure of financial information will work, because we have not been provided with an SI that works in the event of a deal scenario—surely we should have been, because there would be deficiencies in EU law.

What happens in that event? How do the Government decide when to make these SIs? If there is a deal, will they suddenly rush through provisions? The House of Commons has so many SIs in front of it, and we are now only dealing with no-deal SIs. In the event of a deal, will we have a mad situation where the Government have to make edits to each of these SIs and bring them through the House again so that we can approve them, followed by some sort of procedure to put them in place?

There have been screw-ups of monumental proportions in relation to everything to do with Brexit. Specifically in terms of the SI process, we have not seen all the SIs for a no-deal scenario. Apparently we will not even see some of the SIs for a deal scenario until the Prime Minister

manages to get something through the House, and who knows when that may be? Are we going to continue with this shambles? For people who are interested in House of Commons procedure, it is wonderful to see it not working. It is great to see the millions of places where House of Commons procedure is completely deficient, and it is particularly great to be able to discuss these SIs and raise those issues on the Floor of the House.

I understood that the disclosure regulations were for the event of any deal or no deal. If they are only for the event of no deal, what information will the Minister provide about that? What information will he provide about the powers of the FCA and what it will look like in future? How will he ensure that the FCA is adequately funded to fulfil its obligations? Lastly, these two SIs and all the other financial services SIs we have seen have not been adequately consulted on, and I would appreciate it if the Minister commented on the consultation process.

7.32 pm

John Glen: I have listened carefully to the hon. Members for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) and for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), and I will endeavour to respond substantively to their points as succinctly as I can.

Before I get into the detail, it is important to set the context. The Treasury's role is to take through the House the statutory instruments, 53 of which relate to financial services, that would be needed in a no-deal scenario, as well as the in-flight files Bill. Those two activities constitute the Treasury's necessary intervention to ensure that if a deal is not forthcoming—obviously, the Government's expectation and what we are working towards is that one will be—we will have a functioning regulatory regime in place. These two SIs sit underneath the powers taken in the withdrawal Act, and they do not seek to change the legislative effect. They seek to onshore legislation that already operates through our membership of the EU.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): The Minister has talked a lot about the importance of financial services, and I completely agree with that. There is often a perception that financial services are all London-centric, but the insurance industry, for example, employs 300,000 people, and two thirds of those are around the UK. It is fair to say that getting this legislation right will protect all our constituents across the country.

John Glen: My hon. Friend is right: 63% of the 1.1 million jobs in financial services are outside London. It is important that we have this provision in a no-deal situation.

The hon. Member for Oxford East opened her remarks with concerns about the purpose of a debate on the Floor of the House. I am happy to have a debate on the Floor of the House or in Committee tomorrow morning, tomorrow afternoon, Wednesday morning or Wednesday afternoon, just as I was happy to have the debate last week on securitisation, which was also a business-as-usual SI.

A range of points have been raised, and I am happy to try to tackle them. The hon. Member for Oxford East talked about there being no policy explanation in the explanatory memorandum for the disclosure regulations. The explanatory memorandum clearly sets out the reasons for the amendments, which are essentially to make consistent the safeguards that apply to EEA and non-EEA regulators. She asked about the consolidated text not being available for the debate. It is not normal practice for the Government to provide consolidated text for secondary legislation debates, but I will look carefully at her remarks and write to her if I can give any more clarification.

The hon. Lady asked about the reliance on secondary legislation. As I said, the central objective of the SIs is to provide legislative continuity as far as possible for firms, and the withdrawal Act does not allow policy changes beyond what is necessary to ensure that legislation is operable on day one of leaving the EU. I note the areas where she alleges that there is that effect. I will look carefully at that and give her more clarification if I can, as I have always done in our debates in Committee.

The SIs are subject to the usual scrutiny provided by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee. Additionally, in the case of financial services SIs, the Treasury has taken the step of publishing drafts of the legislation in advance of laying, to maximise transparency about the provisions and ensure that stakeholders are aware of the changes. I note the hon. Lady's comments about the EY report, and I also recall the remarks of the deputy governor of the Bank of England, Sam Woods, with respect to contingency arrangements made by firms in the City. That is broadly being played out at the moment. It is an uncomfortable process, which is why it is imperative for us to get the deal that is the Government's policy, although it is right that we make these arrangements in case that does not happen.

The hon. Members for Oxford East and for Aberdeen North asked about the impact assessment of the disclosure regulations. The legislation on the disclosure of confidential information primarily relates to how the UK, EEA and third country authorities disclose confidential information with one another. There is nothing in these regulations that will require firms to change how they do business.

The definition of money market funds has been updated to reflect that, in a no-deal scenario, only those funds that have been authorised under this UK regulation at this point may use the strict designation of money market funds—the hon. Member for Oxford East rightly explained the genesis of it—and to allow those funds that are permitted through the temporary permissions regime to use that designation.

The hon. Members for Oxford East and for Aberdeen North also asked about the FCA's resourcing. For the House's edification, the FCA has a total of 158 full-time employees working on Brexit; that number increased from 28 in March last year. The hon. Member for Oxford East asked about Gibraltar. The SI dealing with Gibraltar has been laid and will be debated in due course.

I have addressed a number of the common themes raised by the hon. Members for Oxford East and for Aberdeen North. I will now briefly turn to the comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton. He used the debate to rehearse some of his normal themes about bank regulation. I always listen carefully to what he says. We had a conversation last week, and I will write to him on the matter he raised and reflect carefully on his comments.

[John Glen]

These SIs are required to ensure safe disclosure of confidential information in the event that the UK leaves the EU without an agreement, that the regulation of money market funds continues and that the legislation functions appropriately if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. The approach taken in these SIs aligns with other SIs that we have laid and will ensure a smooth transition, to reflect the UK's new position outside the EU. I hope that Members across the House will join me in supporting them in the Lobby.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 201, Noes 150.

Division No. 334] [7.39 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Burns, Conor
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Collins, Damian
Davies, Chris
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Jack, Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
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
Lancaster, rh Mark
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
McPartland, Stephen
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Pincher, rh Christopher
Prisk, Mr Mark
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Alok
Simpson, David
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jo Churchill and Michelle Donelan

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman, Kirsty
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Cooper, Rosie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Davey, rh Sir Edward
Davies, Geraint

Day, Martyn
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Flint, rh Caroline
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hussain, Imran
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Lake, Ben
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly *(Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami)*
Madders, Justin
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onn, Melanie
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Perkins, Toby
Platt, Jo
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Wilson, Phil
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Noes:
Bambos Charalambous and Thangam Debbonaire

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Public Record, Disclosure of Information and Co-operation (Financial Services) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 21 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Money Market Funds (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 24 January, be approved.—*(John Glen.)*

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 150.

Division No. 335] [7.53 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Burns, Conor
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Collins, Damian
Davies, Chris
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Jack, Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
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
Lancaster, rh Mark
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian

Lidington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
McPartland, Stephen
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Pincher, rh Christopher
Prisk, Mr Mark
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Alok
Simpson, David
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jo Churchill and Michelle Donelan

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman, Kirsty
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, rh Liam
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Cooper, Rosie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Davey, rh Sir Edward
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Flint, rh Caroline
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hussain, Imran
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly *(Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*
Madders, Justin
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onn, Melanie
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Perkins, Toby
Platt, Jo
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Wilson, Phil
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Noes:
Bambos Charalambous and Thangam Debbonaire

Question accordingly agreed to.

Exiting the European Union (Mediation)

8.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): I beg to move,

That the draft Cross-Border Mediation (EU Directive) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 21 January 2019, be approved.

This draft instrument forms part of our ongoing work to ensure that if the UK leaves the EU without a deal our legal system will continue to work effectively for our citizens. It is solely related to our no deal preparations. If Parliament approves the withdrawal agreement, which includes an implementation period, and passes the necessary legislation to implement that agreement, the Government would defer the coming into force of this instrument until the end of that implementation period. Once a deal and our future relationship with the EU had been reached, we would review whether this instrument needed to be amended or revoked.

This statutory instrument relates to mediation. That is a process whereby parties to a dispute attempt voluntarily to reach an agreement to settle their dispute with the assistance of a mediator but without a court needing to rule on it. In the civil and commercial field such a dispute might for instance relate to a contract, a debt or contact with children.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): As my hon. and learned Friend knows, I am hoping to become an associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitration. I have spent much of my political life championing mediation as a means of settling disputes. To what extent are the Government committed to mediation for the future as a result of these measures?

Lucy Frazer: My hon. Friend is a member of the Justice Committee and has taken part in many debates on this subject. I know he has extensive experience of arbitration as well as mediation. I am very pleased that he is planning to go further on that. He must rest assured that the Government remain committed to mediation. It is a very important tool in the armoury to help people to resolve their disputes. Outwith this statutory instrument and the EU rules that we already have, as I will go on to explain, we have very strong domestic provision for mediation, and that will continue. The reason to bring forward this statutory instrument and the approach we have adopted is that the current arrangement with the EU is reciprocal and that following our leaving the EU we cannot rely on any reciprocity. This statutory instrument will therefore revoke the EU legislation.

In 2018, the European Council agreed a cross-border mediation directive which sought to harmonise certain aspects of mediation in relation to EU member state cross-border disputes. The aim of the mediation directive is to promote the use of mediation in such cross-border disputes. An EU cross-border dispute can be one between parties who are domiciled or habitually resident in two or more different member states, or it can be a dispute where judicial proceedings or arbitration are started in a member state other than the one where the parties are living. The UK, as a member state, enacted domestic legislation which gave effect to certain aspects of the mediation directive. I say certain aspects, because in many areas, such as ensuring the quality of mediation or information about mediation to the public, our existing arrangements already met the requirements or standards set out in the directive. However, to implement the directive the UK had to introduce some new rules for EU cross-border mediations involving UK parties.

The new rules first specify that if a time limit in a domestic law during which a claim could be brought in a court or tribunal expired during the mediation process, the parties could still seek a remedy through the courts or tribunals should the mediation not be successful. Secondly, the new rules define the rights of a mediator or someone involved in the administration of mediation to resist giving evidence in civil or judicial proceedings arising from information disclosed during a mediation. Various changes were also made to court rules to supplement the changes and to implement the requirements of the mediation directive relating to enforceability of agreements resulting from mediation.

Under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the legislation implementing the mediation directive is retained EU law upon the UK's exit from the EU. However, should the UK leave the EU without an agreement on civil judicial co-operation, the reciprocity on which the directive relies will be lost. Even if we were to continue to apply the enhanced EU rules to EU cross-border disputes, we would be unable to ensure that the remaining EU member states applied the rules of the directive to cross-border disputes involving parties based in the UK or judicial proceedings or arbitration taking place in the UK that were not otherwise in scope.

Accordingly, and in line with the Government's general approach to civil judicial co-operation in the event of no deal, this instrument will repeal, subject to transitional provisions, the legislation that gives effect to the mediation directive's rules on confidentiality and extension of limitation periods. It amends the relevant retained EU law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland—in so far as it relates to reserved matters. Separate instruments will amend the related court rules in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is other legislation implementing the directive that is within the legislative competence of the Scottish Government, and I understand that they have decided to bring forward their own legislation in this area.

Turning to the impacts, this instrument is necessary to fix the statute book in the event of a no-deal exit. We have assessed its impact and have published an impact assessment. By repealing the domestic legislation that gave effect to the mediation directive, we will ensure clarity in the law applying to mediations between UK parties and parties domiciled or habitually resident in EU member states. We will also avoid a situation where mediations of an EU cross-border dispute conducted in the UK are subject to different rules on confidentiality or limitation from other UK mediations.

As I indicated, the instrument will change only the rules applying to what are currently EU cross-border mediations, and only in two respects: time limits and confidentiality. On time limits, claimants involved in such mediations who no longer have the benefit of an extended limitation period would, if they wanted more time to allow for mediation to take place, be able to make an application to the court and ask it to stay proceedings. Overall, this instrument will ensure that, post EU exit, UK-EU mediations are treated consistently

[Lucy Frazer]

under the law with mediations between UK-domiciled or habitually resident parties, or UK parties and parties domiciled or habitually resident in non-EU third countries.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): As I read it, fundamentally, for people who are seeking mediation, there will not be much change if the instrument is enacted.

