

**Wednesday
20 February 2019**

**Volume 654
No. 256**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 20 February 2019

House of Commons

Wednesday 20 February 2019

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU

1. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. It is good to see the Benches so busy for Scotland questions. [909249]

7. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [909256]

8. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [909257]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I share the pleasure of the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) at seeing so many Members present on the Opposition Benches below the gangway. I have regular meetings with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and colleagues and have discussed the benefits of the withdrawal agreement and political deceleration for Scotland and the whole UK.

Patrick Grady: Does Secretary of State accept that no form of Brexit is better for Scotland than our current deal, which is membership? On that basis, will he take the opportunity now to rule out a no-deal, cliff-edge Brexit by extending article 50?

David Mundell: There is one sure and clear way to avoid a no-deal Brexit, and that is to vote for the Prime Minister's deal; but on every occasion that SNP Members have had an opportunity to do so, they have declined. Indeed, they have sought to bring a no-deal Brexit closer to reality.

Alan Brown: Instead of these weasel words and standard answer, will the Secretary of State answer the question? The Government agree that no deal would be a disaster. Does he agree with extending article 50 to rule out a no-deal scenario?

David Mundell: I agree that we should leave the EU with a deal. The SNP position is to contrive to bring about a no-deal Brexit, and the chaos and disruption that they know that would bring to Scotland.

Peter Grant: It is just as well that the three-strikes-and-you're-out rule does not apply here, or the Secretary of State would be one dodged question away from an early bath. On other occasions, the Secretary of State has been very keen to know what plan B was, so what has he told the Prime Minister his plan B is when—not if, but when—the Prime Minister's rotten deal is rejected again? Is his plan B no deal or is it to extend article 50, and why is he so coy about telling us what it is?

David Mundell: First, I absolutely refute the hon. Gentleman's description of the Prime Minister's deal. The Prime Minister's deal is a good deal. This House, by a majority, has set out changes it wants to that deal, and the Prime Minister is seeking that deal. But if SNP Members really do not want no deal, they should be backing a deal.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): Can the Secretary of State confirm that, having spent months propping herself in front of every TV camera going, demanding a seat at the table, the First Minister of Scotland was extended an invitation to a series of key meetings by the Prime Minister, which she could not even be bothered to attend?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend is correct. For whatever reason, the First Minister has chosen not to attend the Cabinet Sub-Committee chaired by the Prime Minister on EU exit preparedness. What she has been prepared to do, however, is to go on television and say that she would not accept any deal; no matter what that deal contained, she would not accept a deal. To me, that is a most powerful advocate for a no-deal Brexit.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Her Majesty's Government's Agriculture Bill will give essential legal clarity for farm payments after 2020 and safeguard the UK frameworks as we leave the EU. Does the Secretary of State agree that that is in marked contrast to the SNP Scottish Government who, even at this late stage, have refused to be part of the Bill, leaving Scottish farmers in the dark and at risk?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend has become a powerful advocate for Scottish agriculture in this Parliament. He is correct. We have offered the Scottish Government the opportunity to join us in taking forward the UK Agriculture Bill and providing certainty for Scottish farmers. Instead, they prepare to play politics with Scottish farming and leave farmers with great uncertainty.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): In line with the Prime Minister's ongoing commitment to supporting the growth of the fisheries sector outside the common fisheries policy, may I ask my right hon. Friend what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Treasury about future financial support for the sector, and how best to progress with that and invest in the industry in Scotland?

David Mundell: As my hon. Friend knows, both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have made very clear their support for the industry. Indeed, this afternoon I am meeting the Secretary of State, and that will be one issue on our agenda.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): We have seen over the past few weeks the large number of businesses that have been warning about Brexit and the Government's strategy on Brexit. I keep being told by the leave campaign, "Don't worry; businesses will adapt." Well, they are adapting. They are adapting by moving their holding companies and their brass plates to other European Union countries. What will the Secretary of State do in the Cabinet to try to sort this mess out before it is too late? While his party and the SNP fight over flags, some of us are going to have to fight for jobs in our constituencies.

David Mundell: I did anticipate that I would have a question from the hon. Gentleman, but I was not sure whether he would ask it from the Labour Benches. What he needs to do, if he is concerned about avoiding a no-deal Brexit and the disruption and chaos that that would bring to Scottish businesses, is back the Prime Minister's deal.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Coming back to Brexit, the Secretary of State seems to be completely incapable of answering a simple question: given the choice between no deal and extending article 50 to avoid that scenario, would he choose the latter option? Leaving that to one side, the papers report that he and three colleagues went to see the Prime Minister on Monday this week to discuss this very matter. Did he request that the Prime Minister take no deal off the table, and what was her response?

David Mundell: I am very clear about the implications of no deal for Scotland and the United Kingdom, which is why I want the Prime Minister to achieve a deal. That is why any Member of the House who does not want a no-deal outcome should support a deal.

Tommy Sheppard: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be incapable of answering a simple question. If he did indeed tell the Prime Minister to take no deal off the table, let me commend him, because for once—a rare occasion—he is in tune with public opinion in Scotland. He has threatened in the past to resign over matters of detail. When it comes to a matter of principle—having a deal or not—is he prepared to stay in the Cabinet and implement a no-deal scenario?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman puts his finger on the key question. It is about having a deal or not. When that question has been asked, the SNP has always been in the not column, contriving to bring about a no-deal Brexit for Scotland. I am in the deal column. I voted for the deal in the meaningful vote, and I will do so again.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is high time that Members in all parts of the House, in the words of the head of Make UK, set aside

"selfish political ideology ahead of the national interest and people's livelihoods",

and voted for an EU withdrawal agreement to prevent the catastrophic event of leaving the EU without a deal?

David Mundell: Yes.

Lesley Laird (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): On the 12 October 2016, when questioned about the sweetheart deal that the UK Government struck with Nissan, the Secretary of State stood at the Dispatch Box and told the House that whatever support is put in place for businesses in the south of England

"will apply to businesses in Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 12 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 287.]

In the light of the news that Nissan was offered a financial package worth up to £80 million to ensure that it would not be adversely affected by Brexit, can he detail the financial support that he has made available to Scottish businesses to ensure that, like Nissan, they are not adversely affected by Brexit?

David Mundell: I am pleased to see the hon. Lady on the Labour Benches, as it has been reported that she would be willing to give up her seat to the SNP so that there could be a Labour minority Government propped up by the SNP. I stand by what I said previously: we stand ready to support businesses in Scotland. A huge amount of Government support has gone into supporting businesses in Scotland since the Brexit vote, and that will continue to be the case.

Mr Speaker: May I gently say to Members on both sides of the House that the style is altogether too languid? A lot of people want to get in: short questions, short answers, and let us move on. I call Lesley Laird.

Lesley Laird: Let me reassure the Secretary of State that I am going nowhere—I am Labour through and through. [*Interruption.*] He should not believe everything that he reads in the newspapers.

Recently, Nissan, Honda, Jaguar Land Rover, Airbus, Sony, Panasonic, the Federation of Small Businesses, the CBI and many others have said that the Government's incompetence over Brexit already means that jobs are being lost. Everyone here knows that the Prime Minister's deal is dead, so is the Secretary of State going to let this circus continue or is he going to pull his head out of the sand and take no deal off the table, because that is what business wants, it is what Parliament wants, and it is what the country wants.

David Mundell: What the country wants is to have this sorted. They want to leave the EU with a deal, and the hon. Lady and her colleagues should support the Prime Minister in her endeavour.

Immigration Bill

2. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of provisions in the immigration Bill on Scotland. [909250]

5. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of provisions in the immigration Bill on Scotland. [909254]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The Immigration and Social Security Co-Ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill will help us deliver the new single, skills-based immigration system we want, one that maximises the benefits of immigration and demonstrates that Scotland and the UK are open for business.

Drew Hendry: I have heard the Secretary of State's answer, but what faith can the people of Scotland have in the new immigration Bill or his Government when even after the issue was raised with the Prime Minister, with a promised intervention from the Home Secretary, the Home Secretary's office told me yesterday that it has lost the file on Denis Omondi, the serving British soldier in 3 Scots whose young daughter has been denied a visa? Will the Scottish Secretary now get personally involved in this travesty?

David Mundell: I am disappointed to hear what the hon. Gentleman has said, and yes of course I will.

Stuart C. McDonald: Last week, the National Farmers Union Scotland told the Bill Committee that free movement works and should continue, that the Government's seasonal workers pilot was not nearly enough and that post-Brexit immigration proposals do not make sense and are "very obstructive". Given that the UK-wide system is not working for Scotland's farmers, will the Secretary of State argue for different immigration rules to apply in Scotland?

David Mundell: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman references the seasonal workers scheme, which my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) did so much to champion, but he is very selective in the evidence he cites. The clear view of businesses giving evidence to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs is that they do not want a separate Scottish immigration system.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the CBI has said that a UK-wide immigration policy is the correct route, including for businesses in Moray and across Scotland?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend is right: that is the position of the CBI and of business organisations in Scotland, because they want workers to be able to move around the United Kingdom. There is no justification for a separate Scottish immigration system.

Mr Speaker: I call Luke Graham.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: A bout of shyness has afflicted the hon. Gentleman.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): In both Scotland and Cornwall, many low-paid but skilled jobs are provided by immigrants to the UK. What assurance can the Secretary of State give that that will continue after Brexit?

Mr Speaker: The question is purely about Scotland.

David Mundell: In relation to Scotland, the immigration White Paper is a one-year consultation and businesses such as those referenced by my hon. Friend should take part in it and make the very point he has made.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It certainly feels different up here on these Benches today, that's for sure. What does the Secretary of State have to say to the young people of Scotland—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is something wrong with the microphone. It is very unusual. I have never been unable previously to hear the hon. Gentleman, but what I would say is blurt it out with vim, man!

Pete Wishart: I am, Mr Speaker. What does the Secretary of State have to say to the young people of Scotland who, because of his Tory Brexit, will be denied the rights and opportunities to live, work and love across the continent of Europe?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman gives a solid reason why he and his colleagues should support the Prime Minister's deal, which sets out those very issues. Instead, he would far rather have no deal and set about the chaos and disruption that he believes would further the cause of independence.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I must say that, although my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) no longer sits on the Conservative Benches, she remains my hon. Friend.

Does the Secretary of State agree that the immigration Bill must not include provision for Scotland to join the Schengen area? That would undermine the common travel area and potentially result in a border with England.

David Mundell: There are those in this House who would, of course, like Scotland to have a border with England, but that is not true of this Government, who will never do anything that would bring that about.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the Secretary of State for Scotland agree with me that Scotland needs more immigrants and needs more workers? Will he therefore support lifting the ban on asylum seekers working when they come to this country?

David Mundell: Asylum seekers are a clear category and are dealt with under some very specific rules, but I do agree with the hon. Lady's general proposition. That is why I encourage her and others to engage with the consultation set out in the immigration White Paper.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The immigration Bill and the immigration White Paper go hand in hand. The Bill ends freedom of movement and the White Paper sets out the proposed immigration criteria once free movement ends. But the Secretary of State surely should be championing the pressing demographic and skills needs of Scotland at the Cabinet table. My first job in the shipyards, after graduating, paid £24,000. Many of my colleagues from across the EU and further afield earn similar amounts, and they have brought great expertise to our industry. Indeed, given that the average salary in Scotland is about £23,000 and the average care worker in Scotland is paid £18,000,

what is he going to do to ensure that this ridiculous, arbitrary salary cap is consigned to the bin, where it belongs?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman makes valid points, and I am sure they will all form part of the one-year consultation that is ongoing. I certainly will be advocating those sorts of points in that consultation.

Borderlands Growth Deal

3. **Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): What progress the Government have made on the borderlands growth deal. [909251]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): Growth deals lie right at the heart of the UK Government's support for Scotland, which is why we have committed £1.3 billion to support the existing seven city and region growth deals. We remain committed to the borderlands growth deal.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The borderlands deal is a wonderful opportunity to help economic growth across what we in the borders consider a completely invisible line and not a border at all for practical purposes and day-to-day living. Will the Minister assure me—it is lovely to have a Treasury Minister answering the question—that we will get full support from the Treasury to ensure that we have a really strong, well-built growth deal?

Mel Stride: As a Treasury Minister, I can certainly reassure my hon. Friend that the Treasury remains firmly engaged with local partners in ensuring that we have the best possible deal for the borderlands, including her part of the UK.

Rural NHS Hospitals: Public Transport

4. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the provision in Scotland of public transport servicing rural NHS hospitals. [909252]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Transport and healthcare policy both fall within the competence of the Scottish Government. Nevertheless, the UK Government remain open to discussing best practice with the devolved Administrations.

Robert Halfon: NHS car parking charges were scrapped in Scotland in 2008, saving patients, visitors and staff £35 million. Will my right hon. Friend work with the rest of the UK Government to scrap hospital car parking charges across the UK?

David Mundell: I am sure that my colleagues in the Cabinet with the relevant responsibilities will have heard my right hon. Friend's plea. He has in the past been a very effective campaigner on such matters.

Foreign Direct Investment

6. **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage foreign direct investment in Scotland. [909255]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): The UK promotes UK FDI throughout the world. In 2017, 76,000 new jobs were created in the UK as a consequence. There are 141 FDI projects in Scotland, creating about 4,000 jobs in Scotland.

Theresa Villiers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons behind record levels of foreign direct investment into Scotland is its place in the United Kingdom, the most successful political union in history?

Mel Stride: I agree entirely with that. Scotland benefits enormously through being part of what is the world's fifth largest economy and one of the most dynamic and successful economies in the world.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Does the Financial Secretary agree with me that the First Minister has an important role to play in bringing foreign investment to Scotland and that any criticisms, including those from his own colleagues in Holyrood, border on the provincial to the ridiculous, unless of course they believe that the office of First Minister is a stay-at-home job?

Mel Stride: The First Minister of course has a critical role in ensuring that investment is channelled towards Scotland, but I do not believe that promoting Scottish independence is a way of attracting investment.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): On the First Minister's recent trip to Canada, it was reported that she did not mention Scotland's proudest export, Scotch whisky, once. Does the Minister agree with me that the best way for the First Minister to secure more foreign direct investment into Scotland is to stop prancing around the world flogging independence, and do what she is supposed to be doing, which is to be back in the country she is supposed to be leading? She should be reducing taxes, bettering our public services and making Scotland a more lucrative place in which to do business?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Increasing investment in Scotland is not about promoting Scottish independence; it is about promoting Scottish products and business. We froze duty on whisky at the last Budget—whisky itself represents about 20% of all the food and drink sales from the United Kingdom. We will stand behind that and other Scottish exports.