Lucy Frazer: That is precisely the position. All that is happening with this SI is that we are going back to the position before the directive was implemented. It was implemented in 2011, so it has been in place for only a number of years, and we will still have all the rules that regulate domestic mediations, which take place across the country in various jurisdictions. This measure will impact only two very small areas—time limits and confidentiality—and as my hon. Friend highlighted, much will remain the same.

As I have set out, without a deal in place on 29 March 2019, certain EU cross-border mediations involving UK-domiciled parties—except for those that had started before exit—would no longer be subject to the mediation directive rules in EU member states. The Cross-Border Mediation (EU Directive) (EU Exit) Regulations fix that deficiency and ensure that both the courts and UK citizens have clear and effective rules to follow during a cross-border mediation dispute.

8.13 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Across Parliament and throughout the legal sector, there is serious concern that the Government's inadequate planning for justice co-operation after Brexit puts the most vulnerable people in our society at risk. The Chair of the Lords EU Justice Sub-Committee took the step of writing to the Secretary of State in October to criticise his lack of planning and warned:

"The government needs to wake up to the reality of what having no answers on family justice will mean after Brexit."

Many people are concerned that the Government's failure to secure agreement on a form of continued participation in the European arrest warrant will leave us less safe.

We currently benefit from a well-established, frequently updated and comprehensive set of reciprocal justice arrangements with the EU. These cover everything from disputes over child custody to medical negligence abroad. As a recent House of Lords European Union Committee report states, these specific EU regulations provide "certainty, predictability and clarity". Without an agreement with our European partners on what the future of those reciprocal arrangements looks like after we leave the EU, people who are forced to go to court or mediation to protect their rights could face extremely damaging consequences. Whatever claims the Minister makes about the secondary legislation that the Tories are bringing in, the Opposition need to see concrete action, not words, to defend rights, because we simply do not trust the Government to protect working people's rights.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The shadow Minister puts a lot of store in comments made by various House of Lords Sub-Committees on this statutory instrument. Will he tell us whether the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments raised any objections to it?

Imran Hussain: A number of objections have been raised, as I have set out, but the bottom line is that these regulations repeal legislation and mean effectively that the higher European standards will not be followed and that, instead, lower international standards will be.

Bob Stewart: But I thought I just heard the Minister say that in the matter of mediation, there will be very little difference, and that is what we are talking about: mediation.

Imran Hussain: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman is right; we are talking about mediation. The Minister will know, and rightly pointed out, that there are two issues: time limits and confidentiality. This statutory instrument will repeal legislation that allows for extra time for that mediation, so that is substantially different. Perhaps the Minister can clarify that position in her closing remarks, because my understanding is that there is a substantial difference.

This statutory instrument would revoke and repeal the domestic legislation that enshrined in law the mediation directive. Many Members will be unfamiliar with the purpose of the mediation directive, but it is one of many examples whereby, through co-operation with our European partners, we have raised legal standards and protections across Europe. The European Statutory Instruments Committee—as raised by the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood)—considered whether this instrument could diminish rights. It found that it

"repeals legislation that extends the time limit for bringing certain claims in civil courts and employment tribunals to enable mediation".

Some people may claim that legislation setting out the time limits for bringing civil claims is a minor issue, but it can have substantial real-world consequences. It could mean the difference between people being able to reach a mediated solution to a child contact case or not. The Government's explanatory memorandum makes it clear that maintaining the standards of the mediation directive was an option available to the Government, but they have not sought to maintain the highest possible standards in all circumstances.

Why has the Minister not sought to maintain the highest possible standards? Can she guarantee today that if the statutory instrument passes and we move away from the high European mediation standards, people who rely on mediation for a family law matter—for example, a dispute over custody of a child—will be no worse off than they would have been had the mediation been conducted under the current European standards? I wait for her response, but she knows that the answer to that question is no.

For decades now, people from across the UK have travelled, lived and done business across Europe, safe in the knowledge that if something goes wrong they will be protected by legal systems that work, and work together. Many people from elsewhere in Europe have made their lives in the UK—some have started families, some created businesses, others are working in the NHS and other vital services—and they, too, trusted that they could rely on cross-border legal co-operation if something went wrong. That is why the Government's failure to secure full judicial co-operation after we leave the EU is so damaging—it puts people's rights at risk by lowering standards—and that is why we will vote against the SI. We in the Opposition know the Tories cannot be trusted to defend people's rights.

8.20 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Since that fateful day in June 2016, the Scottish National party has consistently raised justice co-operation post Brexit. No mitigation can replicate the arrangements we have as members of the EU. On the face of it, this statutory instrument seems less important than the grand examples of fleeing businesses, uncertainty about medicine supply chains and failed shipping contracts with firms with no ferries that result in millions of pounds being wasted, but it remains an important and undeniable example of utterly pointless self-harm. In this SI, the UK is willingly taking a course of action that will put both British and EU citizens in a worse position. Jim Cormack, QC, of Pinsent Masons, has said:

"The significance of the repeal is perhaps more symbolic as it explicitly recognises that Brexit results in the end of reciprocity in this respect between the UK and the relevant remaining member states of the EU".

Scotland has a separate legal system and approach to justice that is closely integrated with EU law, so the SI applies to Scotland only in a limited way. As the Minister identified, Scotland will legislate separately to repeal the relevant provisions within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, including on court rules. Nevertheless, this is a significant SI, as it flows directly from the UK Government's decision to leave the EU without showing due regard to the fact to two nations of this so-called precious Union of equals voted to remain—Scotland emphatically so.

Scotland is, then, being ripped out of the EU against its will, and I have serious concerns about the impact this will have on our justice system, which I remind the House has always been separate and distinct—even if the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) was unaware of this fact when he visited Scotland recently. Over the past 40 years, EU law has become woven into the fabric of both Scots and UK law, and this has overwhelmingly been to our benefit, yet, even though these effective arrangements for judicial co-operation benefit victims, families, businesses and communities in Scotland and elsewhere in the EU, they face being repealed or are under serious threat.

What makes this worse is that throughout the whole Brexit process the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and all our civic organisations have been roundly ignored, while the Prime Minister ploughs on with the least popular Westminster initiative since the poll tax. No attempt has been made to win over Scotland or even to listen to any of the concerns expressed in the country, which raises certain questions. For example, what consultation was carried out in Scotland with the Scottish Government, the Law Society or any other civic body?

8.23 pm

Lucy Frazer: I thank hon. Members for their important contributions, and I will respond briefly to some of the points raised. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), made broad criticisms of the Department's justice planning, but we in the Department take our governmental responsibilities very seriously. We have laid before Parliament several SIs for no-deal planning, many of which we have debated and passed; we have the £17 million from the Treasury to prepare; and we are liaising and working with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service and the judiciary to ensure that we are ready should we leave on 29 March without a deal. That said, the best way to avoid a no-deal outcome is to approve the Prime Minister's deal. That is why I voted for it. If the hon. Gentleman would like to avoid a no-deal exit on 29 March, that option is open to him as well.

I will deal now with the shadow Minister's specific points about the SI. We have always had very high mediation standards. Domestic mediations take place across the country in a wide range of jurisdictions; they did so to a high standard before this directive came into force a few years ago; and they will maintain those high standards when we leave the EU. As I said in my opening speech, we are revoking the EU directive because we cannot rely on reciprocity in the future—that is the approach we have taken in our SIs—and where we will not get reciprocity, we are revoking the instruments by which we are currently bound.

Imran Hussain: Will the Minister confirm that as a direct result of the SI standards will be lowered, particularly with regard to mediation, because time limits will be reduced?

Lucy Frazer: If someone wants to stop a time limit running in mediation, they need only issue proceedings before a court, because that stops time running. If someone issues proceedings and asks for a stay of those proceedings, time stops running. That measure is available to people in mediation.

I will respond to the few points made by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). I recognise that the Scottish system is a distinct legal system, but I challenge his claim that we have ignored the Scottish Government. I was in Scotland—in Edinburgh—two weeks ago sitting with members of the Scottish Government and other devolved Administrations, and I was pleased to hear Scottish Ministers praise my Department for our work at official level liaising with them on matters of justice. We have, then, been working hard to involve the devolved Administrations in these measures.

For those reasons, and because it will maintain clear and effective rules for our courts and citizens to follow during challenging EU cross-border mediations, I commend the instrument to the House.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 198, Noes 137.

Division No. 336] [8.27 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Beresford, Sir Paul
Afolami, Bim	Berry, Jake
Afriyie, Adam	Bowie, Andrew
Allan, Lucy	Bradley, Ben
Allen, Heidi	Bradley, rh Karen
Amess, Sir David	Brady, Sir Graham
Argar, Edward	Braverman, Suella
Atkins, Victoria	Brereton, Jack
Bacon, Mr Richard	Bridgen, Andrew
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Brokenshire, rh James
Baker, Mr Steve	Bruce, Fiona
Baldwin, Harriett	Burns, Conor
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Campbell, Mr Gregory

Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Collins, Damian
Davies, Chris
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Frazer, Lucy
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Jack, Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
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
Lancaster, rh Mark
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
McPartland, Stephen
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Pincher, rh Christopher
Prisk, Mr Mark
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Alok
Simpson, David
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William

Tellers for the Ayes:
Michelle Donelan and Jo Churchill

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman, Kirsty
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Cooper, Rosie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Davey, rh Sir Edward
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Flint, rh Caroline
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hussain, Imran
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lee, Karen
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly *(Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami)*
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Perkins, Toby
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve

Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Nick
Snell, Gareth
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberryp, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wilson, Phil
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Noes:
Thangam Debbonaire and Bambos Charalambous

Question accordingly agreed to.

Serious Violence

8.38 pm

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

That this House has considered serious violence.

We cannot ignore the rise of serious violence. Already this year we have seen seven fatal stabbings on London's streets. I have met families of victims and seen at first hand the devastation that brutal violence can cause. I have seen police on the frontline working flat out to make our streets safer, and we must of course all do that we can to help them.

As Home Secretary, my No. 1 priority is to keep Britain safe. To do this, I am tackling serious violence head-on. As the threat has increased, so too has our response. I have listened to expert advice and acted wherever and whenever I could. I have been relentless in this mission so far, but it is clear that more must be done to stop this senseless slaughter; for the sake of all our young people, we are determined to deliver. That is why we published our serious violence strategy last April. We set out a tough law enforcement response that made it clear that this alone was not enough.

The strategy placed a strong focus on prevention and early intervention, preventing young people from being drawn into violence in the first place. It stressed the importance of a multi-agency response, with education, health, social services, housing, youth services and others all playing a part. The strategy also pinpointed the importance of tackling the drivers of serious violence, including the changes in drugs markets. Changes in the way drugs dealers operate and the rise of county lines gangs are fuelling the brutality on our streets. Social media also play a part, with gangs taunting each other online and ratcheting up tension and the risk of reprisal attacks. The strategy addressed those and other risk factors, such as exclusion from school. It set out our plans to do all we can to reduce serious violence.

We are delivering on the commitments we made in the strategy, and we are doing much more. I would like to take this opportunity to update the House on some of the progress we have made so far. First, we are tackling the root causes of violence and investing in our young people's future. Our early intervention youth fund of £22 million is already supporting 29 projects in England and Wales, and more than £17 million has already been allocated to projects delivering interventions to young people at risk of criminal involvement, gang exploitation or county lines. The remainder of the money has been earmarked to help young people over the next two years. Indeed, our investment is increasing, with an additional £200 million for the youth endowment fund.

Secondly, we are taking a multi-agency public health approach to tackling violent crime. Cracking down on serious violence will take the whole of society: everyone has to play a part, so in October I launched this comprehensive new approach. This was underpinned by a package of measures including the youth endowment fund and the independent drugs misuse review. We will consult shortly on a new statutory duty on all Government Departments and public agencies to tackle serious violence. This will ensure that the whole of the public sector is playing its part to the max, working together on serious violence with everyone treating it as a priority.

[Sajid Javid]

Thirdly, we have introduced the Offensive Weapons Bill. We are taking a tough law enforcement approach to ensure that those who turn to violence have nowhere to hide. The Bill will close the net around violent criminals by giving the police more powers to tackle knives, acids and firearms. It will make it harder for young people to possess and purchase these dangerous weapons. The Bill will shortly complete its passage through the House of Lords.

Fourthly, I have announced the introduction of knife crime prevention orders. I have been clear that I will not sit back and wait another decade for the current cycle of violence to end. We continue to look at what more we can do, so no options are off the table if they can save lives. The police asked for this extra tool, so I intend to introduce these orders through an amendment to the Bill. Some people have expressed concerns, and I understand that. They have suggested that the orders are designed to criminalise young people, but that is absolutely not the case. The orders will be preventive, not a punishment. They will enable the police and other agencies to help those who are most vulnerable to carrying a knife to escape a life of escalating violence.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does this mean that when a person has a knife crime prevention order placed against their name, a police officer will be able to come along and check that they are not carrying a knife, just in a random way?

Sajid Javid: I would not quite say that it will be in a random way. The orders can be placed only with the permission of the courts. A police officer will suggest that an order is placed on an individual, but the courts will independently oversee that. The orders can carry a number of restrictions. They will be used, for example, in cases where the police believe there is a high risk of an individual being drawn into carrying knives and even using them, perhaps because he or she has been hanging out with the wrong kind of people, including those who have already been convicted of gang membership, carrying knives or serious violence. The measures will allow the police to ensure that the order is being observed, but I would not use the phrase "in a random way".

Bob Stewart: I thank my right hon. Friend for letting me intervene again to rephrase my question. I do not mean stopping someone in a "random" way, but in a checking way to ensure that the knife crime prevention order is working and that, if the police are worried, they can stop the person and just check him or her.

Sajid Javid: I agree. My hon. Friend puts it appropriately. It is worth taking this opportunity to emphasise that the whole purpose of the order is to prevent people, especially young people, from being drawn into a life of crime in the first place. It is a preventive measure. The police have asked for it and it is supported by the Mayor of London. The serious violence taskforce has discussed it with experts, and it should be considered carefully by the House.

Fifthly, we are doing what we can to dismantle county lines—a horrific and often highly violent form of criminal child exploitation. We have provided £3.6 million to establish a new national county lines co-ordination centre. This will enhance intelligence sharing across the country to ensure that vulnerable children are being identified and safeguarded, and we are already starting to see some good results. Since the centre became fully operational in September, it has carried out two separate weeks of co-ordinated national action, resulting in over 1,100 arrests and 1,000 individuals safeguarded.

Sixthly, we are supporting the police response to serious violence. We know that the demands on police are high, and rising violent crime is stretching them even further. That is why we are giving them the support they need, raising police funding by up to £970 million next year, including council tax. I am delighted that police and crime commissioners collectively plan to strengthen their forces as a result and are consulting on plans to use their additional funding to recruit 2,800 officers. This will help to fight serious violence on the ground. It represents the biggest uplift in police funding since 2010, yet it is notable that some Members did not vote for the settlement.

We continue to back Operation Spectre—co-ordinated national police action on knife crime. The results of this latest drive speak for themselves, with over 1,000 arrests and more than 9,000 knives already taken off the streets. In addition, last year I announced £1.4 million to support a new national police hub to tackle gang-related activity online. It will be fully operational from May, focusing on disrupting criminality and referring content to social media companies to be removed. These companies must be prepared to do much more, and I have already been very clear that I am prepared to legislate if they do not play their part.

Finally, we are acting to tackle the drivers of serious violence. As part of our public health package, I launched an independent drugs misuse review to investigate how the trade is fuelling serious violence. Earlier this month I appointed Professor Dame Carol Black to lead that vital work, and I take this opportunity to thank her for her efforts.

I hope the importance that I place on tackling serious violence is very clear. I have no greater priority than saving lives, providing peace of mind that our loved ones will be safe when they step out the door, and making everyone feel secure on our streets. I have set out our approach and the range of work that is under way to try to achieve those aims, how that has been stepped up since I became Home Secretary, and how we will continue to strive to do more. This Conservative Government are clear that this senseless violence must stop, and we will do everything in our power to make sure that happens. I commend this motion to the House.

8.49 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Few aspects of crime frighten our constituents more than violent crime. The sad truth is that, under this Government, violent crime continues to spiral.

I begin by declaring a personal interest and concern. I have been an MP in the heart of the east end for 30 years. I am immensely proud of being a Hackney MP. It is an amazing community, and we lead the way in tech, fashion, fine art, music and all types of culture, but a person cannot live and work in Hackney for the number of years I have and not be aware of the harsh reality of violent crime. For my constituents and me, violent crime is not just a newspaper story but the cause of tragic incidents that haunt friends and neighbours and regularly scar our community.

Let me remind the House of the parameters of the violent crime wave we face. The latest data from the Office for National Statistics reveal that violent crime soared 19% to 1.5 million offences in the year to last September. Consider that for a moment: it equates to an average of more than 4,000 offences a day. The ONS also reports that it includes a 14% rise in homicides and an 8% rise in knife crime, which equates to 110 knife offences daily. Murder and manslaughter are at their highest levels for more than a decade.

The Home Secretary sometimes tries to hide behind the fact that the rising figures are the result of better reporting and recording. That may be a factor for some types of crime, but the ONS says:

"We have also seen increases in some types of 'lower-volume, high-harm' violence including offences involving knives or sharp instruments."

To look at the issue of violent crime from another perspective, there has been a 15% increase in the number of hospital admissions in England for assaults involving a sharp instrument. That is not better police recording; it is our A&E units across the country being swamped by the effects of serious violence. In fact, a report published by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in 2014 found that violent offences had actually been substantially under-recorded by 33% nationally. We are in the middle of a crisis.

Behind the statistics are a thousand personal tragedies: the victims of violence; the people who have been robbed or attacked on the street; the innocent young men and women caught up in the crossfire in a club or on the street where they live; the vulnerable young people caught up in the drugs trade, and possibly the county lines phenomenon; the mothers who lie awake most nights until their son or daughter returns home; the parents who dread the phone call from the police or the hospital to tell them that a family member has come to harm; and the young men who will never come home again.

As the Home Secretary reminds us, almost a year ago his predecessor launched the new Home Office serious violence strategy. The strategy has many theoretical elements that the Opposition would support, but we contend whether the money made available for it actually offsets all the cuts in local government funding that have contributed to the crime wave we now see. I will return to that subject.

Ministers' responses to violent crime have included calling for more stop-and-search, knife crime prevention orders and asking the internet companies to stop videos that glorify violence. All those ideas have their merits, but I stress to the House that random, non-evidence-based stop-and-search has never worked. Properly targeted stop-and-search can play its part in reducing crime but, in New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio got rid of what they call "stop and frisk" altogether and crime went down.

When she was Home Secretary, the current Prime Minister came to the realisation that random stop-and-search does not work, because that is what the Home Office's own research reveals. The Opposition can only speculate on how long it will take the current Home Secretary to come to that understanding.

There were also concerns about knife crime prevention orders. We have to contemplate that, on the grounds purely of suspicion, people as young as 12 will be targeted, put on a curfew and prevented from accessing the internet. There are already laws against the carrying of knives, threatening to use them and actually using them, but there is a problem with enforcing those laws. That issue relates to police numbers and person power, and I will return to that point.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): The shadow Home Secretary is mentioning powers against knife crime and enforcing them. Does she believe it was wrong for the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor to oppose the change in legislation in 2014 that means anyone caught carrying a knife twice would face a custodial sentence?

Ms Abbott: The idea that the answer to knife crime is a simplistic multiplication of the sentence mistakes the drivers behind knife crime, which I will come to later in my remarks.

The new orders stopping young people from accessing the internet appear reasonable at first sight, but have Ministers never heard of young people creating multiple online identities? Labour Members have grave concerns about how these orders will be used, with the possibility that they will target poor communities, and black and minority ethnic boys and girls. We have yet to be given the reassurances that care will be taken to ensure that particular communities and groups of young people will not be unfairly targeted.

I agree with the Home Secretary that the internet giants have a role to play here in the type of material they allow, but, as he will know, that is true in respect of all sorts of crimes, from online fraud to child pornography and terrorism. All of that is too easy online, and the Government must do more than have a cosy chat with the companies that allow it. So I was glad to hear him say that he is actually prepared to act. It is long overdue for the Government to use their powers against companies that fail to act on these issues.

However, the underlying problem with violent crime is that there is also a crisis in policing. It is all very well for the Home Secretary to say that the police are having the biggest increase in grant since 2010, but this Government and their predecessors since 2010 have imposed austerity policies on the police, as they have done in every other area of our public services.

The result is there for all to see: since 2010, 21,000 policemen and women have been axed by Tory-led Governments of one kind or another. That has undermined the entire capacity of the police services in this country to tackle crime of all types, including violent crime. Community policing has been decimated. Every MP in this debate, on either side of the House, will know of the negative consequences that the fall in police numbers has had in their area: the lower police presence; the decimation of community policing; tardiness in responding to 999 calls, with them sometimes not getting replied to until the next day; and the resultant fall in public confidence.

The Home Secretary talks about increasing investment, but the cuts across almost every other area of public spending have helped to fuel the rise in crime, including the rise in violent crime. Those cuts, particularly as they fall on local authorities, have exacerbated the causes of crime. They include the crisis in housing, growing inequality, and the crisis in our schools, including school exclusions. Too many pupil referral units are just academies for crime.

[Ms Abbott]

A one-time director general of the Prison Service who went on to head Barnardo's, Martin Narey, said that on the day when a child is expelled from school, we might as well give them a date and time to turn up at prison. Ministers have to pay more attention to this pipeline from educational failure—school failure—to the world of crime. The other issues that help to promote criminality are the hopeless job prospects for many of our young people, the collapse of the youth service in many areas of the country and the crisis in mental health care.

When we ask senior police officers, as I am sure the Home Secretary has done, they tell us, "You can't arrest your way out of this", and of course they are right. Rounding up whole drug gangs, as the police sometimes do, often means simply opening up turf wars as neighbouring gangs move into the vacant territory. Under this Government, the police cannot even make the arrests that they should be making, and arrest and conviction rates have plummeted.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, all our constituents engage with the question of violent crime with fear and concern. It is one thing to pay lip service to the causes of crime, including violent crime, as the Home Secretary did in his remarks, but the Opposition say that the rise in violent crime since 2010 is connected to the reluctance to give the police the funding they need to fight all types of crime. The violent crime epidemic that we face is at least partly to do with austerity, the policies of this Government and the funding of the police. The Opposition are committed, when the time comes, to taking serious, co-ordinated action to start to push back on this rise in toxic and frightening violent crime.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. There is, as colleagues will see, quite a short time for the debate, but if everybody could stick to about six minutes, that would be helpful in getting everybody in.

9.1 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, which has great significance. The first duty of the state is to protect its citizens; that is why we have our outstanding armed forces, and why we have the police and the criminal justice system. I commend the police officers across my county of Essex. They often put themselves in harm's way to do the right thing—to protect the public and bring to justice those responsible for serious crime. On that point, I give a special commendation to our police and crime commissioner, Roger Hirst, and to our new chief inspector, B. J. Harrington. Essex borders London and is part of the home counties. We face a range of issues, which the Home Secretary mentioned, including county lines and the associated criminality, which can travel quickly.

We all know of the heroic acts of bravery undertaken by the police, and we all have examples from our own constituencies. Each and every one of us knows of the sacrifices that our frontline officers make and the threats that they face daily. I also want to comment on the actions of others in our local communities—especially the voluntary sector and community groups, who work tirelessly and with great devotion to steer people away from criminality. They are the unsung heroes in our constituencies who bring calm, and who work with criminal enforcement agencies to prevent crime and steer young people, in particular, on to the right path.