Scottish Veterans

9. **Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on the welfare of Scottish veterans. [909260]

11. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on the welfare of Scottish veterans. [909262]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): As members of the ministerial covenant and veterans board, the Secretary of State for Defence and I have worked closely together and with the devolved Administrations on the ambitious UK-wide veterans strategy, encompassing

devolved areas, including housing, education and mental health, to address the needs of veterans in all parts of the UK, including Scotland.

Bill Grant: My right hon. Friend will be aware that, sadly, some veterans may find themselves homeless. What engagement has he had with the Scottish Government and local authorities in Scotland to help resolve this matter?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend will be aware that housing is a devolved area and the responsibility of the Scottish Government. However, the UK Government support the veterans gateway, which, among other things, provides advice to veterans on housing and accommodation in Scotland and across the UK.

Chris Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the first ever UK-wide veterans strategy is a fantastic example of the significant collaboration that occurs every day between the UK and the Scottish Government?

David Mundell: Yes, indeed—I am very happy to confirm that. Although we see a lot of politicking in this Chamber and in Holyrood, the fact is that on a day-to-day basis the Scottish Government, the UK Government and indeed the Welsh Assembly Government can work productively together.

Santander Branch Closures

10. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with representatives of Santander on that bank's proposed branch closures in Scotland. [909261]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): Bank branch closures are commercial decisions; they are not for the Government. However, we do recognise the difficulties that they bring. That is why we are committed, among other measures, to banking facilities within a Post Office network—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. A lot of noisy, private conversations are taking place. That is unsound on two counts. First, it is rather a discourtesy to a senior member of the Government and, although he seems modest about it and unperturbed, I am not. Secondly, it means that the House is deprived of the joy of listening to the Minister's mellifluous tones. The Minister is welcome to continue, at a suitable pace, with his answer.

Mel Stride: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Speaker. I was concluding by saying that we are fully committed to the 11,500 post offices up and down the United Kingdom, most of which provide banking services.

Angela Crawley: Santander will be closing 15 branches across Scotland, including in Lanark in my constituency. People and businesses across Clydesdale depend on this service, which cannot be delivered by post offices. Will the Secretary of State call a halt to these closures?

Mel Stride: As I have already outlined, these are commercial decisions to be taken by Santander and other banks. We have supported the access to banking

protocol, which sets out clear measures that banks must take when they do close branches, to ensure that local customers are supported.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): As my right hon. Friend said, some of these decisions are commercial ones, on which the Government cannot intervene. However, they can intervene more on the Post Office side. Will he meet me to discuss access to cash and the campaign that Which? is running, as well as how we can support the communities impacted by bank closures, such as Comrie and Alloa in my constituency?

Mel Stride: Yes.

Mr Speaker: I gently point out that the issue extends beyond the particular bank branches with which the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) is concerned. If, however, there is a sudden outbreak of unexpected shyness and reticence, the House will note that. It is a most unusual state of affairs: when previously there were significant numbers of Members bobbing up and down, with a view to taking part—

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

Mr Speaker: Ah! I call Mr David Linden.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Will the Minister, since he has been so generous in agreeing to meet hon. Members, agree to meet me to discuss protecting the Santander branch in Parkhead and telling the bank to save our Santander?

Mel Stride: I would be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) and to the Minister for his characteristically pithy reply. We are much obliged to him for it.

PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—
Engagements*

Q1. [909334] **Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 20 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): First of all, I am sure the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to our former colleague Paul Flynn. He was an outstanding parliamentarian and a tireless campaigner, and he championed his constituency of Newport West, and Wales, with energy and enthusiasm for over 30 years. Paul spent the vast majority of his career as a Back Bencher and wrote a helpful guide in his book "Commons Knowledge: How to be a Backbencher", before being made shadow Leader of the House and shadow Secretary of State for Wales. But of course he will be remembered for one of the great parliamentary quotes. When he left Labour's Front Bench in 2016, he said:

"Our glorious leader, in an act of pioneering diversity, courageously decided to give opportunities for geriatrics on the Front Bench and this was so successful that he decided to create opportunities for geriatrics on the Back Bench. I'm double blessed."

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

Stephen Doughty: May I add my tribute to the words of the Prime Minister for my former constituency neighbour, friend and Welsh Labour colleague Paul Flynn? He was a remarkable man. He will go down as one of the great parliamentarians of the past 40 years and was an inspiration to many of us. He once gave me a copy of that book when I was a teenager, so he must have seen something in me, Mr Speaker. I am rebellious, although maybe not quite as rebellious as him. He was a great man and he will be missed by all of us.

In the midst of political crisis, it is ever more important that we put our country first. With thousands of jobs at risk and our international reputation in question, will the Prime Minister now stop playing Russian roulette, rule out no deal, and put a deal back to the British people so they can have the final say?

The Prime Minister: First of all, the hon. Gentleman knows there are two ways in which it is possible to ensure that we do not see no deal. One is to stay in the European Union, which is not what the referendum result said, and the other is to agree a deal. What I am working on at the moment is taking the view of this House of Commons about the concerns on the backstop in the deal and working with Brussels to resolve that issue, such that this House will be able to agree a deal.

Q2. [909335] Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): This afternoon, the House will debate antisemitism. With that in mind, I quote from the statement of the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), who explained Labour inactivity on this issue:

“Given a choice between the support of antisemites and ridding Labour of Jew-hate, they have decided to side with antisemites.”

In the light of that, will the Prime Minister join me in urging Labour to rid its party of this scourge once and for all?

The Prime Minister: I think this is a very important issue that everybody in this House should take seriously. I never thought I would see the day when Jewish people in this country were concerned about their future in this country, and I never thought I would see the day when a once-proud Labour party was accused of institutional antisemitism by a former Member of that party. It is incumbent on all of us in this House to ensure that we act against antisemitism wherever and however it occurs. It is racism and we should act against it.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): May I start, Mr Speaker, by joining what you said on Monday in paying tribute to my friend and yours, Paul Flynn? He served in this House for over 30 years as the Member for Newport West. He was courageous; he was warm; he was witty. As the Prime Minister pointed out, he served briefly on the shadow Front Bench. When he came to his first shadow Cabinet meeting, he welcomed my “diversity project to promote octogenarians”

to the shadow Cabinet. His book on how to become an MP is absolutely a must-read. He was respected all across the House and I think we are all going to miss his contributions, his wit and his wisdom. Our deepest

condolences to his wife Sam and all his family, and to his wider family across Newport and Wales. He was a truly wonderful man and a great and dear friend.

I also hope that the House will join me in paying tribute to Baroness Falkender, who died earlier this month, and send our condolences to her friends and family. When Marcia served with distinction as political secretary to Harold Wilson, she was subjected to a long campaign of misogynistic smear and innuendo. She suffered a great deal as a result, and we should remember the great work that she did as political secretary to Harold Wilson.

The Prime Minister just responded to a question on antisemitism. I simply say this: antisemitism has no place whatsoever in any of our political parties, in our life, in our society—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Mr Ellis, be quiet now and for the rest of the session. You used to practise as a barrister. You did not make those sorts of harrumphing noises in the courts; or if you did, no wonder you no longer practise there.

Jeremy Corbyn: As I was saying, antisemitism has no place whatsoever in our society or in any of our political parties, and my own political party takes the strongest action to deal with antisemitism wherever it rears its head.

Last week, an EU official said the UK Government were only “pretending to negotiate”, adding that there was “nothing on the table from the British side,”

so with just 37 days to go, can the Prime Minister be clear about what she will actually be proposing today when she travels to Brussels?

The Prime Minister: Of course there are a number of meetings taking place in Brussels. My right hon. Friend the Brexit Secretary and the Attorney General were in Brussels earlier this week and had a constructive and positive meeting with officials in the European Commission on the issue of alternative arrangements and work on alternative arrangements. The issue that I am taking to Brussels is the one I have been speaking to EU leaders about over the last few days—that is, the concern that was expressed in this House about ensuring that we could not find ourselves in the current backstop indefinitely. There a number of ways, as I have identified on a number of occasions at this Dispatch Box, to deal with that. I have referenced the work on alternative arrangements. There are also the options of an end-date or a unilateral exit mechanism and legal work—what matters in all of this are legally binding changes that ensure that we address the concern that has been raised by this House. That is what I will be discussing with the European Commission and will continue to discuss with it and European Union leaders.

Jeremy Corbyn: It sounds like it might be quite confusing for the European Union to understand exactly what the Prime Minister is turning up with, actually. She has had three groups of Back Benchers working on three proposals: first, to remove the backstop; secondly, to make the backstop time-limited; and thirdly, to give the UK the right to exit unilaterally. Which of these proposals is the Prime Minister negotiating for today: one, two or three?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman points out that, as I just said in my response to his question—he could have listened to that answer, but I am happy to repeat it—there are a number of ways in which it is possible to address the issue that has been raised by this House of Commons. Work is being undertaken on those various issues. On the alternative arrangements, for example, the Commission has raised questions, particularly about the extent to which derogation from European Union law would be necessary to put those in place, and there is concern about being able to achieve that if we are going to leave in time. Nevertheless, we have agreed that a workstream will go forward on those matters. We are also exploring the other issues, but the point is a very simple one. It is not just a question of saying to the European Union, “Actually, this is just the one thing.” It is a question of sitting down with the European Union and finding a solution that is going to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland and Ireland, that is going to ensure that we deal with the concern that has been raised here in this House of Commons and that is going to enable a deal to be brought back to this House of Commons that it can support so that we leave on 29 March with a deal.

Jeremy Corbyn: Last week, a Foreign Office Minister said categorically:

“We are not leaving without a deal”,

but sadly he does not speak for the Government. The Prime Minister’s Business Minister says he is

“very conscious of the damage that not ruling out a hard Brexit is having on business and industry”.

People’s jobs and livelihoods are in the Prime Minister’s hands. Will she stop playing games with people’s jobs and make it very clear that no deal is absolutely ruled out?

The Prime Minister: People’s jobs and futures are in the hands of every Member of this House. Once again, the right hon. Gentleman could have listened to an answer I gave earlier, to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty). There are only two ways to take no deal off the table: one is to back a deal, the other is to revoke article 50 and stay in the EU. The right hon. Gentleman has refused to back a deal, so the obvious conclusion is that he must want to revoke article 50. He can stand up now and tell us what his policy is—is it to back the deal or to stay in the EU?

Jeremy Corbyn: I did write the Prime Minister a very nice letter setting out our views. I am sure she received it and read it and I hope she will think on it.

It appears that the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) was right when he said last week that in the event that the Prime Minister’s deal does not succeed

“this Government...and this Prime Minister...would prefer to...head for the exit door without a deal”.—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 1108.]

He went on to say that it was “a terrifying fact”. Thousands of car workers in Derby, Sunderland, Birmingham and Swindon are facing redundancy. Does that matter to the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: We have seen decisions taken by car manufacturers, and obviously Honda’s decision this week is deeply disappointing, but it has made it absolutely

clear that this is not a Brexit-related decision, but a response to the change in the global car market. Of course jobs matter to the Government. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about jobs, perhaps he would like to change the habit of a lifetime and stand up at that Dispatch Box and welcome the excellent job figures we have seen this week under this Government.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister does not seem very interested in listening to those companies and industry bodies that are saying they need a customs union. When she talks about jobs, will she also talk about those doing two or three jobs to make ends meet, those on zero-hours contracts, those so low paid they have to access food banks just to survive and those suffering from in-work poverty—on her watch, under her Government?

Last year, investment in the car industry halved. Brexit uncertainty is already costing investment, and where investment is cut today, jobs are cut tomorrow. That uncertainty would not end even if the Prime Minister’s rejected deal somehow got through, because it promises only the certainty of a “spectrum” of possible outcomes. Will she see sense and offer business and workers the certainty of a customs union that could protect jobs and industry in this country?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman will also have heard from car manufacturers is their support for the deal the Government negotiated with the EU. If he wants to talk about jobs, I am very happy to talk about jobs, because what do we see in the latest figures? We see employment at a record high and unemployment at its lowest since the 1970s; we see that 96% of the increase in employment in the last year has come from full-time work; we see youth unemployment almost halved since 2010, and female employment is at a record high. [*Interruption.*] It is all very well shouting from the Front Bench, but let us look at Labour’s record in government. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Lavery, calm yourself. You have applied to be a statesman, but there is an apprenticeship, and you have to undergo it, but it is not assisted by such sedentary ranting.

The Prime Minister: Let us look at Labour’s record in government on employment: unemployment rose by nearly half a million; female unemployment rose by 26%; youth unemployment rose by 44%; and the number of households where no one had ever worked nearly doubled. That is the record of a Labour Government under which working people pay the price of Labour.

Jeremy Corbyn: Child poverty halved under the Labour Government. We invested in Sure Start—in children’s centres—and a future for young people. The Prime Minister should get out a bit more and hear the anger of so many young people around this country at what they are suffering under her Government and on her watch.

The chair of the manufacturers’ organisation Make UK said yesterday:

“I am saddened by the way that some of our politicians have put selfish political ideology ahead of the national interest and people’s livelihoods and left us facing the catastrophic prospect of leaving the EU next month with no deal”.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the Food and Drink Federation, the National Farmers Union and the CBI all want a disastrous no deal ruled out. Along with the TUC, many also support the UK being in a permanent customs union.