Despite such efforts, there is a sorry state of affairs in our country today. Far too many criminals are walking our streets and acting with impunity. We have heard from the Home Secretary about the individuals who terrorise our communities. They target vulnerable children and adults, and they profit from causing harm and misery. All too often, the criminal justice system fails to stand up for the victims and fails to punish the perpetrators for the crimes that they commit.

We have heard many examples, and I am sure we will hear others from Members today, of cases in which the police have worked hard to gather evidence on offenders so that they can be prosecuted, brought to trial and found guilty, only for the courts to set them free or let them off the hook with soft sentences. That means that the offenders do not spend enough time in jail on rehabilitation, where people can spend time with them and invest in them as individuals so that they do not go back out and commit more offences.

I do not have time to go into all the many figures today, but the National Crime Agency has published a conservative estimate of the number of active county lines participants across the country. Those individuals get caught up in the criminal justice system, and their lives are ravaged by a spiral of drugs, abuse, debt and crime. It is fair to say that we would urge the Government to strengthen the ability of our police to ensure that those responsible for organising criminal acts are subject to the right kind of actions in prison and in the criminal justice system so that they do not go back and destroy other people's lives. That is something we should not forget.

In the few minutes I have, I would like to give two examples of where my constituents have been betrayed and let down by the justice system. The first involves a lady who was the victim of an abusive ex-partner. He inflicted serious violence on her over a prolonged period and beat her so severely and violently that she was left blinded in one eye. When she worked up the courage to seek justice, she was let down by the criminal justice system.

This vulnerable victim of domestic abuse was tormented over a prolonged period and had life-changing injuries, but the Crown Prosecution Service did not stand up for her and press for compensation or the right kind of justice for her. This is where we must look at not just police enforcement and serious crime, but how the whole criminal justice system stands up for victims. At the end of the day, we as Members of Parliament have a duty to victims of crime and to access justice for them so that they can get the right course of action.

The second case is that of a constituent who came to me recently, who was the victim of a serious violent assault last year in Brighton. He was beaten up and left injured—punched multiple times in an unprovoked attack. His injuries and recovery stopped him from working, and he lost his business. The offender was violent and aggressive. What kind of sentence did he receive? He received a 12-month community order and was made to do 80 hours of unpaid work and five days of rehabilitation, and to pay costs of £85. My constituent was awarded compensation of just £100. He said:

"I now have no job. I couldn't work for a couple of weeks and because I was self-employed all my customers left."

He has no sense that justice was done. He was a victim of crime, and he is still left suffering.

That is the point. Where is the justice? It is down to this Government to have a much more integrated approach. In fairness to the Home Secretary, he spoke in his remarks about how the severe problem of serious crime affects communities and individuals. However, we must square the circle: we must not allow perpetrators of crime to go and brag on Facebook, which is what happened in this case. We need to see and show that the Government have the right approach to the criminal justice system and that the punishment fits the crime.

To conclude, if we are to tackle serious and violent crime in our society, we have to use many methods—nobody in this House would dispute that. Yes, we need better education and more support for vulnerable people and those at risk of becoming serious and violent criminals: absolutely. We also need better rehabilitation for offenders. However, we cannot ignore the need to defend victims of crime, to keep our communities safe and to make sure that offenders face the right sanctions. Failure to do so means that public trust and confidence are undermined, and that is not what we want. It is down to the Government, through the actions that my right hon. Friend has spelled out, to ensure we have an integrated approach to serious crime and tackling the many issues that blight our communities.

9.8 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The first responsibility of any Government is, of course, to keep their citizens safe. Much of that responsibility in Scotland falls to the Scottish Government, and it is worth while discussing the Scottish experience with violent crime.

Serious violence is an emotive subject in this Chamber and across the country. The emotive nature of the subject has meant that politicians are too often pushed towards reactionary and populist "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" policies without properly addressing the latter sentiment. These mistakes can be made because politicians can too often play into the public's fears or can perhaps be consumed by their own base instincts. More often than not, taking this tough *Daily Mail*, Old Testament approach is the easy thing to do—it is simply the politically expedient thing to do.

As much as I understand this urge—I am a politician—I believe we can aspire to a criminal justice system that is more effective at reducing crime, as well as to a fairer justice system that encompasses a whole-system approach that sees violent crime for what it is: as a societal disease that can be treated, and as a crime that is all too often based in poverty and that can be, if not eradicated, then reduced with a rational, systematic and evidence-based approach. I am therefore convinced that the public health approach is the best strategy to deal with violent crime, particularly knife crime, which is rampant on the streets of London at the moment. That approach was outlined almost two decades ago by the World Health Organisation and first implemented in Scotland. Its adoption elsewhere has been slow. The public health approach recognises that we all have a collective responsibility to tackle violent crime. It is an approach that emphasises rigorous and objective methods, using knowledge from a range of fields. It pools the best practices from everything—economics to education, sociology to medicine, and every discipline in between. In essence, it takes the best we have to offer and turns it on the worst problem we have in justice—generational violence.

Where attempted, the public health approach has been proven beyond doubt to work. It saves lives and allows people to live a life where violent crime is a much smaller risk: it gives peace of mind as we go through days already fraught with worry. It leads to safer communities, better social cohesion, and better mental health and security. The only regret I have is that these steps were not taken far sooner.

Scotland took the first steps towards the public health approach in 2005 when Strathclyde police launched a holistic public heath strategy. This strategy resulted in the creation of the violence reduction unit which has led the way in bringing Scotland to the lowest recorded crime rates in 40 years. The VRU goes by a simple, but powerful motto:

"Violence is preventable, not inevitable."

Strathclyde Police was the only police force in the world, at the time, to adopt the public health approach and it is now a national centre of expertise on violence and visited by many UK Government Ministers. Since it was founded, it has led the way in good policy deliverance which is making a real positive impact on people's lives and our communities across Scotland.

In 2005, violent crime in Scotland was at epidemic levels, and Glasgow was infamously crowned by the World Health Organisation as the murder capital of Europe. It was the same year that the United Nations called Scotland the most violent country in the developed world. The VRU carried out its own analysis and it showed that the areas where violence was most out of control were the most deprived: they had the highest rates of addiction, teenage pregnancy, suicide, and domestic abuse, the latter of which I will come on to address.

The Scottish Government provided the VRU with £12 million and has supported violence reduction and prevention programs such as Medics Against Violence, which targets young people who are at risk of being killed or becoming victims of serious life-changing injuries. Health volunteers are used to deliver education sessions in high schools focused on talking to young people about the consequences of violence and how to keep themselves safe. The Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme is another initiative by the Scottish Government which aims to empower young people to challenge and speak out against violent and abusive behaviour.

Fast forward to today, and Scotland has been recognised by the World Economic Forum as a leader in violence reduction. Indeed, the UK Government have praised the approach that the Scottish Government have taken. Moreover, I have been heartened by the recent proactive, perceptive and progressive approach taken by Ministers in the Ministry of Justice and, to an extent, the Home Office. I wish them luck in advancing this approach in politically sensitive areas, such as the presumption against short sentences. Just last week, the chief executive of Community Justice Scotland, Karyn McCluskey, who helped to set up the VRU, met the Justice Committee to outline Scotland's approach in this area, our successes, our failures and our future challenges.

Douglas Ross: The hon. Gentleman mentions future challenges. Does he think it is correct that someone in Scotland could be punched, kicked or even hit with a weapon and it would not be considered a violent crime? If we are going to truly assess this issue, we have to get the criteria correct for what is and what is not a violent crime.

Gavin Newlands: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am by no means a policing expert, and obviously such crimes are recorded differently across jurisdictions. The fact is, however, that violent crime in Scotland has reduced by 49%, as has been recognised by his colleagues in the Scottish Parliament: Liam Kerr said that we have to recognise that Scotland has turned the corner when it comes to violent crime.

Good policy and effective policing strategy should not be controversial, which is why I am glad that similar initiatives have begun to be rolled out, such as the London violence reduction unit announced by Mayor Sadiq Khan.

In addition, the Scottish Government continue to provide real-terms protection to the resource budget for policing and have committed to protecting that budget for every year of the current Session of the Scottish Parliament. That amounts to a significant increase in investment of £100 million by 2021. As of April last year, the SNP has ensured that the police will also fully benefit from being able to reclaim VAT of around £25 million a year, which for far too long was stolen and kept by the Treasury here in Westminster. *[Interruption.]* I hear chuntering from the Government Benches that we knew it from the start, but the Scottish Conservatives also knew it from the start, yet it was in their manifesto too.

In England and Wales there are now 21,000 fewer police officers than there were in 2010, which makes it the lowest number since comparable records began. Those figures mean a decrease of nearly 15% from the previous nine years. However, I do not want to be complacent, and I stress that there is still plenty of room for improvement, but Scotland is becoming a much safer country thanks to the public health approach.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the White Ribbon Campaign, I draw particular attention to the importance that domestic violence plays in a public health approach to violence. This is an area where we have much further to go, both north of the border and across the rest of the UK. Gender-based violence is a national shame in every part of the UK. In 2016-17 there were nearly 59,000 reported cases of domestic abuse in Scotland, and in nearly 80% of those cases women were the victims. Although the way the data is collected can differ between countries, it is demonstrably higher than in similar small European nations such as the Republic of Ireland.

Domestic abuse clearly has a serious effect on the mental health and development of future generations. Around 16% of adverse childhood experiences are caused by witnessing domestic violence in the household. The vast majority of this, of course, is perpetrated by men against women. That is the largest contributor to ACEs of any household environmental factors. Compared with someone with no ACEs, someone with four or more is more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes in adulthood. For example, they are 16 times more likely to perpetrate violence, and 20 times more likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lifetime.

The Scottish Government are taking action to reduce domestic violence in households through an increase in health visitor numbers and the roll-out of family nurse partnerships, and through targeted investment in projects and services that support parents and families to cope better, keep children safe and prevent children from going into care. Although that falls outwith the Scottish Government's policing strategy, it is steps like this that help people participate in society, tackle serious violence at its root cause and stop the cycle of violence perpetuating itself on and on.

In conclusion, the most compelling stories are the ones that are true. Over the past decade we have seen Scotland go from being called the murder capital of Europe to being the safest nation on these islands in which to live. I fear that in many crucial ways the serious violence strategy for England and Wales was a missed opportunity to tackle the problem in a completely objective and holistic manner, as we have done in Scotland. I implore Members across the House to see violence for what it is: a resilient societal disease. Although the symptoms must be appropriately punished, the root causes also deserve to be treated. We can no longer waste time and human energy trying to deal with the symptoms of generational violence.

While Scotland is enjoying lows in recorded crime that have not been seen for decades, violent crime in England and Wales is rising to deeply worrying levels. Thanks to the Scottish Government, and particularly the violence reduction unit, Scotland is becoming a safer country. I urge that a similar approach be tried and tested across the rest of the UK so that we may learn from each other. We need to understand better why violence happens, we need to be as objective as possible in tackling it, and we need to be mindful of the many forms that it comes in. We need an all-encompassing public health approach to violent crime.

9.18 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I shall be mentioning policing in Scotland, so I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. My wife is a serving police officer, although she is actually in her final week of work before taking maternity leave as we prepare for the arrival of our first child in a few weeks' time.

Much of my remarks, while focusing on some elements that are devolved in Scotland, will be based on my experience as a member of the Home Affairs Committee, because we are currently undertaking an inquiry into serious violence. I have to say that the evidence session we had last October with parents of children who had died as a result of serious violence was one of the most compelling I have sat through. I feel it appropriate to repeat some of the evidence that we heard in the Committee, because it really puts into perspective what we are discussing this evening.

Philippa Addai's son Marcel was stabbed 14 times by a gang of seven in September 2015. Yvonne Lawson's son Godwin was stabbed while trying to break up a fight involving some of his friends. Yvonne's testimony about her reaction on being told what had happened to her son was compelling. She said:

"I remember being at home. There was a knock on the door. Typically, I just thought it was Godwin knocking on the door. There were three police officers who came to tell us that Godwin lost his life. I remember hearing that word that Godwin died. I was in denial… I just kept ringing Godwin's number. I just could not believe that the police officers were saying that Godwin has taken his last breath on the street alone."