There is a little over a month to go and the Government have failed to put the country first. There is the crisis of jobs going and industries under threat, and the Prime Minister indulges in what her own Business Minister calls “fanciful nonsense”. When is she going to put the interests of the people of this country before the interests of the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has consistently put his party political interest ahead of the national interest. We can take no deal off the table by agreeing a deal, yet at every stage he has acted to frustrate a deal. He has acted to make no deal more likely, but that is not surprising from this Labour party. What do we see from his Labour party? Hamas and Hezbollah are friends, and Israel and the United States are enemies; Hatton a hero, and Churchill a villain. Attlee and Bevan will be spinning in their graves. That is what the right hon. Gentleman has done to a once-proud Labour party. We will never let him do it to our country.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know from Shelter that many people in receipt of benefits are blocked from renting in the private sector. These people are often carers or have a disability. I know that No. 10 is working with Shelter to resolve this problem. Will the Prime Minister give all her officials her support to resolve this pressing issue?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. We are working with Shelter. I urge that work to go ahead to a fruitful conclusion. Stuart Carroll, one of my local councillors, has raised this issue with me and has come in to work with No. 10. It is an important issue and we are working on it to find a satisfactory resolution soon.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on the sad death of Paul Flynn? He will be missed by many, and thoughts and prayers are with Sam and his family. He was a unique and truly gifted parliamentarian. It was a pleasure to serve on a Committee with him and it was a pleasure to have known him.

Westminster is broken. We are in the middle of a constitutional crisis and on the brink of a Brexit disaster, yet this place is at war with itself. The Tories and the Labour party are imploding. Scotland deserves better. We need a way out. Time is running out. Will this House get to vote on the Prime Minister's Brexit deal next week, and if not, when?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, we are in discussions with the European Union and will bring a vote back when it is possible to bring a deal back that deals with the issue that the House of Commons has raised. We have listened to the House of Commons. We are working on the views of the House with the European Union, and we will bring a vote back when it is the right time to do so.

Ian Blackford: Quite simply, that is not good enough. Time is running out. Three and a half thousand jobs have been lost from Honda; the NFU says that a no-deal Brexit is the “stuff of nightmares”; and 100,000 jobs in Scotland are under threat. Prime Minister, you are bringing the UK economy to its knees. How many warnings, how many jobs and how many resignations will it take for the Prime Minister to stop this madness? If you do not act, Prime Minister, Scotland will.

The Prime Minister: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that we see debt down, the deficit down, jobs up, taxes down—oh, taxes down not in Scotland of course, where the SNP is putting taxes up. He says it is not good enough, but I will tell him what is not good enough: it is an SNP that wants to take Scotland out of the United Kingdom, knowing full well that being a member of the United Kingdom is worth £1,400 every year for each person in Scotland. He talks about damaging the economy; the only people who are going to damage the economy in Scotland are sitting on the SNP Benches.

Q7. [909341] **Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister join me in thanking the Home Secretary for making it very clear that those who join or support terrorist organisations abroad do not deserve British citizenship and that this Government are not a soft touch for terrorists?

The Prime Minister: It is an important message for us to give that we are very clear that we will take action against those who are involved in terrorism. Obviously, each Home Secretary deals with the question of deprivation on a number of occasions; I dealt with deprivation cases myself, and there is a very clear set of criteria on which the Home Secretary considers that matter. But the overall point my hon. Friend makes is absolutely right: how important it is for this Government and this country to make it very clear that we will take action against those who are involved in terrorism.

Q3. [909336] **Eleanor Smith** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Before going into my question, may I say a few words about our colleague Paul Flynn? I went to Bangladesh with him and his wife and it was absolutely lovely. He was a very nice person and surely will be missed. I give my condolences to his wife, Sam, and hopefully she will get in contact with me as soon as she can. Thank you.

Right, Prime Minister: Heidi Prescott is a little girl who is my constituent, and she was born with a rare muscular wasting spinal disease called spinal muscular atrophy. She is 10 years old and her condition is worsening. Heidi is now losing the ability to walk and is spending most of her time in a wheelchair. There is a treatment that could help Heidi, slow down the deterioration and prolong her life; it is called Spinraza. It is not available in England but will be in Scotland in April 2019. Why can this treatment not be accessible to my constituent Heidi and other children in England with this disease?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady has raised a particular case about Heidi, her constituent, and obviously I am sorry to hear that Heidi is in these circumstances. On the question of the drugs and treatments that are available, obviously we have a robust independent process through the National Institute for Health and Care

Excellence reviews to look at new medicines that are possible, and this is the case with Spinraza. I am pleased that Biogen has, as I understand it, submitted a revised submission for the NICE appraisal committee to consider and a meeting has been arranged for 6 March when those recommendations will be considered.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): All parliamentarians should be horrified that any human being would spend the night sleeping on a pavement. In that regard, will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity, following the visit from the relevant Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler), to acknowledge that Southend-on-Sea Borough Council together with its associated bodies has reduced rough sleeping by 85%, and that that is another reason why Southend should become a city? And will the Government do all they can to address issues of alcohol abuse and mental health?

The Prime Minister: First, well done to my hon. Friend for once again getting in his bid for Southend to be a city. He raises very important issues; we are addressing the issues of alcoholism and mental health, and of course these are often connected when people find themselves homeless or rough sleeping. I am happy to congratulate Southend council on the work it has done to reduce rough sleeping in its area. I am pleased to say that the rough sleeping initiative which the Government have introduced, where we are working with the local authorities with the highest levels of rough sleeping, has seen rough sleeping falling by 23% in those areas, so action is being taken and that is having an impact. Of course there is more to do, and we focus on those issues that underlie the problems that those who find themselves rough sleeping are experiencing.

Q4. [909338] **Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Hundreds of leaseholders in my constituency, and many thousands more across the country, are still living in privately owned buildings covered in dangerous Grenfell-style cladding, and they have no idea whether they will have to pay the full cost of the remedial works and interim fire safety measures. I am sure that the Prime Minister will tell me that she expects building owners not to pass on those costs and that nothing is ruled out, but my constituents want to know when the Government will act to make private owners pay, rather than just continuing to ask them nicely.

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman has heard me respond to a similar issue before. We have repeatedly called on private building owners not to pass costs on to leaseholders, and as a result of our interventions, 216 owners have either started, completed or have commitments in place to remediate. Fifty are not co-operating, but we are maintaining pressure on them and we rule nothing out. We have established a taskforce to oversee the remediation of private sector buildings, and it is actively working to do just that.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Sometimes our public services fail to provide our military personnel, our veterans or their families with the support that they need, and they have nowhere to take their case for arbitration. Will the Prime Minister meet me to

discuss my campaign to create an armed forces ombudsman, so that those who have served our country will know that they are valued?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for the way in which she has worked to champion the armed forces covenant and the interests of the armed forces. Of course we should all recognise the sacrifice and dedication of our armed forces and the work that they do for us, day in and day out. I would be very happy to meet her to discuss her proposal.

Q5. [909339] **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): Alongside the tributes paid to our late dear colleague Paul Flynn, I hope that the Prime Minister will join me in recognising his dogged determination in his fight for the legalisation of medicinal cannabis. Since November, however, the rescheduling of medicinal cannabis has not changed anything. Not a single new NHS prescription has been issued, and this is causing the families of children with epilepsy, in particular, unbearable suffering. It is evident that someone, somewhere, is blocking this. Did the Government mean to block this life-changing medicine for those children? If not, what will they do about it?

The Prime Minister: Of course the Government have taken action in relation to the issue of medicinal cannabis, but the important thing is that decisions are taken on the basis of clinical evidence by those who are best able to take those decisions, rather than by Ministers. A process has been put in place to ensure that, where there are cases, those cases are looked at very carefully and that decisions are properly taken by the clinicians who are best placed to do so.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The Home Secretary is to be congratulated on his swift and decisive action in removing British citizenship from Shamima Begum, but the fact remains that, of the 900 British nationals who have gone to support Daesh fighting against British armed forces in Iraq and Syria, only 40 have been prosecuted. With 400 of those individuals set to return to this country in the near future, will the Prime Minister revisit the provisions of the Treason Act to ensure that these appalling activities receive suitable and just punishment?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, our priority is to ensure safety and security here in the UK. We also recognise that anyone who has travelled to Syria not only puts themselves in considerable danger but potentially poses a serious national security risk. Any British citizen who returns from taking part in the conflict must be in no doubt that they will be questioned, investigated and potentially prosecuted. It is right that we follow that process, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will accept that one of the issues in looking at prosecution is ensuring that there is evidence to enable a prosecution to take place. Decisions on how people are dealt with are taken on a case-by-case basis, to ensure that the most appropriate action is taken. We are ensuring that, in every decision, we put the protection and safety of the public first.

Q6. [909340] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Prime Minister is correct: history will judge us all, and those in positions of authority will be

particularly harshly judged—people such as the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition—for dividing the country and their parties. Will the Prime Minister finally rule out no deal and stem the bloodletting in British jobs, dismiss the nonsensical notion of a jobs-first Brexit and extend article 50 to enable the people finally to vote, given that her sole justification for backing Brexit is the will of the people?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about ensuring that we do not leave the European Union without a deal, he has a simple route through this, which is to back the deal that the Government bring back from the European Union.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in paying tribute to my late old friend Steve Dymond, a haemophiliac who was infected by contaminated blood? He fought for over 20 years, showing great bravery and resilience, and was supported throughout by his wife Su. He was grateful when the Langstaff inquiry was set up, so does the Prime Minister agree that it is vital that all the NHS documents and medical notes that the inquiry may need are made available so that it can be fully comprehensive?

The Prime Minister: I join my right hon. and learned Friend in paying tribute to Steve Dymond. The contaminated blood scandal was an appalling tragedy that should never have happened, and it is vital that the victims who have suffered so much and their families get the answers and justice they deserve, for which, as we all know, they have waited decades. I am assured by the Department of Health and Social Care that it has already sent thousands of documents to the inquiry and will send more when necessary, but we are committed to being open and transparent with the inquiry and have waived the usual legal privileges to assist the process. It is important that the inquiry is able to get to the truth.

Q8. [909342] **Phil Wilson** (Sedgefield) (Lab): Prime Minister, Conservative Governments have taken £6 billion out of the north-east since 2010. Can we have it back, please?

The Prime Minister: This is a Government who are ensuring that we are working across the whole country and that we are delivering an economy for everyone across the whole country. The hon. Gentleman talks about billions of pounds in relation to the north, but he may just want to reflect on the £13 billion being put into transport in the north of this country.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me welcoming Councillor Anne Meadows, who has today left the Labour party in Brighton and Hove City Council, crossing the floor to join the Conservatives, who are now the largest group on the council? Councillor Meadows left the Labour party because of the rise of antisemitism and bullying that she and her colleagues have experienced from Momentum activists—so much so that only seven of the 23 councillors will be standing again in May. Does the Prime Minister agree that antisemitism is rife throughout the whole Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. As she says, Anne Meadows, a long-serving Labour councillor on Brighton and Hove City Council, has today chosen

to leave Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party and join the Conservatives, due to the bullying and antisemitism that she has received from Momentum and the hard left. That is the harsh reality that decent, moderate Labour councillors are having to face every day, due to Jeremy Corbyn's failure to stand up to bullying and racism in his party. We welcome Councillor Meadows into the Conservative party with open arms, and I am sure that she will be an excellent Conservative councillor.

Q9. [909343] **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): I have a constituent who was left doubly incontinent following a serious and violent sexual assault. She previously had a lifetime award for disability living allowance. However, recent personal independence payment assessments have concluded that she is not entitled to DLA or the mobility components of PIP, despite her extremely difficult condition, which dominates every aspect of her daily life. Will the Prime Minister please ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to look urgently at the Department's failure to recognise the impact of this serious condition?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady will recognise that I am not able to respond to the individual details of the case at the Dispatch Box, but I will ensure that the Department for Work and Pensions and the relevant Minister look at the case and respond to her.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Improving mental healthcare has rightly become a priority for the Government, but are the Government doing anything to improve the mental health situation of hard-pressed NHS staff who deserve support?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Our dedicated NHS staff, day in and day out, are delivering an unwavering commitment in caring for us all, and obviously it is necessary that we ensure their mental health is looked after. We are setting up a dedicated mental health support service, which will offer NHS staff confidential advice and support 24 hours a day. It will be staffed by qualified professionals who have had training in situations that are unique to the NHS and will ensure that mental health referrals for NHS employees, from either a general practitioner or an occupational health clinician, are fast-tracked. It is right that mental and physical wellbeing is at the forefront of our health service, and it is right that we are taking this action to support our dedicated NHS staff.

Q10. [909344] **Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Local Government Association has identified a potential £1.6 billion deficit for special needs education, but the Government responded with a paltry £350 million. As a result, headteachers in my Brighton constituency are literally having sleepless nights. Vital reading programmes for children with special educational needs are being cut and crucial support staff are being lost. Instead of repeating her usual line on schools funding, will the Prime Minister agree to meet a delegation of headteachers from Brighton so she can hear direct from them about the real pain that is being caused?

The Prime Minister: I am sure the hon. Lady will look forward to working well with the largest group on Brighton and Hove City Council, which is now the

Conservative group. She raises the issue of education funding, and she refers to answers I have given in the past. We have been putting more funding into education, and we have been doing it in a number of ways. We have announced extra support, as she says, for children with complex special educational needs, and that is building on the £6 billion in place for it this year—the highest level on record. She says it is not enough, but it is the highest level on record. We are also putting money into new school places and better facilities for children with special educational needs.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Communities across the country are installing defibrillators. The village of Brompton in my constituency has one in a former telephone box that is a stone's throw away from the main road but is not directly visible from it. Does the Prime Minister think it is a good idea to have a nationally approved defibrillator road sign so that these lifesaving devices can be quickly accessed in the event of an emergency?

The Prime Minister: I commend the action being taken in my right hon. Friend's constituency, and I see the same action being taken in my constituency, with people ensuring that defibrillators are available. He raises a very interesting point, and I will ask the Department for Transport to look at it seriously.

Q11. [909345] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Recent research from the charity Bliss shows that two thirds of dads have to return to work while their premature or sick baby is still in a neonatal intensive care unit. Does the Prime Minister think that is unjust? Will she work with me to ensure a change in employment law so that dads and parents of premature babies, like me, get the support they need to support their family?