Caroline Shearer, whose child Jay was also killed, recalled how she put on perfume when she was told by the police to go to the hospital. It was an irrational thing to do, but that is what she remembers. The next thing she remembers is being in the back of the police car and getting out at the hospital, where an officer bent down to tell her that her son had died before she could see him. The next thing she tried to do was steal that officer's Taser and put it in her mouth. Finally, Darren Laville's son Kenichi Phillips was shot dead in 2016. Kenichi had a whole life ahead of him and had just that day been given a new job as a personal trainer.

Those four testimonies have stayed with me since our evidence session in October, but there were positive legacies. Each and every family were determined that their child would not die in vain and have started charity work to ensure that more youths are saved from that end, which will hopefully complement the work that the Government and all parties are doing on serious violence.

I would like to focus on some of the elements that affect Scotland. I am fortunate that my Moray constituency does not have a particularly high crime rate, but, as the Home Secretary said, county lines affect us all. A crime that starts in London can progress right up to Aberdeen and potentially across to Moray, so it is important that Government investment here is matched at a UK level, and I know that work is ongoing in Scotland to deal with county lines.

I agree with the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) about the pioneering violence reduction unit. It is important that we treat violence as a disease that is preventable and not inevitable. However, the Scottish crime and justice survey shows that at least two thirds of crime in Scotland goes unreported. It goes on to say that the result of violence in Scotland is more likely to be seen in A&E departments than police stations, because more people go directly to hospital than report it to the police. While I welcome the figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted about violence reducing in Scotland, we have to realise that a large amount of violence is unreported.

A number of Members want to speak in the debate, so I will make my final plea to the Home Secretary and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins). The Home Secretary was clear that he is looking at all options to reduce knife crime and the fatalities caused by it. My constituent Hugh Broadley, who came to my surgery in Buckie on Friday, believes he has designed a knife that can significantly reduce the number of fatalities from knife crime. Will someone from the Department meet me to look at his designs? It is important that we listen to all offers to deal with this issue, and if Hugh Broadley believes that his design could prevent just one death, that is important. I would welcome any opportunity to discuss that important matter with the Minister or the Home Secretary.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I would be happy to.

Douglas Ross: Thank you.

9.23 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I have worked with the Home Secretary and the Minister on these issues, and I am grateful to them for extending an invitation to me to the serious violence taskforce.

Sajid Javid: May I take this opportunity to thank the right hon. Gentleman for his membership of the serious violence taskforce and the hugely important contribution he makes?

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that.

This is a very serious issue. Over the almost 20 years that I have been in public life, very sadly, I have had to comfort far too many parents who have lost their children to violence. In fact, when I reflect on my career one day, and this is an apposite day on which to say this, as a member of the serious violence taskforce moves off in a different direction—I am of course thinking of the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna)—it is right to say that two cases stand out in my mind. The first is the young woman, Pauline Peart, who, at the beginning of my political career back in 2003, was shot in a car in my constituency and lost her life. The other was on bank holiday last year, when a young woman, Tanesha Melbourne-Blake, was also shot and killed.

It is right to say that that event sparked the current national concern about violent crime in our country. At that point, there was a lot of comment about the murder rate in London overtaking that of New York. I do not think we are quite in that place, but it nevertheless caused tremendous alarm. I think it was because it was a young woman who found herself in those circumstances, just having walked out of her home with a friend to go a newsagent's, and lost her life, that it caused such concern on that public holiday.

I guess the important thing in such a debate—this subject is probably the one I have spoken about more than other subject in this Chamber and in this House—is to ask: is the situation getting worse, is it stable or is it getting better? My judgment is that we have not got over the problem, and the situation feels significantly worse over the last period than it has done in the past. I have seen other spikes. I recall the spike back in 2008, and I remember that Ken Livingstone was the Mayor of London, but lost his post in part because crime became a very central issue in the campaign. There have been spikes over this period, but we are clearly in the grip of something at the moment.

I want to reflect briefly on some of the contexts of this spike and the national concern. The first is that, once upon a time—when I started, we talked about yardie gangs and Operation Trident had just been set up—I really thought this problem, which we had imported almost from downtown America, would go. It does not feel like that today; sadly, it feels almost a permanent feature of our urban life, and of course it has spread to areas that are very different from my own constituency. That is the first context that is very disturbing.

Why is that? We tend to focus on the violence and on the knives and the guns, but the real issue that drives much of this is not the knives or the guns. It is drugs,

[Mr Lammy]

money and demand, as well as the increasing quality of cocaine across our country and the drop in price of that product. It is prolific, and I was first struck by how prolific it is when sitting in Highbury magistrates court behind a young man—I think he was 17—who had been arrested for trafficking that drug on county lines, and I was staggered that he had been arrested in Aberdeen. What was my young constituent doing in Aberdeen, when I have never been to Aberdeen? I wish that I had been to Aberdeen, but I have not been there. I thought, "Why was he there?" He was there because it turns out there is quite a rich market for cocaine in Aberdeen. There is a middle-class life, with some money and some spend, and like a lot of places here in London and a lot of parts of our country, cocaine is particularly rife.

I welcome the review by Dame Carol Black that has been announced. This does open broader questions about drugs in our country, about the war on drugs and its failure, about our position and the repositioning of public policy on drugs, and—I have to raise this with the Home Secretary—the successive cuts in our Border Force. If we want enforcement on drugs and not to relax our position—although I think that is highly unlikely for cocaine—we have to police our borders.

When I met people at the National Crime Agency recently, they explained that they cannot possibly prevent the vast majority of drugs from coming into this country, although they do their best. Our Border Force is seriously stretched to police the market that is coming across the Atlantic, up through Spain, or across from Holland.

Drugs are the first major issue, and then it collides. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the Opposition spokesman, has raised this, and I hate it being such a partisan issue, but there are real issues at a local authority level. Local authorities set the strategies for youth. They set the strategies for youth violence. They do it alongside the police—we turn to the police so often—but much of this falls to local authorities. My sense—I got around a lot when I was doing the review for the Government on the disproportionality of the criminal justice system for black and ethnic minorities—is that it is patchy across the country. It is not just patchy in terms of strategy and approach, but in terms of resource to address some of the problems, so investment in new services is important. It certainly means that issues such as how the pupil referral units are working and how alternative provision is working are central to this discussion.

The subject has come up in the serious violence taskforce and I remain concerned about the amount of young people who are effectively excluded from school, who are not getting an effective education and who are falling into the hands of adults who are exploiting them. That takes us to another issue: how do we address not the young people but the grown men who are exploiting them and trafficking them across the country? Is the law robust enough to send the message to these modern-day pimps—because that is how we should describe them—who are exploiting these young people in this way? The frustration is that we can go back quite a number of years, back to Dickens, and there will always be adults there to exploit young people. We have to bear down very hard on them.

The other colliding force affecting all young people across our country is of course social media and technology and, in this context, some of the rabbit holes down which young people can go in relation to particular types of music and particular types of violence. My concern is that much of that remains heavily unregulated and voluntarily policed by the industry. We have to do more to protect young people. It affects all young people. We see it in terms of suicide, anorexia, bulimia and those sorts of mental health issues among young people. In this area, it has a bearing on some of the increase in violent crime as well. I look forward to continuing to work with the Home Secretary, but there are issues with funding. It does not all fall to the police. The local context is important, and I am very concerned about the rise in drugs in this country, the rising market and the need to fully grip what we, as a nation, are to do about it.

9.33 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and to hear him explain the work he has done, as well as his experiences. I commend him for his knowledge of the subject and his contribution to trying to make things better.

This is a very timely debate, not because crime is increasing or decreasing in Erewash nor, I hasten to add, because we see serious violent crime in Erewash, but because there appears to be an increase in the use of cheap synthetic cannabis in our market towns as well as in our cities and because it appears so invasive. The issue has been highlighted to me by my constituents over recent weeks, as they have shared their concerns about visible drug dealing, mainly in synthetic drugs such as Mamba and Spice, and the resulting zombie state that is so distressing for my constituents to see, especially when young children see it as well.

It is completely unacceptable that the day-to-day lives of residents are being disrupted by people taking drugs. I have personally spoken to the local police inspector. As a result, the presence of uniformed police patrols has increased in the area where it is happening. I would like to take this opportunity to commend my police officers across Erewash for their work, not just on this issue but day in, day out tackling everything that comes up. They never know what will be around the next corner.

Sadly, many of those targeted by the dealers are those who are the most vulnerable. I am also concerned that the dealing and use of drugs can so readily lead to more serious crimes. That is why I welcome the serious violence strategy published by the Government last year, in particular the action to tackle county lines, which other hon. Members have spoken about, and the misuse of drugs. I look forward to the Minister, in responding to the debate, providing an update on the progress being made to tackle the county lines issue. Work on intervention and prevention is vital if we are to get a grip on the pervasive use and abuse of drugs. For too many young people, their involvement in county lines and the resulting involvement in violence has, as we have heard, resulted in lives being lost and young people being seriously injured in gang attacks.

On a recent visit to one of the hospitals that serves my constituency, the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham, I was able to see at first hand the work of

the charity Redthread, which is supported by the Home Office. It runs a youth violence intervention programme in the hospital's emergency department, in partnership with the major trauma network. It is having a real impact, changing young people's lives and moving them away from crime.

Redthread and other such charities provide the evidence that if we are to be successful in tackling all types of crime, we must understand that partnership working has the most success. It is not just about what the police do; it is also about collaboration with a wide range of statutory bodies and agencies. It is only by working together that low-level and more serious crime and violence will be tackled effectively.

9.37 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. Serious violence is an issue that we in Northern Ireland know better than most, but tonight we are discussing a different kind of serious violence. I would first of all like to welcome the Home Secretary's commitment and the important measures he suggested to tackle knife violence. Many right hon. and hon. Members have referred to county lines and the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) referred to drugs. Drugs seem to be the key issue for most of what is happening.

I want to make a quick comment on firearms. The statistics show that those who have the legal right to have a firearm, through licences and firearm certificates, are the most law-abiding people in the land. It is therefore important that the focus is put on those who have illegal firearms and on deactivating firearms. I am reminded of a slogan I saw in Canada many years ago, which said "When all the guns are outlawed, the only people who will have guns will be the outlaws." The message is clear: those who want to have guns illegally will find a way to do so.

In the short time available, I want to refer to serious domestic violence. Like other types of violence, serious domestic violence is about the psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional, controlling and coercive behaviour that can lead to a pattern of threats, humiliation and intimidation to harm, punish or frighten the victim—all serious violence. The level of domestic violence has dropped slightly in the past few years. That is good news as it shows that some things are working. At the end of the day, however, there were still 1.2 million female and 713,000 male victims in 2016-17. Also, 26% of women and 15% of men aged 16 to 59 had experienced some sort of domestic abuse since the age of 16. That equates to some 4.3 million female and 2.4 million male victims, which again, indicates the immensity of domestic violence and why it is important that it is addressed.

The Government have brought in a number of methods to address the issue, including domestic violence protection orders whereby a perpetrator can be banned from returning to their home and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. That is good stuff—the right sort of thing that we need—but again, it is important that victims are given the time and space to access support and consider their options. The domestic violence disclosure scheme—Clare's law, which many will be aware of—has been rolled out across England and Wales since March 2014. The scheme means that an individual can ask the police to check whether a new or existing partner has a violent past. I wish that we had some of that legislation in Northern Ireland—it is the sort of legislation that we would like. The police will consider disclosing the information under the "right to know".

The Government rightly committed some £80 million to a strategy on ending violence against women and girls. They have committed another £20 million to that as well, so some £100 million has been committed in total. In the Queen's Speech of 2017, the Government promised a courts Bill that would

"end direct cross examination of domestic violence victims by their alleged perpetrators in the family courts and allow more victims to participate in trials without having to meet their alleged assailant face-to-face".

Will the Minister tell us what is happening in relation to that?

A couple of very helpful recommendations, again, came out of the Home Affairs Committee inquiry—a comprehensive review of funding of support for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence, and the suggestion that the proposed domestic abuse commissioner should instead be established as a violence against women and girls and domestic abuse commissioner. I believe that that recommendation reflects, importantly, the gendered nature of domestic abuse and its links to other forms of gender-based abuse.

I want to finish with something that it is important to put on record. Today, one of my constituents contacted me—I am not going to mention her name; I am just going to tell her story. She said:

"I have been the victim of domestic violence. In August 2017 my husband tried to strangle me and he set fire to our home. My 3 and 5 year old girls witnessed the abuse and my now 6 year old is still experiencing flashbacks, nightmares and dealing with panic attacks due to the trauma. Social services have said my ex husband is still not safe to have direct contact with my children however he is still seeking access through the courts. Next month I face being questioned by my ex husband in family court. This is a man who has a suspended jail term due to his abuse of me, a non molestation Order to stop him harassing me and the judge gave a 2 year restraining order due to the level of abuse I have suffered and then next month he will be allowed the opportunity to have direct contact with me! The domestic abuse bill"—

I know that that is not your responsibility, Minister—

"is a start in improving the situation for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and their children but in Northern Ireland"

we do not have it yet, as she and I would like. I know that it is not your responsibility to do that, Minister—*[Interruption.]* It is not your responsibility either, Mr Speaker—I am sorry, I do that all the time. I was trying to get away from using the word "you". I apologise—when we are in the middle of all this EU stuff, it is very hard to distinguish the two.

I am sure that the Minister has been touched, as I was, by that heartfelt plea from a lady who has been through nightmarish scenarios to get safety for her children and is begging for us to make a change so that other people do not have to go through this. Again, for the record, we need the domestic abuse Bill and these proposals to be put forward here in the UK mainland and in Northern Ireland—I wish we had them.

9.43 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Thank you for giving me time to speak in this very important debate on serious violence, Mr Speaker. As many Members have

[Vicky Ford]

said before me, we are seeing a dramatic change in the type of violence that takes place in our country.

As a statistician, I go back to the statistics, and it is interesting to see that while the level of knife crime is increasing, just recently the level of gun crime seems to have come down. The level of homicides is also increasing, but I was comparing the statistics with those in other European countries and I noticed that our homicide rates are actually well below those of the Netherlands, Belgium and Scandinavia—less than half of the rates in those countries—and well below countries like Germany and Italy.

However, when it comes to violence, lives are not statistics. Violence has a real impact on communities and families, and I have been very pleased to see the Government working to address these issues not only through the serious violence strategy, but by looking at how to address the changing nature of online crime. On the Science and Technology Committee, we recently took evidence on the impact of social media on young people's lives. We heard chilling evidence of how serious gangs use online tools, such as YouTube, to seduce young people to get involved in their gangs, resulting in young, especially vulnerable, teenagers taking part in criminal activity. Last Saturday night, Essex police saw two people running from a vehicle when they spotted the police. The police gave chase and apprehended them. The car contained drugs and knives, and the number plates were false; the driver was 16.

When it comes to fighting crime, our police are on the frontline. Ten days ago, I attended the passing-out parade of 55 new police officers in Essex. They are in addition to the 150 extra officers who joined the force last year and are part of the 240 joining this year. They are vital to our police's future and are proudly funded by the Essex taxpayer. It is beyond belief that the Labour party refused to vote for the funding that made those police officers available. I spoke to every one of the new recruits. Many were on the fast track to become detectives under a programme established to bring new skills into the modern force, many were women, and many had experience in the armed forces or other civil occupations.

In Essex, our police have been working hard to target knife and drug-related crime, and stop and search is a vital part of their toolkit. In the last three months of last year, Chelmsford police undertook about 500 stop and searches—compared with only 80 the year before—and it works. One third resulted in a positive outcome—finding that the person was carrying something they should not have been, such as a weapon or a drug. This visible, pro-active work on the streets has resulted in many arrests and a tougher approach to fighting crime. I am pleased that stop and search has been extended to people suspected of carrying corrosive substances or acid in public places. Many young people in my constituency have raised with me the fear of acid attack.

Fighting crime is not just about the police, however, but about partnerships. Our excellent police and crime commissioner in Essex, Roger Hirst, who has been mentioned before, asked me to mention the violence and vulnerability strategy, which we have had in place since last summer, and which brings together partners to work on prevention and intervention. It was the first framework of its nature in the country. I also thank the Home Office for the £664,000 it invested in the early intervention youth fund, which was matched by £500,000 from the county council. Such measures are positive incentives to getting partners aligned and have a positive impact.

In Essex, our children's services have just been rated outstanding by Ofsted and No. 1 in the country. The joined-up work of the gangs intervention team was particularly praised—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have allocated six minutes to each Front-Bench spokesperson, so last sentence please.

Vicky Ford: In conclusion, this joined-up approach to early intervention does work and should be a focus of the upcoming spending review.

9.48 pm

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in this debate, although I do not plan to go through all their contributions because time is so limited.

As my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary pointed out, this seems like a very rushed debate. It has been rushed forward with no indication that any action will follow. Based on the contributions, the Government's continued inability to tackle the rise in serious violent crime seems unlikely to alter. It is clear from today's debate that right hon. and hon. Members are deeply concerned about the rise in serious crime, and the Government's lack of decisive action is also concerning. Ministers have failed to tackle the underlying causes of crime. In fact, their policies have made them worse.

Ministers are relying on eye-catching initiatives designed to achieve good headlines, but these do not amount to a strategy, or even to effective initiatives. The latest are their knife crime prevention orders, for which there is no evidence, and these follow Ministers' support for more random stop and searches, more Tasers, more spit hoods, and so on and so on, none of which measures is supported by evidence.

Ministers have still failed to answer some basic questions about the knife crime prevention orders. They have failed to explain on what evidence the Home Office has based its new policy; if there is evidence, it should be made available to the House. They have failed to explain what oversight of the orders there will be, and what review or appraisal will be made of their effectiveness or otherwise. It is hard to see how, without evidence, the Minister can reasonably expect the orders to have any appreciable effect in reducing knife crime. There has also been no indication of what safeguards have been introduced to prevent the issuing of incorrect or inappropriate orders, and of whether we shall see any report examining the subjects of the orders by region, locality, family income and, of course, ethnicity.

This is all of a piece with the Government's previous announcements. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has pointed out, the evidence does not support an increase in stop and search. In November last year, researchers from the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies examined data including a study commissioned by the Home Office, and concluded there was

"limited evidence of the effectiveness of stop and search in reducing crime".

That is absolutely in line with the Home Office's own research, and with separate analysis conducted by the College of Policing. There is a similar absence of evidence to support the use of spit hoods, which are almost designed to humiliate those who are stopped, and the same is true of Tasers.

However, the Home Secretary and the Government do not seem to operate on the basis of evidence at all. In fact, their assurances about their own policies do not bear scrutiny. At the beginning of October last year, the Home Secretary announced that the Government were taking a dramatic turn towards the adoption of a public health approach to tackling violent crime, including knife crime. If that statement was not made simply as an irrelevant soundbite, can the Minister tell us, even now, how the new policy on knife crime prevention orders accords with the previous announcement of a public health approach?

The truth is that since 2010 the austerity policy as a whole has had the effect of worsening the causes of crime, and that since that year, successive Tory-led Governments have axed the jobs of 21,000 police officers. This is the real record on serious violence: it is a toxic cocktail of failure. Moreover, nothing has changed. Austerity continues in all areas of social policy, and it continues in policing. The latest police settlement is a cut in real terms, once the funding for police pensions is taken into account, and that is why I voted against it.

There is an alternative. There is Labour's alternative, which means truly ending austerity in every aspect of social policy, and, specifically, ending austerity in funding for the police. We will recruit thousands of extra police when we are in government, because that is what we need to tackle crime in the short and the medium term. The Government continue to operate as though it were possible to have safety and security on the cheap, but their own record shows that it is not. A Labour Government are needed to end this failure.

9.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I thank all Members who have spoken for their passionate and moving speeches, although I note—as I often need to—that the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) has perhaps misjudged the tone of the debate.

Across our country, serious violence is robbing people of their futures, families of their loved ones, and children of their lives. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) spoke of the experiences of the families of Marcel, Godwin, Jay and Kenichi, and also spoke movingly of the work that their parents are now doing to try to stop knife crime. The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) spoke compellingly, as he always does—particularly about Pauline and Tanesha, two women who were killed in his constituency some 20 years apart.

This issue transcends party politics. Serious violence is a matter of grave concern to all of us, and to those whom we represent. If we in this place can be united in our anger, we can also be united in our efforts to tackle violent crime. As the Home Secretary said at the start of the debate, tackling violent crime is an absolute priority for the Government, but just as there is no one cause of serious violence, there is no one solution. It can only be effectively tackled though the combined efforts of Government, law enforcement and civil society—and, crucially, through a coherent short, medium, and long-term approach.

Through our serious violence strategy and our serious organised crime strategy, we are tackling those who ensnare young people in criminality, while intervening earlier to prevent them from being drawn into these terrible webs of violence. With immediate effect, the Government have set up the national county lines co-ordination centre. We are taking the Offensive Weapons Bill through the House. We are also introducing knife crime prevention orders at the request of the police because they believe that this is one way to help prevent young people from being drawn into criminality. We have also handed out money through the anti-knife-crime community fund; I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup), who spoke about the contributions made by the voluntary sector in their constituencies. This has all been overseen by the cross-party serious violence taskforce, which includes the right hon. Member for Tottenham, for whose attention we are most grateful.

In the medium term, we are investing in our early intervention youth fund across the country to work with children and young people and steer them away from gangs and crime. We know of the link between drug markets and serious violence, so the news of a major independent review into drug misuse has been welcomed by hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Tottenham and my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash, who spoke about the impact of synthetic cannabis in her constituency.

The Home Secretary has announced £1.4 million to enhance the ability of the police to tackle gang-related activity on social media. Colleagues across the House have spoken about the impact social media can have on gangs, including through bragging, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham mentioned, and the chilling evidence heard by the Science and Technology Committee, as set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). The new social media hub will help the police and the tech companies bear down on those who would use social media to spread their criminality.

Our long-term strategy seeks explicitly to identify and tackle the root causes of violent behaviour. The only solution is prevention. That is why we are carrying out a consultation on a new legal duty to underpin a multi-agency public health approach to tackling serious violence. In practice, a duty would mean that police officers, education providers, local authorities and healthcare professionals would all have a legal responsibility to act to prevent violent crime.

A new £200 million youth endowment fund, delivered over 10 years, will support intervention with those children and young people most at risk and provide interventions to deliver long-lasting change. It is only by reaching out to the most vulnerable that we can combat violence now and in the future.

Members mentioned the role of exclusions in the vulnerability of children to being drawn into violent crime, or indeed being victims of it. The Home Office is working with the Department for Education on this issue, and alongside the exclusions review the Department

[Victoria Atkins]

for Education is providing £4 million through the alternative provision innovation fund to improve outcomes for children in non-mainstream education.

I am also grateful to colleagues who raised the role of adverse childhood experiences, as the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) mentioned, and in particular the role that domestic abuse plays, sadly, in the lives of children drawn into violence. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) both raised the issue of domestic abuse. From the work I have done in visiting youth workers and speaking to former members of gangs, it has been clear that domestic abuse is a theme that runs constantly through these young people's lives. That is why the Domestic Abuse Bill will, as well as tackling domestic abuse, have huge positive impacts on the life chances of children who live in abusive households. I know there are colleagues across the House, including in the Opposition, who will be helping the Government bring that very important piece of legislation through. I hope the hon. Member for Strangford will forgive me if I promise to write to him rather than addressing the particular points he raised about domestic abuse in this debate, because we are, sadly, running short of time.

We are working to tackle the threat of county lines, to impede the supply of weapons and to identify those young people most at risk of violence, but I join all colleagues across the House who tonight have thanked their police officers working in their constituencies on the frontline, including the 55 new officers in Essex.