The Prime Minister: This issue is close to the heart of many Members, and it is particularly close to the heart of the hon. Gentleman. I know that he met Ministers to discuss this issue last year. Officials in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are undertaking a short, focused internal review of provision for parents of premature, sick and multiple babies to obtain an understanding of the barriers to participating in the labour market. They are working with organisations such as Bliss, the Smallest Things and the Twins and Multiple Births Association to better understand these issues, and they have held focus groups with a number of parents. They have offered to discuss their conclusions with those interested parties in due course, and I am sure that they will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss this in taking it forward.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware that the British Army has engaged in a recruitment campaign in Commonwealth countries. However, only after soldiers have signed up for minimum four-year contracts do they find out that they are not allowed to bring their children to this country. Given that these brave women and men are prepared to put their lives on the line for us and our country, I hope that she will agree that this needs to be looked into urgently. Will she therefore kindly agree to meet me and others concerned to see how this matter can be progressed?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the issue that my hon. Friend has raised. I am told by the Ministry of Defence that it does make sure that information is available to individuals about what their situation will be. This matter is not just of concern to the MOD; obviously, the issue of the immigration rules rests with the Home Office as well. I will certainly meet him to discuss this issue.

Q12. [909348] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Some 70% of flights are taken by 15% of the population, yet the Tees Mayor has just spent up to £90 million of taxpayers' money buying an airport when most people across the area cannot get a bus home after 6.30 pm. Could the Prime Minister help them out?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the importance of buses to our communities. We have been spending £250 million every year to keep fares down and maintain an extensive network. The hon. Gentleman might like to know that since 2010 we have seen 10,000 new routes across the north and midlands, and live local bus services registered have increased by 15% in just the past two years.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Paul Flynn was, in his time, a valued member of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and I know that colleagues on both sides of the House who serve on that body would like to join others in expressing our condolences to his family.

My armed forces constituents will be pleased to know that, with effect from the start of this year, ex-servicemen and women will receive ID cards. Will my right hon. Friend join me in expressing the hope that, in time, that card will become a passport to public recognition of some of the bravest and finest in our country?

The Prime Minister: We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the ex-forces community and we are working hard, as my hon. Friend has indicated, to ensure that they receive the support they deserve. As he says, any personnel who have left the military since December 2018 will automatically be given one of these new ID cards, which will allow them to maintain a tangible link to their career in the forces. As the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who has responsibility for defence people and veterans, said:

"These new cards celebrate the great commitment and dedication of those who have served this country, and I hope they can provide a further link to ex-personnel and the incredible community around them."

I hope that they will, as my hon. Friend says, be a sign of the incredible valour that those ex-servicemen and women have shown.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): In 2017, during the election, we learned what the Prime Minister's definition of "strong and stable" was. As our automotive industry disintegrates before our eyes, as investment is put on hold and as growth slows, are we now learning what the Prime Minister's definition of "smooth and orderly Brexit" is?

The Prime Minister: I say to the hon. Lady, as I say to every Member of this House, that there will come a further point, in this Chamber, when every Member will

have a decision to take on whether we want to ensure that we deliver on the vote of the referendum—most Members stood on a manifesto to do that—by leaving the EU with a deal. That will be a decision for all

Members of this House. I know where I stand: I believe we should be leaving with a deal. I hope that the hon. Lady agrees.

Leaving the EU: Economic Impact of Proposed Deal

12.44 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the economic impact of her Government's proposed deal for the UK exiting the EU.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): At the end of November, the Government published our analysis that assessed the economic impact of leaving the European Union. It not only included an analysis of the Government's negotiating position, as set out in the July 2018 White Paper, but went further still and considered three other scenarios: a free trade agreement, a European economic area-type relationship, and a no-deal scenario.

Specifically, the analysis showed that the outcomes for the proposed future UK-EU relationship would deliver significantly higher economic output—about seven percentage points higher—than the no-deal scenario, which would result in lower economic activity in all sector groups of the economy compared with the White Paper scenario. That is why we should pass the deal, to avoid no deal and support jobs and the UK economy.

In publishing the work, the Government delivered on their commitment to provide an appropriate level of analysis to Parliament. In addition, the House has had plenty of opportunity to debate both the analysis and the deal that is on the table. As the Prime Minister has said, we will bring a revised deal back to the House for a second meaningful vote as soon as we possibly can.

In the meantime, it is right that that the Government are afforded the flexibility and space to continue our negotiations. That is because the agreement of the political declaration will be followed by negotiations on the legal text. The UK and the EU recognise that that means there could be a spectrum of different outcomes. We need to approach the negotiations with as much strength as possible. The focus must now be on the future, planning and prioritising that which matters.

Let me remind the House that we will have an implementation period, a new close relationship with the EU and, crucially, the ability to strike trade deals around the world. We are bringing back control over our money, borders and laws to mould a prosperous and ambitious new path for our country, and on our terms. No matter what approach we take, the UK economy will continue to be strong and grow into the future.

Ian Blackford: With respect to the Minister, this was of course a question to the Prime Minister, and it is the Prime Minister who should be answering. This is a matter of the utmost importance, because this House is going to be asked to vote on the Prime Minister's deal. The specific question I asked was about the economic analysis that the Government have done on their deal. It is quite clear from the Minister's answer that the Government have done no analysis on this deal. On arguably the most important matter that this House has voted on since the second world war, we do not have an economic impact assessment from the Government. It is, once again, this Conservative Government treating this House and the United Kingdom with contempt. It is a disgrace that the Government have continued to duck and dive in respect of their responsibilities.

Economists are clear: the Prime Minister's deal is set to hit GDP, the public finances and living standards. Analysis published by the London School of Economics estimates that

"the Brexit deal could reduce UK GDP per capita by between 1.9% and 5.5% in ten years' time, compared to remaining in the EU."

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has warned that

"if the government's proposed Brexit deal is implemented, then GDP in the longer term will be around 4 per cent lower than it would have been had the UK stayed in the EU."

Bank of England analysis states the UK Government's deal will raise unemployment by 4% and inflation by 2%. The Prime Minister is running fear of the truth, with her Government refusing to admit the damage that her deal will do.

The Government cannot claim that their November document covers their deal. Let us look at the facts. Page 17 of the Treasury analysis looks at the modelled average free trade agreement and states:

"As such, it does not seek to define or model a bespoke agreement."

But the Prime Minister tells us she has a bespoke deal. The Treasury analysis continues:

"This scenario is not indicative of government policy, as it would not meet UK objectives including avoiding a hard border" in Northern Ireland.

There we have it in black and white: the Treasury analysis conducted last year does not account for the Prime Minister's deal. So, I say to the Government, where is the analysis? MPs continue to be expected to vote on the proposed deal without the Government explaining the economic consequences. That is the height of irresponsibility.

The deal would be a disaster for Scotland, taking us out of the EU single market and customs union. We know that up to 100,000 jobs in Scotland are under threat. The Government are sticking their head in the sand. Everyone knows this Government are bringing our economy to its knees. We cannot allow the Tories to drive us off the cliff edge.

No Government can be allowed to bring forward a vote on such a significant matter without an economic assessment. It must be published. Shame on the Prime Minister if she fails to protect our economy; shame on those on the Government Benches if they allow businesses to collapse and jobs to be lost; and shame on any MP, including the Leader of the Opposition, if they march through the Lobby to deliver a deal that secures economic catastrophe.

No Member should believe that there is a binary choice; there is not. This is not a choice of no deal or this deal. Both are bad. Both will plunge our economy into an unmitigated disaster.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I ask the Minister to apply, I very generously did not interrupt the flow of the right hon. Gentleman's eloquence—or, indeed, for that matter the eloquence of his flow. However, by way of a public information notice, may I say to the House—this is not directed particularly at the right hon. Gentleman, as I have seen this burgeoning phenomenon in recent times—that an urgent question is supposed to be that, not an urgent oration? With whatever rhetorical force and insistence it is delivered, it is supposed to be a

[Mr Speaker]

question and I have noticed over recent times an increasing tendency on the part of Members who have secured such an opportunity, through the courtesy of the Chair, to launch into a lengthy preamble, sometimes constituting the entirety of their remarks.

For future reference, because in future I will have to cut people off if they abuse the parameters, however inadvertently, it is supposed to be a question; a sentence of preamble is one thing, but thereafter a Member should put a series of inquiries to the Minister on the Treasury Bench. We will leave it there for now. The right hon. Gentleman has made his point, but I know that he will not misbehave again.

Mel Stride: I thank the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for his vociferous oration, but vociferous orations are no substitute for the facts. Let me remind him of some of the facts in respect of the points he made. He says that we have made no analysis of the impact of these arrangements on the United Kingdom economy, and that is simply not the case. The information we have come forward with is a robust analysis of the future outcomes of the four different scenarios that we consider in that analysis. He levels the charge that we are in some way treating the United Kingdom with contempt, and that is certainly not the case. The House has been very deeply preoccupied with matters of Brexit and the nature of how we might exit the European Union, and the Prime Minister has set out that there will be further debate this time next week to be followed, in the event that we do not pass a meaningful vote, with another amendable motion to be considered by the House.

The right hon. Gentleman also says that the deal, as he terms it, would have a negative impact on the UK economy. The analysis clearly shows that, under every single scenario it analyses, it is better to have this deal than no deal or any of the alternatives. Finally, he decried the fact that we had not put forward a bespoke deal for analysis within our analysis, and that illustrates his lack of understanding of what the future political declaration is all about, which is a range of possible outcomes. That is entirely what the analysis models.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): It is perfectly obvious to all those involved in the negotiations, both the British negotiators and the EU negotiators, that if Britain were to leave the EU with no deal, it would be disastrous for the British economy in the medium to long term and extremely damaging to the economies of many EU countries, particularly those nearest the UK. Does the Minister accept that it is rather silly to think that it is useful in these negotiations to take up the simplistic view that we must pretend we are threatening to leave with no deal to improve our bargaining position? Will he reassure me that the negotiations are proceeding on the basis that both sides know that they do not want no deal and that they are therefore trying to limit the damaging consequences of risking that? What we should really pursue is retaining the benefits of the customs union and the single market and continued free trade with our largest customer in the world, as it will always be, as is being urged on us by every industrial leader in this country.

Mel Stride: My right hon. and learned Friend is entirely right that no deal would be a very unsatisfactory outcome. Of course, what the House will appreciate is that the only way to avoid a no deal is to secure a deal. That is why the Prime Minister will shortly return to Brussels to have further discussions with the EU Commissioner, Jean-Claude Juncker, in pursuit of one.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): For more than two years, businesses and trade unions have called for clarity about the Government's Brexit deal, and for two years there has been nothing but delay and a total lack of clarity. What has been clear from the wide range of independent analyses that we have received is that the Government's Brexit deal is not good news for our economy. Even the Government's own modelling said that the economy would be nearly 4% smaller if the Government's deal was agreed, equivalent to £83 billion if it happened today. It is no surprise that the Prime Minister's deal has struggled to command any widespread support, leading to the largest ever defeat in the House of Commons.

The climate of uncertainty created by the Government's Brexit blundering, particularly their refusal to take no deal off the table, led first to businesses delaying investment decisions. Now, decisions are being taken, but as a result of the uncertainty and insecurity created by the Government, those decisions are to cut investment and jobs. The result, as the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, told us this month, is that business investment in 2018 fell by 3.7% in year-on-year terms.

Let us go through some of those decisions. Jaguar Land Rover has cut 4,500 jobs, Ford cut 1,000 jobs in Bridgend and Honda's Swindon closure, supposedly not related to Brexit, will mean that 3,500 will lose their employment. In financial services, HSBC has announced that it will move seven offices from London to Paris in 2019. Deutsche Bank has said that it is considering moving 75% of its balance sheet from London to Frankfurt.

This is not just about Brexit. It is about how the Government have failed to produce an economic plan that tackles our productivity crisis and increases investment for the long term. They are a Government putting our economy at risk through failed economic management and failing to secure a Brexit deal that would protect jobs and the economy.

May I ask the Financial Secretary first, what happened to the promise of frictionless trade? Secondly, where is the detail businesses need about the promised customs arrangements? Thirdly, can the Government tell us what mysterious technology will facilitate their proposed customs arrangements? Fourthly, why have the Government failed even to mention the issue of intellectual property protections in the future partnership agreement? Finally, will the Government confirm that there has been a dilution of protections from road hauliers and passenger transport operators since the earlier Chequers commitments?

It is the role of the Government's Treasury team, above all others, to stand up to protect our economy. It is as though the Chancellor has simply gone missing. The Government have run out of time. We cannot wait any longer for the answers we need and the country cannot wait any longer for the answers it deserves.

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman accuses Government Members of having a lack of clarity on the issues around Brexit. I find that slightly rich coming from the Labour Front Bench, given that the position of the Leader of the Opposition has flip-flopped as to whether to be in or out of the customs union, and whether or not to honour the pledge that he appeared to make at his party conference for a second referendum, which appears to have been parked now. It seems to me that the Opposition are trying to ride at least two horses on this issue, if not more, and we know what happens if you do that, Mr Speaker—it tends to get rather painful in the end, as we are perhaps seeing in more recent events.

The hon. Gentleman refers to the parliamentary defeat that the Government suffered more recently. He chose to overlook the fact that the House did unite around a particular way forward, and that is to seek changes to the backstop arrangements. That is now the main focus of the negotiations that are continuing in Brussels. He referred to various impacts of employers' decisions and changes, and the impact on the economy and employment, which gives me a good opportunity to remind him of some facts. As a country, we have about the highest level of employment in our history; we have the lowest level of unemployment since the mid-1970s; and we have halved youth unemployment since 2010. Lest it be forgotten, every Labour Government in history have always left office with unemployment higher than it was when they entered office.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Treasury issue a codicil or a clarification of its economic forecasts, looking at what happens if we leave in March under the managed World Trade Organisation model, when we spend the £39 billion-plus of the withdrawal agreement on boosting public services and boosting our economy at home? We are bound to be better off—is that not true?

Mel Stride: It is important to recognise that the modelling is on the basis of the status quo, so the model would not take into account factors of the kind that my right hon. Friend has raised, or indeed changes in productivity or trade flows and other factors. It will be for individual Members to assess the specific issues that he raised, in that context.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Things have come to a pretty pass when here we are, 37 days from Brexit, and the House of Commons is actually discussing which of several options—all of them economically damaging—we should choose for the future of our country's economy. Since it is the Government's policy that they are planning for a no-deal Brexit, could the Minister explain to the House what possible justification there is for that? Given that their own economic assessment shows that it would have the most damaging impact on the British economy, how could such an act of economic self-harm ever be justified?

Mel Stride: What the right hon. Gentleman overlooks is that whilst he is absolutely right that no deal, in essence, is something to be avoided, and indeed is not in the interests either of the United Kingdom or of the European Union, that is not the same thing as saying that we should be reckless and not make sure that we are prepared for it, should it happen. That is precisely what we are doing.

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): Will the Financial Secretary undertake to publish to the House, in good time for the meaningful vote, the decisions that he and his colleagues are currently taking on the tariffs that would apply in the event of no deal, including which industries would be protected, at what rate, and what the impact would be on prices?

Mel Stride: Tariff policy in the event of no deal is clearly something that we are heavily engaged with. My right hon. Friend rightly identifies the aspects or elements of tariffs that relate to protecting domestic producers, and that of course will be a very important part of the considerations that we are undertaking at the moment. We will come to the House in due course with the details of those tariffs.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Brexit uncertainty is one of several factors contributing to the crisis in the car industry, which previous Governments—Conservative, Labour and coalition—did so much to promote. What assurances have the Government had from Toyota, BMW and Vauxhall that they are not going to follow the pattern of disinvestment that we are now seeing?

Mel Stride: I think the right hon. Gentleman's question would be most appropriately directed to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy as to the specifics of the companies that he listed. Honda, a company that has already been mentioned in this respect, has made it clear that its decision to leave the United Kingdom is not a consequence of Brexit; it is more to do with international changes around cars and the position of diesel, and of course the deal that Japan has struck on zero tariffs in a few years' time for exports from Japan to the European Union.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What would be the economic impact of membership of a customs union where access to our market was conceded to a third party without any reciprocal arrangement of our access to theirs?

Mel Stride: My right hon. Friend asks a specific, interesting question, which prompts many other questions on exactly the form of the model that he is postulating. The important thing, when it comes to access to our markets in future, is that we have a tariff policy that protects domestic producers in our economy where they require protection, and ensures that our trade remedy regime is robust, so that we can prevent the dumping of products into the UK market, and also is sufficiently liberalised such that the cost savings that would accrue from liberalised tariffs are there for the benefit both of consumers and those who use those products in their production processes within the UK market.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) is not in her place to ask this question herself. Last week, she withdrew her amendment asking the Government to publish their papers on the impact of no deal. Will the Government still hold to their promise, even though she has defected from the Tory party?

Mel Stride: The analysis that the hon. Lady refers to is contained in the cross-Government analysis that we are discussing as part of this urgent question.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): As the Treasury's forecasts before the referendum were woefully inaccurate, and the Office for Budget Responsibility was set up specifically to stop politicised reports coming out, would it not be better to consult a newspaper horoscope than Treasury forecasts?

Mel Stride: I hate to disappoint my hon. Friend, ingenious and amusing though his question is, but I should point out just one fallacy in the premise of his question: these are not forecasts.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): In the search for a withdrawal agreement that we can all support, can the Minister now confirm that the draft proposals have been put forward to Europe that would make a legally binding textual change to the withdrawal agreement?

Mel Stride: We have made it clear that our ambition is to strike an amended deal with the European Union, so that we put beyond doubt the issue of how permanent or otherwise the backstop arrangements might be. I am not in a position to comment on the specifics of the ongoing negotiations because I am not intimately involved with them.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): We know, of course, that the economic impact assessment on the Chequers deal showed that there would be no impact on growth in Scotland. However, does the Minister agree that nationalists have made it very clear that they will accept no deal that is put on the table, and—as I know, the Minister knows, my constituents know and businesses in Scotland know—this is all just to cause the ultimate chaos to pave the way for independence?

Mel Stride: The analysis shows that in all the scenarios being considered, including no deal, a deal based on the 2018 White Paper will give a better result for our economy for every sector, for every region and for every country—including Scotland—of the United Kingdom.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): As the Chairman of the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union said, today is D minus 37, so in some five weeks from today we will have honoured the wishes of 17.4 million UK citizens and left the European Union. Military veterans living in Cyprus will also be affected by some of these changes, not least because we recently signed a double taxation treaty with the Cypriot Government. The Minister personally intervened in that negotiation, to allow a five-year transition period for military veterans receiving state pensions to have longer to adjust. He played a blinder and honoured the covenant, and on their behalf I thank him today for everything he did to look after them.

Mel Stride: I sincerely thank my right hon. Friend for his extremely kind words. As ever, he is too modest. It was not my effort alone that secured the result that we achieved for those very important veterans in Cyprus—he raised the issue, brought it to my attention in Committee, and worked hard with me to make sure that we achieved the right, just and desired outcome.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Of course, the economic effects are already being felt. I have spoken to businesses in my constituency

that have gone from profit to loss and others that have cut investment. This week I spoke to Cardiff University, which cited Brexit as a factor in the job losses that it has proposed. This is very serious, so does the Minister accept that we need to get serious? Ministers know that no deal would be a catastrophe. They know that every single Brexit would lead to a worse economic outcome for this country, so do they accept that the issue needs to go back to the people so that they can decide, based on the facts?

Mel Stride: If I may summarise, the hon. Gentleman makes the point that uncertainty is not good for business. He is entirely right, and that is all the more reason why we should get behind the deal, and get it sorted. We would then have an implementation period in which nothing would change until the end of 2020. The businesses in the hon. Gentleman's constituency to which he referred could then begin to increase employment and invest with confidence.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): There are a great many voices in the international investor community that have made it clear that the underlying fundamentals of the British economy remain sound, but they warn that we are in a period in which investment decisions have been put on hold, and trade deals are in abeyance. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the single most important thing that we can do right now to unlock new investment in the economy is to pass the deal?

Mel Stride: My right hon. Friend hits the nail firmly on the head. What we must do to move from uncertainty to a situation in which we can begin to concentrate on negotiating our future relationship with the European Union while everything remains stable and the same until the end of 2020 is to pass the deal as he suggests.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The fundamental problem with the British Government's policy as it stands is that the deal offers certainty only for the duration of the transition period. Owing to the chaos in the Conservative party, is it not the case that all the deal does is move the cliff edge to the end of the transition phase?

Mel Stride: No, not at all. The deal would, first, resolve the three critical issues on which the withdrawal agreement focuses: the Northern Ireland-Ireland border; the situation as it relates to EU and UK citizens; and the financial arrangements that we will enter into as we leave the European Union. Critically, it would give us time to put into effect the political declaration, which is the other part of what has been negotiated, until the end of 2020.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): With the Scottish economy growing at half the rate of the rest of the United Kingdom, can my right hon. Friend offer any advice on economic growth to the Government north of the border?

Mel Stride: My advice, although I doubt very much that the Scottish National party will take much advice from me, is, first, get behind the deal and let us get certainty and increase investment; and secondly, accept

the result of the 2014 referendum, stay with the United Kingdom and do not end up in a situation that creates a border between the country of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): In response to the Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee, the Minister said that it would be reckless of the Government not to plan for no deal. However, the detailed work of the Public Accounts Committee has clearly shown that the Government are not prepared for no deal and are woefully prepared for a deal. Would not the responsible thing be to delay any exit or extend the transition period and take stock, and make sure that the D-minus-37 uncertainty that is hanging over our country is resolved? It is too late just to pass the deal—uncertainty is now built in.

Mel Stride: I do not accept that we are not adequately prepared or are not deeply preparing for the possibility of no deal. This work has been going on for many months, and in far greater depth than many people appreciate. In my area of ministerial responsibility, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and borders, we have staffed up, and we have 4,500 more personnel ready for this work. There will be over 5,000 in place by 29 March. We have engaged with stakeholders across the piece by making sure that we have the most facilitated possible customs arrangements in place, particularly in respect of the short straits crossing—Dover and Calais—and so on. An immense amount of work has been carried out.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): In considering the economic impact of the proposed deal, has the Minister reflected on the key drivers of economic performance and the policies that we decide domestically—on productivity, business structure and tax structure? We need only look at what the SNP is doing in Scotland to realise where we could go wrong.

Mel Stride: I will not be drawn into the Scottish National party again, but I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is absolutely right—fundamentally, the way in which we manage the economy is one of the most important things that we do as a Government, which is why we have record levels of employment and the lowest level of unemployment since 1975. It is why we have halved youth unemployment since 2010, reduced the debt and have reduced the deficit by 80%, and it is why the economy is moving in the right direction.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): As many of my hon. Friends have said, all credible economic analysis shows that a no-deal Brexit would be disastrous for the economy. The draft withdrawal agreement would be only slightly less disastrous for the economy. Given that the report published by the Resolution Foundation today predicts an increase in child poverty of 6% by 2023—that is equivalent to an additional 1 million children living in poverty since 2016—what are the Minister's estimates of the additional effect on child poverty of no deal or the draft withdrawal agreement?

Mel Stride: Absolute poverty is at a record low. The Government have an enviable record of helping those who require work to get into work, and I have outlined

at length our success in that area. We have made sure that work pays with the benefit system and our roll-out of universal credit. Underpinning the hon. Lady's question is a denial of the result of the 2016 referendum. The country made a decision to leave, and on that basis the decision has to be whether we have a sensible deal, as we have negotiated, or whether perhaps we end up with no deal, which I think the vast majority of Members in the House would not want to happen.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows, and the people of Scotland know, that the SNP Government, by their refusal to contemplate any form of withdrawal agreement whatsoever, are deliberately dragging Scotland to a no-deal situation—a crisis of their making—which they would use as a platform to demand independence. What possible excuse, to the best of my right hon. Friend's knowledge, does the First Minister of Scotland have for not attending the Prime Minister's Brexit cabinets?

Mel Stride: It is for the First Minister of Scotland to answer on the reasons why she attends functions and to deal with the points that my hon. Friend made. There is no doubt that this is a matter that affects the entire United Kingdom, including Scotland. I believe that the vast majority of us in the House wish to avoid a no-deal Brexit. The Scottish National party could play a pivotal role in helping us to do so by supporting the negotiated deal.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): It is no secret that the Government's deal will hit people's livelihoods and jobs, along with economic growth. All credible economic analysis says that a no-deal Brexit would have a devastating effect. With just 37 days to go, does the Minister agree that we need to get serious and that we need to consider extending article 50?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady urges us to get serious. We have been extremely serious in negotiating a deal with the European Union for a considerable amount of time, and we continue to engage in that endeavour. She is absolutely right to say that most of us in this House wish to avoid no deal, but the way to do that is by Opposition and Government Members uniting and making sure that we avoid no deal and have a good deal for our country.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): We know that the Government have done no economic impact analysis of the proposed deal, but has the Minister done an economic analysis of the failure of the Secretary of State for International Trade to secure the 40 roll-over trade deals that he promised would be signed one minute after 11 o'clock on 29 March?

Mel Stride: The right hon. Gentleman says that we have done no analysis of the deal, as he refers to it, but as he knows, the deal is actually the political declaration, which inherently will include a range of particular possible outcomes for that deal. That is modelled in the sensitivity analysis that we have brought forward to Parliament. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Seely, sit down young man. It is very discourteous. The Father of the House comes in—*[Interruption.]* Order. Do not sit there looking at your phone, man. I am speaking to you. Show some respect and manners in the Chamber.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: No, I do not need the hon. Gentleman to get up. Remain seated and behave with courtesy. What on earth has got into you?

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): As the Minister will know, 23% of all the European funding that comes to the UK goes to Wales. He said that discussions on the shared prosperity fund would start before Christmas; I wonder whether he has played any part in that. Leave campaigners said that Wales would not be a penny worse off if we left the European Union, so will the Minister set out how the fund will work and who will make decisions to ensure that the Welsh economy does not tank if we are to have this botched Brexit deal?

Mel Stride: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we will set out those details in due course.

Chris Elmore: Sod all!

Mr Speaker: Order.

Chris Elmore: I am sorry, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: It is not really a matter of order but very poor taste, and I expect somebody as culturally sophisticated as the hon. Gentleman to behave better than that.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Scotch Whisky Association recently reported that the value of Scotch whisky exports to Mexico last year was £131.5 million—which is up 18.5% on 2017—and that Mexico is the fourth largest export market by volume for Scotch whisky. However, the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) has confirmed by letter to the Procedure Committee that the Government “do not...expect to replicate the existing Mexico spirits agreement in time for 29 March”.

What assessment has the Financial Secretary made of the impact that will have on geographic indicators for Scotch whisky and on the wider Scottish economy?

Mel Stride: This Government totally understand and get the significant importance—not just to Scotland but to the entire United Kingdom—of Scotch whisky exports, which account for some 20% of all exports of food and drink from our country. That was also signalled in our recent Budget, which once again froze duty on Scotch whisky. The hon. Lady can rest assured that we will make sure that we do the right thing by Scotland’s most important export.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The Department’s assessment is that any form of Brexit will leave us worse off than if we stayed in the European Union. Will the Minister simply confirm that that is his Department’s view?

Mel Stride: The analysis, quite rightly, does not assess staying in the European Union, and there is an obvious reason for that, which is that in June 2016 the country took the decision—17.4 million people voted—to leave the European Union, and that is an outcome that this Government will respect.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Will Operation Stack have to be replicated across all major ports in the event of no deal?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady can rest assured that an extensive amount of contingency planning has gone on, and will continue to go on, in terms of the arrangements that we may have to bring into force at our ports to make sure that goods keep flowing.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): We have heard the usual nonsense of “SNP bad” from Conservative Members because we do not support this Government’s so-called deal. If the deal is so good, why are the UK Government not brave enough to take control and publish evidence on the financial impact? Has the Minister seen the Bank of England analysis that his deal will raise unemployment by 4% and inflation by 2%? If the UK Government do not agree with that analysis, why do they not disprove it by publishing their own evidence?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman says that we have not had the courage to produce an analysis of the deal, as he terms it, but we have done precisely that, as was required by this House, with a range of potential landing points for the deal set out in broad terms in the future political declaration. The Government have done just that.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Father of the House knows better than others that Margaret Thatcher was instrumental in creating the single market and in encouraging Japanese companies to come here to platform into it. Given that the EU now has a free trade agreement with Japan and the Government intend to Brexit, is not the loss of Japanese investment and associated jobs painfully predictable? Is it not now incumbent on the Government to give business and the people, including Honda workers and others, the final say on whether this botched deal is really what they want, or whether they want to stay in the EU to secure future jobs?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that the trade deal with Japan has been struck at a time when we are members of the EU. There will be an impact on car producers, and we see that as part of the reason why Honda has taken its decision. The most important thing is that we enter into an arrangement with the EU where we minimise the frictions at our borders, have a free trade agreement with the EU27 and make sure that trade continues to flow. The best way to do that is to support the deal we are negotiating with the European Union.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Government’s letter to Nissan promised that its ability to export to and from the EU would not be adversely affected by Brexit. How on earth can that possibly be reconciled with the Prime Minister’s red lines?