I was delighted to see the video on the social media pages of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford. I also want to thank the police and crime commissioners and those in the voluntary sector who do so much work with these young people. We heard tonight about the great work of Redthread, and there are many more charities that help us in this sphere. No one should have to face the pain and devastation that violent crime can cause a person, a family and a community, and by working together we will stop this—

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Business without Debate

Mr Speaker: We now come to motion 6, on the Joint Committee on the draft Registration of Overseas Entities Bill. Motion not moved. We now come to a series of motions, and for the convenience, and with the agreement, of the House, I propose to take them together. I am fairly confident of what is going to happen, but we will see. I ask the Whip to move motions 7 to 17. Motions not moved.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Helen Jones be discharged from the Finance Committee and Bambos Charalambous be added.—*(Mark Spencer, on behalf of the Selection Committee.)*

Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Rebecca Harris.)*

10 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I am delighted to have secured this Adjournment debate on the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal. I am proud, too, that this Conservative and Unionist Government have made it possible for every single one of Scotland's cities to have a city deal, adding up to billions of pounds of public investment unlocking many billions more in private investment. It is a Government record that all Scottish Conservatives can and should be proud of, and one that will bear fruit for Scotland's economy and Scotland's people well into the future. City deals drive investment in infrastructure. A city deal sends a strong signal from the Government that they have confidence in the future of the city and the region and that they are prepared to commit public funds to make that future a reality. City deals are designed with the intention of transforming the local economy and creating a landscape in which individuals, communities and businesses are enabled to explore their full potential.

The genesis of the Stirling city deal was the realisation that Stirling's economy had several structural weaknesses that needed to be addressed. First, while Stirling is the best place in Scotland for people to set up and start a business, and the best place in Scotland for a large established business to continue its journey—

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He is of course speaking about the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal, and Clackmannanshire shares the accolade of being one of the best places to start a business in Scotland.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his well-intentioned correction.

While Stirling is also a great place for large established businesses to continue their journey, we have a real issue locally when it comes to small businesses scaling up to become successful larger businesses. The lack of scale-up businesses is due in part to a shortage of the right kind of business space and a shortage of the skills most needed by employers to grow their businesses. The situation is not helped by a shortage of housing of all types in Stirling, and the need for microbusinesses to be given the practical business support they need to help them on their commercial journey. Secondly, Stirling's economy is held back by wealth inequality. We have some of Scotland's wealthiest and poorest postcodes, and we need a more inclusive approach to economic development.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the good work that he does. He is a very assiduous Member for Stirling, and this is an example of just how hard he works. Well done! My constituency will gain from the Belfast city region deal, and I am grateful for that, but does he agree that local councillors are looking at lists and could perhaps think of better projects to fund? Does he agree that more weight should be given to the development departments in local councils? I certainly do.

Stephen Kerr: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. City deals are nothing if not a partnership between all levels of government, and their success will depend on the ability of all those levels of government to work together successfully.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this excellent debate. I hope he will allow me to make one further correction to his speech. As well as city deals, there are also general growth deals. Moray might not be a city, but we are well on the way to securing the Moray growth deal, which will unlock great untapped potential in our local economy.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, but the debate, of course, is about the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal.

Many of the good, well-paid jobs in Stirling are located outside the local area, while many of the jobs created within Stirling are filled by commuters. Access to the local job market is too limited for many people in some of Stirling's most deprived areas, particularly in rural Stirling, due to skills shortages, the lack of high-value pathway jobs and entry-level positions, and basic transport infrastructure shortcomings.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this important debate to the Chamber. City deals are a fantastic way for the UK and Scottish Governments to work together, which all our constituents want. He mentions rural initiatives, and the Tay cities deal included broadband funding in Angus. The Scottish Government's roll-out has been slow, and we have seen extra investment from the UK Government, so city deals can bring such important initiatives.

Stephen Kerr: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I know Angus really well, and I concur with what she says about the importance of broadband in revitalising Scotland's rural economy, and I will come on to that later—should I be able to.

The deal needs to tackle the issues that I have tried to describe and deliver inclusive economic growth and opportunities right across the district. We need to build a confident future in which businesses can grow, people can access good employment, young families can own their own homes, and young people can have a bright future, without having to leave the area.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate him on securing this debate. Does he agree that city deals also provide a fantastic opportunity for local employment and for local small businesses and contractors to get involved in bids for carrying out city deal work, both in the original design-and-build phase and in continuing employment on projects?

Stephen Kerr: I completely agree. There would be little point in city deals, with the investment that comes with them, if the work was not done by businesses and people who live in that area. If we did not take that approach, the whole thing would be rather pointless and unsustainable.

The deal is now at an advanced stage. We have the signed heads of agreement, which demonstrates the commitment made not only by the UK Government, but by the Scottish Government and the local council. The University of Stirling is a major partner in much of this, as is Forth Valley College. Both institutions benefit from having visionary leadership. The university is likely to be a major beneficiary of the city region deal, as much of the investment is aimed at promoting the commercialisation of the university's research and development capabilities. The good name of the University of Stirling will only continue to increase in esteem.

The city region deal sets out several commitments that have already been made. The international environment centre will be based across the region but centred at the university, where a new research and policy centre will bring in dividends from the environment sector. It will become a catalyst for the set-up and scale-up of new environmental companies, building on the international reputation our area already has in this field. The new institute for aquaculture and global food security will also secure Stirling's worldwide reputation as a centre of excellence for research and breakthrough solutions in the sector. Existing business interests in the sector will be supplemented by new ventures.

The national tartan centre will be a significant economic asset. I often feel I must remind colleagues about the global importance of tartan not just to Scotland's traditional heritage sector, but as a part of today's global fashion industry. Stirling is perfectly positioned to take up the mantle of hosting the national tartan centre as Bannockburn was a centre for manufacturing and design of tartan for much of its history. The tartan centre will become the UK-wide showcase for tartan and help to launch new design and fashion houses, building on its iconic global reputation. It will also become a hub for family history research, attracting new businesses into the growing global phenomenon and fascination people have for discovering their ancestry.

The Ministry of Defence has agreed to hand over the land at the recently vacated Forthside—a military base specialising in the maintenance of Army equipment. The site is of key importance because it sits between the river and our industrial estate and will become a grow-on space for businesses right in the heart of the city. It will combine with work that is already under way to host a third sector hub and a public sector innovation hub, creating a corridor of opportunity for public, private and third sectors to innovate and share ideas well into the future.

There will be a comprehensive regional energy masterplan, which will see new investment in schemes and projects to harness the power that can be generated from our natural resources in Stirling.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I compliment my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for sharing his enthusiasm for the Stirling and Clackmannanshire growth deal. Will he join me in commending the hard work of the teams at the three Ayrshire councils that have come together to drive this forward?

Stephen Kerr: I absolutely commend the council teams, and I will talk about Stirling Council if I have time.

We have natural resources in Stirling and Clackmannanshire, and the masterplan is already delivering a combined heat and power project in the city centre that derives heat from our sewage treatment works to warm commercial and public sector buildings throughout

[Stephen Kerr]

Stirling. Beyond that, geothermal, wind, hydro and solar will all play a part, and the opportunity for innovation and commercialisation is unlimited. Skills and innovation go together not only in ensuring the creation of job opportunities that can be accessed by all but in specific schemes in the neighbouring area of Clackmannanshire. The skills that businesses need can be delivered in the local area, and everyone can benefit. This joined-up working between the two areas allows capital sums to be best utilised across Stirling and Clackmannanshire, recognising how interconnected the two areas are.

I now come to the meat of what I want to say. Stirling is ready to go. We have an engaged and energised private sector that is ready to invest, and we have a local authority that stands ready to deliver. All the local parties in Stirling share a commitment to delivering the city region deal. We just need to sign off on the business case. The individual projects are well thought out and planned, and I am sure the Minister will want to assure the House tonight that the UK Government are fully energised behind the Stirling and Clackmannanshire deal.

Waiting for perfection and for everything to be planned out across all areas of the deal will only delay the creation of jobs and prosperity in Stirling. There is no perfect slate of projects, and it is essential that we get things moving so that we can deliver. We need to see hi-vis jackets, hard hats and cranes on Stirling's skyline. It is time for us to start the work.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making a great case for his local area. Will he join me in welcoming the £5 million top-up that is coming from the Scottish Government, in addition to the city deal funding? Will he also join me in pressing the UK Government to match the Scottish Government's funding for city deals across Scotland?

Stephen Kerr: I have no hesitation in doing so, and I was challenged on this earlier. Do I welcome the positive actions of the Scottish Government? Of course I do, and I welcome the additional investment that the Scottish Government promised for the city deal. It is targeted, and I support the Scottish Government's utilisation of public funds in that way.

We need the MOD land at Forthside to be released. The site needs to be decontaminated and handed over as soon as possible. How soon can that be done?

The new-build tartan centre will bring additional private sector investment almost immediately. We must start on the national tartan centre soon, and I would love to see one of my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench coming up to Stirling with spade in hand to turn the sod and start the construction. Why not?

Luke Graham: I look forward to those same Ministers coming across to Clackmannanshire to help start the international environment centre in Alloa west. Does my hon. Friend agree that the £8 million capital fund set aside by the UK Government to assist Clackmannanshire, which had less regional assistance spending to develop its business cases, is unprecedented? It is a first for any city deal in Scotland and has enabled us the time and space to develop new projects that will benefit Clackmannanshire in the short term and for many years to come.

Stephen Kerr: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work in securing that unprecedented amount of money for an untagged project. He and I have had long discussions about the importance of the UK Government being active in the Scottish economic scene. I will come on to say something more about that, with which I hope he will agree.

We need to make sure that all parts of Stirling, whether geographic or social, can benefit from this deal. In rural Stirling, we want to see financial and other practical support for rural business hubs. Some of these are already delivering for their communities, and the businesses that will be located there will grow and diversify the local economy—that is badly needed. We need them in other areas of Stirling, especially in the eastern villages of Cowie, Plean and Fallin.

Digital connectivity was mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) and it is important, and our bid should be to ensure there is digital connection that these villages in rural areas can benefit from. No area should be left behind. We need to build a digitally connected district beyond the city centre. Local full fibre networks are a great way to do this, and we have commercial investment happening in Stirling though CityFibre. This fantastic investment will make Stirling truly a digital city, but in rural areas, including the eastern villages, we need this investment. I call on the Government, who have responsibility for connectivity, to make direct investment in these areas and make that a reality.

We need government, especially the Scottish Government, to get serious about rural infrastructure. Whether we are talking about getting a new bridge for Callander, which would transform the economy there, or turning the A811 Stirling to Balloch road into a trunk road, the needs are there to be seen. I would like to see these projects treated as major upgrades to the national infrastructure, because of the positive economic benefit they would bring far beyond the communities where those items of infrastructure would be constructed. These benefits would be real, impactful and immediate. It is imperative that all levels of government pull together in such areas.

Today, I ask the Minister to comment on what additional support could be given. We have the commitment for funding on the projects, but what I feel is lacking is a stronger overall commitment from the UK Government to get more heavily involved in promoting and investing in the Scottish economy; I am concerned about a lasting thought of "devolve and forget" in the UK Government. I want to hear assurances from Ministers that the UK shared prosperity fund will be used for this purpose by the UK Government in Scotland.

There are very few UK Government departmental offices in Scotland, with the only significant presence of any Department being that of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in Aberdeen, where an office is dedicated to promoting the oil and gas industry. The Scottish economy is more varied than that, and the case for a UK Government presence in central Scotland is compelling.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman will of course be aware that the Department for International Development has a significant presence in East Kilbride, so will he take this opportunity to confirm, as perhaps the Minister might, the Government's commitment to retaining DFID as an independent Department? I hope that you do not mind, Mr Speaker, but as everybody else has mentioned their city deals, I should ask: is there not a lot to learn from the Glasgow city deal as well?