Mel Stride: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has a clear commitment to entering into a future trading relationship with the European Union based on the political declaration, which has at its heart a free trade area—tariff-free trade—and to making sure that we have the customs facilitations in place to ensure that that trade flows as freely as possible.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): In spite of Conservative Members shouting, “SNP bad,” the UK Treasury analysis does not cover the PM’s deal; it covers no deal, a free trade agreement, the European economic area without a customs union and the Prime Minister’s failed Chequers plan. Does that mean that the Prime Minister plans to ditch her plan for one of those or to proceed without knowing the consequences?

Mel Stride: The analysis needs to model the future political declaration, upon which the negotiations will rest. Of course, that is a relatively broad document with a number of potential outcomes. The analysis has quite rightly taken a range of possible outcomes to make that assessment and most accurately reflect the range of outcomes of where the deal itself may land.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Unlike the EEA or single market model, the PM’s deal assumes that regulatory checks will be essential to the proper functioning of separate EU and UK markets. Does not the Minister agree that we need to understand the impact of such trade barriers now?

Mel Stride: That is precisely what the analysis is setting out—a series of potential outcomes and the economic impacts thereof. Some Members are suggesting that we should analyse where we are at the moment, but that would not be appropriate given that we are leaving the European Union. At the same time, it has to be recognised that we have not yet fully concluded the new trading relationship with the European Union—the EU27—and therefore the analysis sets out a range of possible landing points for those negotiations.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My sense is that the Minister is actually starting to admit that there is no analysis of the withdrawal agreement, so I just want to press him. The withdrawal agreement was laid before the House on 26 November, so on what specific date did the Government publish their specific economic analysis on that withdrawal agreement, and what title or Command Paper number should I ask for in the Vote Office or the Library to see the analysis?

Mel Stride: The analysis, as demanded by the House, sets out the different possible outcomes, including modelling a range of options between those contained in the White Paper of June last year and an FTA, as well as a point somewhere between the two of them, to allow an informed look at the likely impact of the various outcomes implicit in the future declaration. The hon. Gentleman will know that that is, of necessity, the way in which this analysis has to be conducted, given that we have a period during which we will be negotiating a precise exit arrangement with the European Union.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This is Schrödinger’s analysis—even the Minister does not know whether or not it exists at this moment in time. Will he answer a simple question: does he believe that the UK would be better off if it were to leave the EU with the Prime Minister’s deal or if it were to stay in the EU?

Mel Stride: I have been asked this question a couple of times, and the reality is that it is entirely hypothetical. To end up staying within the European Union would be to fly in the face of the result of the June 2016 referendum

—the referendum had a higher turnout than any other electoral event in our country’s history—and this Government are going to respect the outcome of that referendum.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): This urgent question was aimed at the Prime Minister, so I can only assume that the Minister is undergoing an audition as the future leader of the Conservative party. On that basis, if he were Prime Minister, would he take cognisance of the analysis published by the London School of Economics that shows a 5.5% hit on GDP due to the incumbent’s plan, or would he, like her, simply ignore it?

Mel Stride: What we must do is to make sure that we conclude a good deal for our country; what we must do is to make sure that we avoid a no-deal scenario; and what we must do is to make sure that we respect the result of the June 2016 referendum. That is the mission of this country and of this Government. We are negotiating the final elements of that, and as, I hope, the Prime Minister comes back with changes to that deal in relation to the backstop, if we are to do the right thing and the best thing for the whole United Kingdom, we should support it.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I am stunningly impressed by the Minister’s performance at the Dispatch Box. We can tell a big Downing Street lollipop is on its way when that intellectual heavyweight, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), has nodded in agreement with everything the Minister has said for the last three quarters of an hour.

Let me ask the Minister this: the deal ends freedom of movement—one of the reasons why I will not support it—but where can I find the economic analysis of the impact of ending freedom of movement on Scotland and on the city of Glasgow? Following his answer to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), will the Minister also tell me, as well as the discussions he has had with HMRC, whether Revenue Scotland has been consulted?

Mel Stride: On the impact of immigration, if the hon. Gentleman looks closely at the analysis, he will see that the various scenarios I have outlined during this urgent question are analysed both in terms of the current free movement arrangements and in terms of more restrictive arrangements that would be expected to follow on from the further negotiations we will have with the European Union.

May I just make one very important point on immigration? There will have been a multitude of reasons why 17.4 million people voted to leave the European Union in 2016. There is little doubt in my mind that immigration was one of them, and it is absolutely vital that this Government stick, as we will, to our commitment to ensure that we put an end to free movement and gain control of our borders.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: There’s a big lollipop coming your way.

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman continues to chunter from a sedentary position about the merits or otherwise of lollipops, but when his appetite has been satisfied, and perhaps even if it has not been, we will move to the next urgent question.

Deprivation of Citizenship Status

1.35 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement on his use of the power to deprive a person of citizenship status.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): To keep this country safe, we must be prepared to make tough decisions. As I told the House on Monday, there must be consequences for those who back terror. More than 900 people travelled from the UK to engage with the conflict in Syria and Iraq. At least 20% have been killed in the region. About 40% have returned. They have all been investigated, and I can reassure this House that the majority have been assessed to pose no or a low security risk.

Those who stayed include some of the most dangerous, including many who supported terrorism, not least those who chose to fight or to raise families in the so-called caliphate. They turned their back on this country to support a group that butchered and beheaded innocent civilians, including British citizens; tied the arms of homosexuals and threw them off the top of buildings; and raped countless young girls, boys and women.

I have been resolute that, where those people pose any threat to this country, I will do everything in my power to prevent their return. This includes stripping dangerous individuals of their British citizenship. This power is used only in extreme circumstances, where conducive to the public good. Since 2010, it has been used about 150 times for people linked to terrorism or serious crimes.

We of course follow international law. An individual can be deprived of British citizenship only where it will not leave that individual stateless, where they are a dual national or, in some limited circumstances, where they have the right to citizenship elsewhere.

It would not be right to comment on any individual case, but I can say that each one is carefully considered on its own merits, regardless of gender, age or family status. Children should not suffer, so if a parent does lose their British citizenship, that does not affect the rights of their child.

Deprivation is a powerful tool that can be used only to keep the most dangerous individuals out of this country, and we do not use it lightly. However, when someone turns their back on fundamental values and supports terror, they do not have an automatic right to return to the UK. We must put the safety and the security of our country first, and I will not hesitate to act to protect it.

Sir Edward Davey: I thank the Home Secretary for his reply. On the legal grounds to remove citizenship because it would be

“conducive to the public good”,

can he set out the criteria he must use to make such judgments on the public good?

As the Home Secretary knows, the law prevents him from making someone who is British by birth stateless. In November, the Home Secretary lost a case before the

Special Immigration Appeals Commission on a similar decision made by his predecessor to strip two terror suspects of their British citizenship. Then, as now, the Home Office contended that the two had Bangladeshi citizenship by descent, but the court ruled that that was not the case and that stripping them of British citizenship was therefore unlawful. Will the Home Secretary tell the House what changes have been made to the decision-making process since that case to give him confidence that he is acting lawfully now?

In removing British citizenship, the Home Secretary is essentially saying, “She’s somebody else’s problem,” but in the words of the former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne:

“Which other country is supposed to look after her on our behalf?... Can you imagine the fury here if we took a French or Italian citizen who joined Islamic State?”

Surely a British citizen, born in Britain, is a British responsibility. The Home Secretary mentioned national security in his answer. Can he explain what evidence he used to conclude that this 19-year-old mother and her new-born baby would be a threat to national security? Will he confirm that the evidence required to prosecute Ms Begum for supporting terrorism is readily available from the media? Will he explain why he is so unwilling to bring her to justice?

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman please tell the House what he expects to happen to Ms Begum’s new-born baby boy? This child is an innocent British citizen, and we have a clear responsibility to ensure his wellbeing. What steps is the Home Secretary taking to uphold that important responsibility?

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his questions, which I want to go through. But let me say to him and the House that these decisions are never taken lightly, and I am not just speaking for myself.

The power has been in place for more than 100 years. It was set out properly in the British Nationality Act 1981, since when it has been used by successive Home Secretaries. Although I will not know every decision that every Home Secretary made in the past, I can be certain that none would have taken decisions on deprivation of British citizenship lightly. There are a number of things to weigh up: national security, moral issues and legal issues all need to be carefully taken into account. No decision of this type—as serious as this—can be taken lightly.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the grounds for a citizenship decision. As I have said, I cannot talk about an individual case, although I am happy to try to answer his questions. Almost all these decisions, depending on how far back one goes, are made on what is called the “conducive test”: conducive to the public good. The test can apply to a number of issues—to the case prominent in the papers now, but also to many recent cases, including the ones that he mentioned, to do with terrorism and national security. In each of those cases, I would look at the evidence put in front of me: some of that would be secret intelligence and some would be more publicly available information. That would be used to determine the threat that the individual might pose to the country. Alongside that, officials from the Home Office, working with other partners and partner agencies, would put together a case, including a legal case, to look at a number of issues but of course

absolutely to make sure that if we went ahead and took the decision to deprive someone of their British nationality, that person would not be left stateless.

In every decision that I am aware of—I cannot think that any of my predecessors would have taken a different decision—that has been applied, every single time. Our lawyers are expert in this field and would look carefully at judgments in previous cases—the right hon. Gentleman referred to those—if they have been challenged, to see whether there are lessons to be learned. Those would be taken into account. When a decision then has to be made, I have to be, in every case, absolutely confident that it is not only conducive to the public good, but legally proper and correct, and compliant with both international and any relevant domestic law.

The right hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that Lord Carlile, an individual whom he will know well, has already made a public comment—I can refer to public comment—about the case in the press at the moment and other such cases that he has been familiar with. He is worth listening to on how this practice has taken place in the past.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about minors. Again, I cannot talk about any particular individual or case, but in the case of a minor, clearly even more care must absolutely be taken. It is absolutely paramount in all cases to take into account the welfare of minors. I cannot refer to any particular case, but that is also in domestic legislation: in any immigration decision, including about deprivation, the welfare of a child is taken into account where that is relevant.

Finally, I say gently to the right hon. Gentleman that he was a senior member of the previous Government. He was not only in the Cabinet: for almost three years, if I remember correctly, he was a member of the National Security Council. He would have discussed counter-terrorism issues in that council on countless occasions, and it would be hard to think that the issue of deprivation never came up. Not only was he a member of a Government who made decisions on deprivation, many on terrorism grounds, but he even voted for the Immigration Act 2014, which extended the powers of deprivation. Now he stands here pretending that he knows nothing of that and trying to play politics with such an important issue. He should reflect on that.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): When I was Home Secretary, I did not deprive anyone of their citizenship, and although the power is necessary, it is being used with ever increasing frequency. Every patriotic British citizen has to accept that we have fellow citizens who are extremely unpleasant and have very unpleasant and dangerous ideas. We deal with them through the rule of law—international law and domestic law. Some people are mass murderers, but we have given up transportation or exile as a response to such cases.

As this woman is only one, but several hundred have already come back and hundreds of various western nationalities are now stranded in Syria, is it not right that we should begin at least from the position that we should accept back the people who are obviously British, by every ordinary test of the word, and that others have to accept back everybody who is obviously a national of their state? Somehow leaving these people to disperse through Syria seems to me quite a serious threat to future security. We can use the full force of the criminal law

—we must—and the full resources of the intelligence services once these people have got back here. That is how my right hon. Friend is going to be able to protect the British public.

Sajid Javid: First, I should say that I always listen carefully to my right hon. and learned Friend, who is very distinguished in the House and served as a distinguished Home Secretary as well as in many other positions of responsibility. As usual, he has made an important point. All I would say is that each case should be looked at on a case-by-case basis. That is exactly what happens in the Home Office: I look at each case very carefully against what tools are available that will help protect our national security and citizens here at home and in regard to what can be done to help bring people to justice.

My right hon. and learned Friend is right to point out that many hundreds of people from the UK—more than 900, we believe—have gone in recent years to Iraq or Syria to join terrorist organisations. There are many more from other European countries and countries such as the US and Australia. We work closely with our allies. I hope he welcomes the fact that we are trying to work even more closely with them following the recent news that Daesh is being defeated in the region, in the expectation that more people may want to come back to the UK or other European countries. We must work with our allies and see how we can co-ordinate and have a more unified approach.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): On the general question of returning foreign fighters and ISIS supporters, the President of the United States said:

“The United States is asking Britain, France, Germany and other European allies to take back over 800 ISIS fighters that we captured in Syria and put them on trial.”

Does the Home Secretary accept that what the security services have been calling for is a very specialised programme of questioning, interrogation, de-radicalisation and quite possibly putting these people on trial, fashioned for this group of foreign fighters and their supporters? What is not helpful is to strip them of their nationality, which on the face of what he has said appears to be on a wholly arbitrary basis.

On the particular issue of Shamima Begum, there is no question but that she has said some very reprehensible things in the media, particularly about the Manchester bombings. However, the Home Secretary knows that the Home Office lost two cases where it attempted to strip people of their nationality on the basis of Bangladeshi nationality by descent, so why is he going forward with the same strategy now? Let me remind the Home Secretary of article 15 of the universal declaration of human rights:

“(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality”.

Can the Home Secretary explain how his actions are not in breach of the articles of the declaration?

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her questions. She will know—I have said this at the Dispatch Box before—that we estimate about 900 people of national security interest left the UK at some point to join terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. We estimate that about 40% have returned and approximately 20% have

[Sajid Javid]

died in the region. Of those who have returned, in every case we know of they have been investigated. Where there is enough evidence, they have been prosecuted for their actions.

The right hon. Lady will also understand that the part of the world they are in is a very lawless and dangerous place, so it is not always possible—in fact, it is incredibly difficult—to gather evidence of their activities that could be used to try to have a successful prosecution, either in the UK or in the other countries with which we work closely. If we have evidence, we can help to bring about prosecutions either at home or with our allies. In each case, we work carefully with them. It is always the case that the preferred outcome is always one of justice, where there is evidence and we can be sure that there can be proper legal proceedings and proper hearings. Our preference in many of cases is to see if more people can be tried in the region. As I mentioned earlier to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), we are working with a number of other countries to see if more work can be done together. Sadly, this challenge is not unique to the UK but is shared across many countries including our European friends.

The right hon. Lady referred to other cases, as did the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). She knows that at any time any decision made by any Minister can rightfully be challenged by anyone in court. That is their right. But it would be wrong to take one particular case that may have been in the courts and apply it to all other potential cases that follow. It is worth repeating that where legal cases may have an impact, our own legal advisers, who are incredibly experienced and take these issues very seriously, would of course take them into account.

The right hon. Lady referred to the UN declaration of human rights. We absolutely abide by that and it is incredibly important that all Governments abide by it. She quoted the declaration by saying that no one should be made stateless. That is absolutely correct. No one should ever be made stateless and that is not something we would ever do. We would never take a deprivation decision if someone, as a British national, has only one nationality. We would not do that. We would not leave anyone stateless. She also suggested that these decisions are somehow arbitrary. As I said to the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey), each decision is taken incredibly seriously. The facts are weighed on a case-by-case basis. It is anything but arbitrary.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I draw the attention of the Home Secretary and the House to an important article just published online in *The Independent* by the self-described liberal journalist Ahmed Aboudouh, who says that Egypt paid a terrible price in taking back jihadists who begged to be allowed home after the Afghan and Chechen campaigns? He points out that in November 1997, 58 western tourists were slaughtered in Luxor by returned jihadists who only a year earlier had been begging to come back. Clearly, there is a danger in letting radicalised people come back. However, given that not everyone can have their citizenship withdrawn and not everyone who has been out there can be successfully prosecuted because of the lack of evidence of what goes

on in a place like that, does the solution not have to be a change in the law so that the act of giving support, aid and comfort to terrorist groups is itself a prosecutable offence?

Sajid Javid: I thank my right hon. Friend for drawing the attention of the House to that case in Egypt and for his question. He outlines that in cases—again, I am not talking about any particular case—where the only opportunity to keep out a dangerous individual is through deprivation, thereby preventing re-entry into the UK, then any Home Secretary would weigh that option very carefully. Ultimately, my No. 1 responsibility is to do everything I can to keep everyone who lives in Britain safe. The last thing anyone would want to see—he cited the example of Egypt—is a situation where someone returns who could not be kept out and goes on to kill, murder and destroy lives. The duty to keep their constituents safe should be paramount in the mind of every hon. Member. That is why the House has supported successive Acts of Parliament that allow deprivation. As I said, the Immigration Act 2014—not that long ago—actually extended powers of deprivation. That was the will of the House. My right hon. Friend referred to changes in the law. I know he welcomes the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, which became an Act just last week. That also gives the Government further powers to prosecute terrorists.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Let there be no question: everyone in this House deplores Daesh and this young woman's choices in going to join them, and of course there are security issues that must be addressed. However, the young woman we are talking about is British. She was radicalised in Britain. Daesh is a worldwide phenomenon, but she is our problem. Why is the Home Secretary not bringing her home to put her on trial here to be judged by a jury of her peers? Apart from anything else, she may have valuable intelligence and insights into how she was radicalised. Why is he washing his hands of this problem? He cited what Lord Carlile had to say, but if he, like me, was listening to the “Today” programme this morning, he will have heard Baron Anderson of Ipswich, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation from 2011 to 2017, suggest that we ought to be dealing with our own problems here.

I respectfully say that there is nothing that the Father of the House said with which I would disagree. The rule of law is fundamental to our democracy and if the Home Secretary thinks he can overlook the results of previous decisions, I would very gently suggest to him that he might want to seek a lecture about the doctrine of precedent from the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who is sitting beside him on the Treasury Bench. Unless this young woman holds dual citizenship, he may be found to have acted in breach of UK and international law by rendering her stateless. My question is this: is that a risk he is willing to take? Is he more interested in playing to the populist gallery than respecting the rule of law?

Sajid Javid: Let me say a couple of things to the hon. and learned Lady; again, I cannot talk about an individual case, but I will try to answer her questions. Every decision on deprivation—I think I speak for all former Home Secretaries who, under successive Governments, have made decisions on deprivation—are weighed up very carefully. The Government and officials in the

Government—these decisions have been made over a number of years under successive Governments—will be looking at legal cases individually, on a case-by-case basis. Of course, that would take into account any judgments in court that may be relevant. I am not proclaiming to be an expert on the law in this matter, and a decision like this would not be taken—certainly not by me—without my officials, who are the experts in the law. I know that the hon. and learned Lady is a distinguished lawyer, but I do not think that she is an expert on this particular issue, and it is important to listen to experts on this.

I also gently say to the hon. and learned Lady that it was in July, not that long ago, when another case was considered in an urgent question—the Kotey/Elsheikh case, again, related to foreign fighters—and in a similar way to now, she accused the Government of “departing from” Government policy. That was her language at the time. She went on to talk about how we were ignoring “our long-standing policy on the death penalty”.—[*Official Report*, 23 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 728.]

That was her accusation at the time. She will know that many months later, that case was looked at by the courts, quite properly—as is their job—and they ruled in the Government’s favour on all five counts, so if anyone is trying to play politics with this judgment, I think it is the hon. and learned Lady.

Joanna Cherry: Disgraceful. Ad hominem remarks with no basis whatsoever.

Mr Speaker: Order. Criticism by one right hon. or hon. Member of another is not a novel phenomenon. I have heard what the hon. and learned Lady said, but she has other colleagues who can pursue these matters in questioning and I am sure that she will take that opportunity. It would not be right for me to intercede at this point, other than to request that the House hears from Sir Desmond Swayne.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The Home Secretary’s power to deprive is open to challenge and, in most cases, will not exist at all. I urge him once again to arm himself with powers of Executive detention so that people can be sufficiently quarantined before they are allowed back.

Sajid Javid: In cases where terrorists or suspected terrorists are returning to the UK, a number of powers are available, including, for example, temporary exclusion orders, which have been used and can place a number of restrictions on someone, including the port of entry and reporting requirements, as well as other restrictions. We would always look first at what existing powers we can use, and if we feel that they are not sufficient, we would always look at what more might need to be brought to the House.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary is right to want to prosecute anyone who has been involved in terrorist activity here or abroad and we should support him in doing so. However, on the citizenship issue, he said that he will never make anyone stateless, but it appears in this case that he is relying legally on this young woman’s potential right to citizenship in the Netherlands or Bangladesh and presumably on the expectation that one of those countries will accept her, even though she has not lived there and was radicalised here. Does that mean that he

accepts that the same principle would apply to other people who might be citizens of Bangladesh or the Netherlands, who might either have potential citizenship in the UK or actual dual citizenship rights, and that if those countries removed their citizenship first—even though this was somebody who had committed crimes in that country who had never lived here—we would somehow be expected to accept those citizens?

Sajid Javid: I understand why the right hon. Lady referred to a particular case and I will not comment on that, but on her broader question, it is worth reminding the House that every time such a decision is made, it is done on a case-by-case basis. By definition, each case is going to have a different set of facts—sometimes completely different—and we will take all those into account. In every single situation, there is no question of making anyone stateless under any circumstances. Not only would making someone stateless be unlawful, it would be morally wrong, and that is not something that we would do. In any case, and certainly with any decision that I have made, I am perfectly comfortable that the analysis is done properly by expert legal advisers. I would not make such a decision unless I was absolutely confident on the statelessness issue.

The right hon. Lady also referred to citizenship of other countries and how that may or may not work. She will know, as the Chair of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, that the citizenship rules can be very complex. They are complex in our country and have similar complexity in many other countries. However, we make sure that we work with lawyers, sometimes including foreign lawyers, if necessary, to make sure that our interpretation of how citizenship laws work is correct.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): As somebody who served in the ISIS campaign, I am very aware of the difficulty of extraditing and prosecuting returning UK ISIS fighters. Does the Home Secretary agree that the priority is monitoring those 400-plus fighters who are back in the UK? Is he aware of how many of them were actually fighters? How many of those people are likely to be prosecuted, and if he cannot supply the information now, would he be able to give it to me or the House in some form at a later date? Does he agree now that there is also a case for an updated and renewed treason Bill or Act to cope with these sorts of incidents in future?

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for his question. As I mentioned a moment ago, we estimate that of the 900 or so people who left the UK to join terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, approximately 40% have returned. He asks how many have been prosecuted. Each one is investigated—that does not necessarily lead to a prosecution, but anyone who returns should absolutely expect to be questioned and investigated, and prosecuted where possible. I believe that around 40 have been successfully prosecuted. Some have received very significant sentences. I am aware of at least one case in which I believe a sentence of more than 10 years on terrorism-related charges was given by the courts. I will also see whether I can provide any more information to my hon. and gallant Friend.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): As the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), noted, in Greater Manchester we have

[Kate Green]

particular reason to find the conduct and utterances of Ms Begum abhorrent. We also want to understand why and how she apparently became radicalised in this country, as indeed, have young people from my constituency who have also tragically gone to Syria to fight with the jihadis. How can the Home Secretary assure us that we are taking every possible step to understand how that home-grown radicalisation occurs and what we can do to prevent it in future if we are not able to bring back our own citizens and interrogate, investigate and, if appropriate, prosecute them?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady raises a really important point. We have been talking about cases that hon. Members have raised in the House involving people who sadly went on to join terrorist organisations, but how we prevent that from happening in the first place is just as important.

The hon. Lady will know that intensive work is being done across Departments, including through programmes led by the Home Office. We are doing our best. There are many people, especially young people, who seem vulnerable and are preyed upon by extremists. The first thing is to find out who they are—that is what we try to do with the Prevent programme, particularly through the Prevent duty—and then to develop bespoke programmes working around those individuals. Each case will be different. In the most intense cases, people move into the Channel programme. Last year, 7,000 people were referred to Prevent and of them about 400 went into the Channel programme. Many of those referrals were to do with Islamist terrorism, but almost half of the Channel referrals last year were to do with right-wing terrorism and extremism. We want to fight all types of extremism, and we work throughout the country, including in Greater Manchester, to do so. Just a few months ago, I went to Bethnal Green and looked carefully at the programme there, and I am very happy with what I have seen so far.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): This country is admired around the world for its sense of decency, fair play and the rule of law, which is why I am concerned about this case. I realise the Home Secretary cannot talk about this specific case, but can he tell us how many other people have had their nationality withdrawn, be it British or dual?

Sajid Javid: It is worth pointing out again—it cannot be said often enough—that nationality will be withdrawn only where the Home Secretary is satisfied that it is conducive to the public good and that such action will not leave the individual stateless. As I said at the start of the urgent question, this power has been used more than 150 times since 2010. I do not have the number for before 2010, but it was used by successive Home Secretaries under successive Governments prior to 2010.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am sure that many of us recall the attack in Manchester, and I am sure I speak for everyone in saying that security in relation to such attacks is a priority. That goes without saying. That said, how can the Home Secretary defend the dangerous concept of what is now in effect a two-tier citizenship system and invoke the

name of national security in doing so? Surely—I am thinking how people might perceive this outside—this plays to the sense of injustice and the brainwashing narrative of those seeking to radicalise young people in communities across the United Kingdom. How does he anticipate remedying the underlying causes of radicalisation when he opts to act unilaterally instead of making use of a rigorous justice system? It is through justice that we achieve what we want, which is a sense of fairness in society, and if we are unfair in society, he loses the moral high ground. I beg him to consider how he uses justice to best effect.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady lays down a fair challenge in asking that in such cases we—whether me or Ministers more generally—think very carefully about fairness and the impact of our decisions. I understand why she raised the issue of people who would look for excuses to try to radicalise populations and communities. That should weigh heavily in any decision on deprivation as against the Government's responsibility to keep their citizens safe. It is worth keeping something else in mind. Let us imagine a hypothetical case where there is the possibility to keep a terrorist out of the country, but the Home Secretary decides not to, for some reason, and that that individual returns, continues to preach extremism and radicalise others, and potentially even carries out terrorist attacks. It is worth thinking about the impact of that on communities and how it could radicalise people.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Earlier today, several Labour MPs said that removing British citizenship from dual nationals accused of terror offences and acts against the British state could harm dual nationals residing abroad who get themselves into serious trouble. Is it not the case that, typically, countries deport back to this country British citizens convicted of serious crimes in those countries?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend asks me about deportations. In the case of deportations from the UK, we are talking about individuals who, for one reason or another, if they have broken laws, we would seek to deport. The best example in the UK is probably the deportation of serious foreign national offenders once they have served their sentence in a British prison. We take a case-by-case approach, but where appropriate we would look to deport. As he pointed out, many countries seek to deport back to the UK British citizens abroad who have committed offences once they have completed their sentence.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): I have been tackling radicalisation and terrorism since 9/11. What sets us apart from those radicalisers and terrorists and their barbaric ideology is the rule of law. We need to tackle them with the rule of law, not kneejerk reactions to tabloid headlines. The Government could have done something about this in the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, but there is no mention of it in that Act. You have the terrorism prevention and investigation measures. How many of the people you are looking at in terms of radicalisation are currently on a TPIM? You have no records of people—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not looking at anything. I have no record of anything. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know that debate

goes through the Chair. He should not say “you” because “you” does not refer to the Minister; it refers to me, and I am an innocent in this matter.

Mr Mahmood: My apologies, Mr Speaker.

The Home Secretary has no idea what is going on with TPIMs. How many people who have been radicalised are having no action taken against them in relation to their capability to strike terrorism and radicalisation in this country? Will he give me some figures on TPIMs, and what control does he have over those?

Sajid Javid: I have seen for myself some of the work the hon. Gentleman has done, particularly in the west midlands, to help with deradicalisation, and I commend him for it. It is important that he and others continue such work and continue working with local authorities and other partners in doing so.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about deprivations generally and talked about the rule of law. Of course we operate according to the law, as does any Government, and that law is set by this House. I referred earlier to the British Nationality Act 1981 and the Immigration Act 2014. Both talk about deprivation. The 2014 Act extended the provisions for how deprivations can be done. He was a Member of the House in 2014. I am not suggesting he voted for the Act—I do not know; the point is it was debated and is now the law. This is the rule of law. As well as that, we are signed up, quite rightly, to a number of international conventions that we care deeply about. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) mentioned the UN universal declaration of human rights. There is also the convention on the rights of the child, which is relevant in some cases. Those are all hugely important, and we absolutely abide by them.