Stephen Kerr: Oh, there is a great deal to learn from the Glasgow city deal. Of course I acknowledge the existence of DFID in East Kilbride and the amazing work it does. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am great supporter of the work of that Department, and I would hate to see it absorbed into the Foreign Office, for example. Whether the Treasury, BEIS, the Department for International Trade or the Home Office, these Departments serve the purposes of the wider Union, and Scotland needs to see that it is part of the United Kingdom. London must not be the be-all and end-all when it comes to sharing out UK Government functions and personnel, and the city deal in Stirling and Clackmannanshire offers us an opportunity, not only to see the Union flag flying on projects in Stirling, funded by taxpayers from the whole UK, but to see that commitment made real on the ground, with Departments of the Union there supporting, and not remote and distant.

I mentioned the work of Stirling Council earlier. I will close soon, so that the Minister can reply, but I should mention the excellent work done by the officers of Stirling Council, who have shown themselves to be skilled and able to punch well above the weight one would expect of a council of that size.

Luke Graham: My hon. Friend is making an excellent point about how different levels of our government work together. Having been part of two city deals, it has been clear to me that we need to use these deals as a learning point. Both the central Government in Westminster and the devolved Administration need to look at how they work with each other and to find methods that are more transparent and effective at delivering for our constituents.

Stephen Kerr: I agree with my hon. Friend. He and I have the scars from our learning experience with the city deal we are discussing tonight, and the learning from Glasgow and Edinburgh needs to be taken on board. There are better ways to do the things that we do. There is always room for continual improvement.

Jim Shannon: It is obvious from what the hon. Gentleman is saying that this is about Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the councils together. Does that not underline the fact that we can do much better if we are all together as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—and that includes our good friends the Scots nats?

Stephen Kerr: The hon. Gentleman sums it up beautifully. One might say "better together", and that is exactly the case. The council officers at Stirling Council have done an incredible job of pulling together the city deal, and I give them credit. Knowing their tenacity and their entrepreneurship, I have every confidence that they will deliver on the outcomes predicted for the city region deal. Would it not be great if the council could point to UK Departments—on the ground, right next to it—and know that it has their backing, that they share its ideals and goals and that they are as close to the detailed delivery as it is? Can we have a BEIS taskforce assigned to Stirling and Clackmannanshire to help with the execution of the city deal? I have asked for that before, and I would really like the Government to make a practical and real commitment of that nature.

Our Stirling economy—the Government have demonstrated that they have confidence in it—can be a shining beacon of how different levels of government can work together to attract and retain high-quality business investment. It will be a place to which business from around the UK and the wider world will flock when they see how government at all levels devotes itself to the development of the area. I want nothing less than for this city region deal to be the engine that drives the whole of central Scotland forward. Stirling is a burgh that received royal recognition some 900 years ago, and this city region deal will build on that long and illustrious history. It will build a future in which innovation and investment are harnessed to create good, well-paid jobs and to bring better life prospects to all people in all parts of my constituency.

10.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Nigel Adams): I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal. I pay tribute to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) for their role in advocating for this deal across the Government and securing investment for their constituencies. We were delighted that the £45 million UK Government investment was matched by the Scottish Government.

I am pleased that we are committed to funding deals in each of Scotland's seven cities, including Stirling and Clackmannanshire. That represents a total investment of £1.2 billion by the UK Government. With contributions from our friends in the Scottish Government and other partners, the total figure is even higher. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has further ambitions, and that is why the Government are rolling out deals beyond the city regions in areas such as Ayrshire, Moray and the borderlands. With further investment from other public and private partners, the total value of these deals amounts to several billion pounds. They represent a fantastic opportunity to give local and regional economies across Scotland a significant, real and transformational boost.

Douglas Ross: Will the Minister confirm that although it is important that the city deals are taken forward, it is right that the UK Government have committed to extending such deals across Scotland? Moray, which does not have a city, could benefit from a Moray growth deal in the same way as the cities have done.

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in that regard. We are committed to having 100% coverage of Scotland. As he will be aware, a commitment to the Moray growth deal was announced at the Budget. It involves some very exciting projects, including an energy pipeline, employability programmes for service families and a college hub looking at innovation in manufacturing. While the figure has not yet been clarified, the Treasury

[Nigel Adams]

has provisionally agreed a sum of around £25 million for that growth deal, which I am sure he and other hon. Friends will welcome.

To get back to the Stirling and Clackmannanshire deal, the UK Government are pleased to be supporting the University of Stirling's international reputation as a centre of excellence for aquaculture, with an offer of investment in new facilities that will not only safeguard the sector in Scotland and Wales—it can be very significant in supporting rural employment in often remote areas—but allow our world-class researchers to develop technologies that we will be able to export around the world.

In speaking about developing the infrastructure at Stirling, which will have an international focus, I of course want to take this opportunity to commend to my hon. Friends the excellent facilities at the Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Research at Swansea University. As the UK Government Minister for Wales, it would be remiss of me not to slip that into this speech about the Stirling and Clackmannanshire growth deal.

We are also supporting the establishment of the international environment centre, which will take full advantage of the natural environment and heritage of the region to bring together academic expertise from across Scotland to explore some of the key challenges of our age.

The region already represents a major draw for visitors, and local partners have been clear about their desire to do even more in that regard. Of course, any visitor to Scotland will know there is nothing more emblematic than tartan, which is why the UK Government are delighted to provide the investment needed to build the Scottish tartan centre. I am not yet aware of a particular Adams tartan. I hope that there will be one, and if I say that loud enough during the debate, perhaps someone will do a bit of research. However, I would be more than delighted to come up when the Scottish tartan centre is open—if my hon. Friend is brave enough, I will even put the relevant tartan on as well. The centre will provide an historical narrative encapsulating key developments in the history and evolution of tartan, along with related themes that will engage with a diverse audience. I am sure that hundreds of thousands of people will flock to his area to view this fantastic centre.

We are doing further work to identify additional projects in the Clackmannanshire Council area, and those will be worth around £8 million, as we have heard. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire on everything he has done to help secure that additional money from the Treasury. It is no easy feat wrestling money from the Treasury, so he should be commended.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is planning on announcing more details on that deal shortly. As part of the deal, we are pleased to be releasing some surplus MOD land for development in the centre of Stirling, and the Department for Work and Pensions is running a bespoke scheme in Clackmannanshire to help lone parents return to work.

Let me quickly refer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling about the MOD land. At first sight, the land is due to be made available under the defence estates review in 2022, which is well within the 10-year scope of the deal. The office of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the MOD are working together to ensure that the land at Forthside is ready to be released in a fit state.

On my hon. Friend's other very valid point, I would just like to politely remind him that the UK Government are committed to Scotland—it is not a case of devolve and walk away. As I have said previously, the UK Government have committed over £1.2 billion to support development in Scotland through the city and growth deal programme. That is what I call real commitment.

These investments represent a significant package that will help to transform the economies of Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Scotland. Growth deals should be transformational and show the real benefits that can be brought about when Scotland's two Governments work together instead of pulling apart—*[Interruption.]* I agree with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) that we are much better together.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland signed the heads of terms for the deal in May last year and expects to agree the full deal in the summer. That will herald a 15-year programme of investment and growth that will bring real and tangible benefits to all those who live and work across the region. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling is right. He wants to see hi-vis jackets and spades in the ground: I am happy to go up there with a spade and break the ground myself if necessary. In my view, the deal will be the engine that drives the whole of Scotland forward.

Question put and agreed to.

10.30 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 18 February 2019

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Hague Convention

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): The Government have decided to opt in to the European Commission's proposals for Council decisions authorising the acceptance by certain member states of the accession of named countries to the 1980 Hague Convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction, in the interests of the EU. The acceptances are as follows:

Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom to accept Dominican Republic;

Austria, Luxembourg and Romania to accept Belarus and Uzbekistan;

Austria to accept Ecuador and Ukraine;

Austria and Romania to accept Honduras.

The UK has already accepted Belarus, Uzbekistan, Ecuador, Ukraine and Honduras and therefore these Council decisions do not instruct the UK to take any action.

All EU member states are party to the 1980 Hague Convention, the primary civil law international instrument which provides a mechanism to seek the prompt return of wrongfully removed or retained children to their country of habitual residence.

When a country wishes to accede to the convention, it is necessary for an existing contracting state to accept that country's accession before the convention can apply between them. It is the European Commission's view that there is exclusive competence on the EU for all matters relating to the 1980 convention and that therefore member states must be authorised by the EU to accept accessions by third countries and must do so collectively through Council decisions.

Although not anticipated in the proposals, the Government believe that the UK opt in under the protocol to title V of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union applies and it has therefore asserted its right to choose whether to opt in and have decided that it is in the UK's best interests to do so.

The Government believe that the wider significance of these proposals for external competence mean that it is in the UK's interests to participate fully in these negotiations, including having the ability to vote. These proposals must be agreed by unanimity within the EU Council.

[HCWS1339]

JUSTICE

Probation Services: South-West England and Wales

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): I wish to inform the House regarding future arrangements for probation services in the south-west and Wales.

The House will be aware that community rehabilitation companies were set up just over four and a half years ago (with contracts awarded in December 2014). They were a new idea and part of probation reforms which extended supervision on licence each year to an additional 40,000 offenders released from prison sentences of less than 12 months. These companies do not deal with high-risk offenders—who are managed by the National Probation Service—but with low and medium risk offenders. They have been set up in a range of ways. There are 21 companies, the majority of which are private sector owned with a range of voluntary sector third party suppliers. Their particular purpose is to work with low and medium risk offenders, supervise them, develop plans for them, and provide them with rehabilitative services, in order to reduce the reoffending rate.

On Thursday 14 February 2019, Working Links (Employment) Limited, and its three CRCs: Wales CRC, Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire CRC, and Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC, went into administration. The Ministry of Justice has been in discussions with Working Links and has taken immediate action to ensure that probation services are fully protected in these areas. Our central priority is of course to protect the public, ensuring that we have the right supervision of offenders in place, and that probation staff are supported in their important work. We have undertaken significant work to determine the most sustainable option for future management of probation services in Wales and the south-west and have transferred staff and services to Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC, which is owned by Seetec. This change has been made via a variation to Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC's existing contract. Seetec has a good track record in Kent, Surrey and Sussex and we are satisfied that they are well-placed and well-equipped to take over these services and run them effectively. Plans have been implemented to ensure that probation staff and other key probation stakeholders are well-informed with regards to the transition.

We are also working towards more bespoke arrangements for the services in Wales, specifically that offender management services in Wales be transferred to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service before the end of the current contractual period, to better dovetail with the future design for probation delivery in Wales. Our intentions are to transfer these services by the end of 2019, rather than the previously planned date of 2020, and we are currently working at pace with Seetec to accelerate this process.

We also recognise the impact of Working Links' administration upon its other public sector contracts in the UK, and have been engaging with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Scottish Government. DWP will be working with Working Links and the administrators to identify all participants of its programmes who are potentially affected to ensure appropriate advice and support is provided.

The Government continue to work to improve the effectiveness of the wider probation system. We have already taken action to stabilise and improve probation delivery. Last year, we announced we intended to end CRC contracts early and held a consultation on proposals to improve future probation services. We also agreed contractual changes with current CRCs to improve performance in key areas. We want to create a

better system in future which will prevent these kinds of things happening again. We intend to better integrate public, private and third sector providers, putting in place a more stable and resilient probation system, which works effectively to protect the public and tackle reoffending. We will announce detailed plans later this year.

We know probation is vital to ensuring justice is done and the cycle of reoffending is broken. We will work closely with Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC and Seetec in the next weeks and months to ensure the continuation, stability and improvement of services.

[HCWS1338]

Petition

Monday 18 February 2019

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

The future of maintained nursery schools

The petition of the parents, carers, staff and governors of Tenterfield maintained nursery school in Welwyn.

Declares that we are concerned about the future of maintained nursery schools in England after March 2020 as no guarantee has been given by Government that adequate funding will continue when supplementary funding ends.

The petitions therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government to take action to ensure maintained nursery schools are financial sustainable for the future.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Grant Shapps.]*

[P002428]

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