I cannot stress enough that we would not make a decision that had not been looked at carefully by Government lawyers—experienced lawyers who have worked for many Governments—and which we did not feel to be absolutely lawful. I do not pretend for a second that Governments do not get decisions wrong and that decision are not sometimes declared unlawful if challenged—that has happened under many Governments, and when it does happen, Governments have to listen—but we strive every time to make a completely lawful decision. We have in the past published transparency reports in the House on deprivations—the last one, which was published in May, I think, gives year-by-year numbers—and we will continue to be transparent. The hon. Gentleman also asked about TPIMs. I do not have the exact numbers, but I will write to him.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): In fighting Daesh, we faced a new phenomenon. People through their own actions decided to join and embrace a new foul and warped state. It was a matter for them to choose. May I therefore commend my right hon. Friend for the bold action he has taken, which I am sure is supported across the country? Will he reassure me that our position on these difficult issues will be rooted in British values and proper judicial processes?

Sajid Javid: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that reassurance. He is right to talk about the threat from Daesh. It is not the first and will not be the last terrorist organisation that we have to confront, but the number

of people who left Britain to join that vile terrorist organisation, and to commit the most horrific crimes either themselves or by supporting what it wanted to achieve, was unprecedented. I do not think that any country that has faced a similar problem—citizens leaving to join such organisations—has a perfect answer to deal with it, which is why it is important that we work with other countries, which we will do. I assure my hon. Friend absolutely that we must always uphold our values. As I said in answer to the previous question, we must ensure every single time that we act properly and at all times within the law.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The actions and words of Shamima Begum are reprehensible and almost undoubtedly illegal, but we are not to know because the Secretary of State has rejected due process and the law that it is his duty to uphold, and has instead chosen to treat British citizenship as a privilege accorded to those with whom he agrees. He is also abandoning our responsibility to pursue and prevent terrorists made in Britain, and in the process ceding the moral high ground to President Trump. Do the Secretary of State's actions do justice to Britain or to his political ambitions?

Sajid Javid: I have had some dealings with the hon. Lady in the past. She is a wonderful woman, and she is a lot better than that question. Perhaps it is a Whip's handout—that is not her. Much of her question has already been answered in this urgent question, but I am happy to say it again. We must ensure that at all times we are fair, that we are acting morally and also lawfully. As I have said, such important decisions cannot be taken lightly. The facts must be weighed very carefully, and decision taken only when all alternatives have properly been taken into account.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The Home Secretary has an incredibly difficult job. The interests of the public in this country are paramount and he must keep them safe. We have a fine tradition in this country of not exporting our problems around the world, but of trying to solve problems around the world. Does he consider that we have sufficient powers to ensure that people coming from abroad who may pose a risk are contained? If so, does he also consider that it may be worse for humankind if individuals with problems are exported to parts of the world where there are not such safe containment laws as ours?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend asks whether we have sufficient powers. It is right that we keep our powers under review at all times. If we feel that things need to change, and if that change can be brought about, we would bring it to the House, as we did very recently with the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019.

It is worth saying that no matter what powers we have, any prosecution would require sufficient evidence because of our absolute commitment to due process. That is incredibly difficult when people have gone abroad, joined terrorist organisations and carried out the most horrific attacks. It can be incredibly difficult to achieve justice by obtaining evidence that we can present in a court of law under whatever power we have. That is why, as Home Secretary, I must look carefully at all the powers at my disposal. In some cases—and only in some cases—when it is deemed that the best way to keep

[Sajid Javid]

this country safe is through deprivation of citizenship for someone who has more than one nationality, that should be taken as a serious option.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): May I bring the Home Secretary back to the answer he gave to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who is no longer in her place? He referred to the Prevent programme. It clearly does very valuable work, but, as far as I am aware, it is a UK-based programme, so the question remains: in what way can he find out why or how a young woman was radicalised when she was a child if she is in a camp in Syria? What assessment has he made of the risks of a large number of people remaining in a camp in Syria and developing networks there that provide us with a risk here at home?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman rightly brings to the attention of the House the fact that these are tough decisions that have to be made after weighing a number of factors. I will not refer to an individual case, but he talks about people in camps abroad who are members of terrorist organisations. We might have limited evidence of what they have done as members of those organisations, but we know that they have joined. I hope he accepts that there are risks of their staying in the region and of returning to the UK—there are risks both ways, which is why each case should be looked at individually and judged on its own facts. I do not pretend for a second that these are easy decisions. Any Home Secretary must take all factors into account and everything should be balanced out, but ultimately it is my responsibility to keep our citizens safe. That must be paramount in my mind when making decisions.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): I strongly welcome the action taken by the Home Secretary. There has been a lot of use of the word “arbitrary”, but surely the key point is that the young lady chose voluntarily to go out and join and live among a terrible regime that has behaved in a barbaric fashion. Has he reflected on whether she wants to come back because she has regret and feels remorse, or whether she wants to come back because the caliphate is being defeated? My constituents would ask why someone can choose to go and join an organisation while it destroys, but be welcomed back as if nothing has changed once it finds its downfall.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend will understand if I do not talk about a particular case. As I said earlier from the Dispatch Box, we believe that more than 900 people have gone to Syria and Iraq to join terrorist organisations, many of whom have promoted that fact. As I said a moment ago, it is hard to gather evidence on what they may or may not have done, but we know the cause with which they have aligned. We know what those terrorist organisations stand for, their objectives and the kind of things that they do.

It is worth recalling that Daesh is a lot weaker than it was even a year ago, but certainly a lot weaker than it was when many people went out and joined it two or three years ago. It is not surprising that those who are there and who seem to be being pushed out of the region want to come home. They might have that thought,

but we must know about each individual. It is our duty and our right to think carefully about the best interests of this country and how best to protect our citizens.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I have listened for the last while to many people from the Father of the House to honourable, right honourable, learned and gallant Members, and I have listened carefully to the Home Secretary's responses to each and every one of them, but I still cannot get over the fact that the case that he will not refer to, as is proper, but that everyone else is referring to and the press are referring to, concerns a 15-year-old girl who was radicalised, went to Syria, has lost two children and is now a lactating mother—and she requires that her citizenship be rescinded? The Home Secretary keeps talking about security; can he explain to me in what regard she will affect the security of this country if she is allowed back in?

Sajid Javid: Again, I hope the hon. Lady will understand that I cannot talk about an individual case; I hope she recognises that. But if individuals have voluntarily left this country, joined a terrorist organisation and have for a number of years been supporting that terrorist organisation, it is self-evident that individual is a risk by dint of the fact that they have joined a terrorist organisation. As I said a moment ago, some of the acts of this organisation are there for us to see. I therefore hope that the hon. Lady can understand why such individuals could be a threat to this country if they returned, and that if I have a proper reason, based on the facts put in front of me in each case—this should be done on a case-by-case basis—that the best way to protect our national interest, and in particular the security of people living in the UK, is to exclude someone from re-entering the UK, that surely has to be the right decision.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con) *rose—*

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: We have not got to points of order yet, but if the right hon. Gentleman wishes to pose an inquiry, having consulted his scholarly cranium, he is welcome to do so.

Sir John Hayes: I wanted to raise a point of order, Mr Speaker, but I am very happy to wait until you feel it is the right time to do so. I seek your advice, Mr Speaker: now or later?

Mr Speaker: No, no, what I was saying to the right hon. Gentleman, I thought clearly in terms that brooked no misunderstanding, especially by one of his perspicacious intelligence, was that now was not the time for a point of order, but if he wanted to put a question he could. If he wants to wait for his point of order, we will all wait with bated breath, beads of sweat on our brows and eager anticipation. Meanwhile I call Rehman Chishti.

Rehman Chishti: Having previously successfully pushed the Government to accept the correct terminology, Daesh, to defeat the idea, the ideology and the appeal that is sucking in hundreds of individuals from the UK to

Syria and Iraq to fight for this poisoned ideology and entity, may I ask the Home Secretary the following? Peter Neumann, one of the world's best experts, based at King's College London, has said the presumption must be for host countries to take back their foreign fighters. Unlike France, which is taking back 120 of its foreign fighters straight away in one lump, will the United Kingdom be looking at taking them back in a gradual way, for example taking back first those who assist the UK by giving evidence against those they have been fighting with and excluding them until they do that? Linked to that, on the issue of revoking the citizenship of individuals with dual citizenship rights, can the Secretary of State explain the following? Before the Government do that, do our Government speak to country x or y where these individuals may have originally come from to see if they will take them back? If not, they will become stateless, and that would not be what the Government want.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has now acquired the dubious distinction of being known in the House, I think for ever after, as among other things a cheeky chappie, as he somewhat abused my generosity in asking a question of that length. But never mind, he has done it now, and he can repent at leisure.

Sajid Javid: Each case is looked at individually, on a case-by-case basis. My hon. Friend mentioned France, and the UK and France have probably had the most people go from their countries to Syria or Iraq as foreign fighters, so we work closely with our French counterparts, and other European friends, on whether there can be a more co-ordinated approach to this challenge that we face. Cases involving individuals who may have the nationality of other countries as well are again dealt with on a case-by-case basis. As I have said, we would need to satisfy ourselves that they do genuinely have the nationality of another country before they can be deprived of their British nationality.

Points of Order

2.35 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am saving the hon. Gentleman; it would be a pity to squander him at too early a stage of our proceedings. We will come to him in due course, but I think the House is in a state of great animation at the point of order that is going to be forthcoming from the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes).

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): On a much trailed and therefore much anticipated point of order, Mr Speaker. Last April, the Prime Minister announced a children's funeral fund to give support and solace to those who have loved and lost. Despite the fact that the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), I and others have raised this matter subsequently in this Chamber, nothing more has been heard. Have you had notice, Mr Speaker, of a statement from Ministers, and if you have not, what further steps might I take to ensure that this pledge is honest and honoured, because no one should break promises to the broken-hearted?

Mr Speaker: Indeed not, and the right hon. Gentleman expresses himself with his customary eloquence. The short answer is that a number of recourses are available to him. If he believes the matter warrants the urgent attention of the House, he could seek to use the mechanism that would secure, with my agreement, the presence of a Minister in the Chamber to answer his question on the matter; the earliest he could possibly do that would be tomorrow, and it is open to him to do that. Alternatively, it may be that the right hon. Gentleman will take his customary seat in the Chamber for his usual participation in the business question tomorrow morning. We have become accustomed over a substantial period to hearing the eloquent and often very poetic inquiries from the right hon. Gentleman, often infused with some philosophical reflections and even references to his favourite authors as well, and that is a treat that I think might lie in store for the House.

Craig Mackinlay: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last week at Prime Minister's questions, the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition chose to mention my constituency of South Thanet, whereupon graciously, Sir, you allowed me the very last PMQ. I will quote what the right hon. Gentleman said:

"The Secretary of State's decision to award the contract to Seaborne has increased the budget deficit of Thanet Council, the owners of Ramsgate port, by nearly £2 million."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 877.]

That figure was clearly incorrect, as in a period of just 51 days that would amount on an annualised basis to £14.6 million, which represents some 70% to 80% of the entire revenue of the council.

As a courtesy to the right hon. Gentleman, I alerted him to my concern that he might have misled the House, and I did that within an hour of him making that statement. I also alerted you, Mr Speaker, to my concerns on this matter. A week later, I have heard nothing from the right hon. Gentleman, nor has he, upon my request,

[Craig Mackinlay]

pointed me to the figures on which he has relied to make a statement to the House from the Dispatch Box.

On that same day, the right hon. Gentleman also highlighted the fact—at least from his point of view—that £800,000 had been spent with appropriate professionals on due diligence for the Seaborne contract. That is again factually incorrect; that money was spent to do due diligence across the three contracts of over £100 million, not just on the very small Seaborne contract.

I alerted the right hon. Gentleman to my concerns both last week and this morning by hand-delivered letter, and I also delivered the same letter to you, Mr Speaker. I note that the right hon. Gentleman, having been alerted to my concerns, is not in his place to redress the issue at hand, and I now seek your guidance on how the error can be addressed in this place and what other measures I might take at your leisure.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his intention to raise this point of order. That was typically courteous of him. I also note that he had informed the Leader of the Opposition of his intention to raise the matter. Moreover, I am conscious—[*Interruption.*] It would be helpful if I were able to communicate this point to the hon. Gentleman without the background hubbub coming from the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), who is conducting what is no doubt an absolutely fascinating conversation, but which can wait. I am conscious that the hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) has written to the Leader of the Opposition because I have received the copy that he sent to me.

The short answer is that if the Leader of the Opposition believes that he has inadvertently misled the House, it is open to him to correct the record. Each and every Member takes responsibility for the veracity of what he or she says in this place. I simply make the point—I am not trying to argue the toss with the hon. Gentleman; that is not for me to do—that the Leader of the Opposition might have a different view of this matter and that his exegesis of the facts might differ from that of the hon. Gentleman. After all, that is very much in the nature of political discourse and argument. This is a subject of dispute, and perhaps of continued scrutiny.

All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that it is perfectly open to him to continue to write letters to the Leader of the Opposition if he feels that that would be a productive exercise or if he finds it therapeutic. It is alternatively open to him to take the short journey from here to the Table Office to put down some written questions. That is something that I once did myself on quite a substantial scale, so I would certainly not cavil at him doing it; it is absolutely his right. Meanwhile, he has put his concerns and his view of the facts on the record with his customary force.

Asylum Seekers (Permission to Work) (No. 2)

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

2.41 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for certain asylum seekers to be granted permission to work; and for connected purposes.

Prior to my election as an MP, I worked for a number of years with refugees and asylum seekers who had fled violence and genocide in the former Yugoslavia. Those people left behind their homes, their friends and in most cases their wider families as they searched for safety upon our shores and, crucially, a chance to rebuild their lives. In my own constituency, we have a long history of welcoming refugees. At a meeting in Muswell Hill led by Lord Alf Dubs—himself a refugee from Czechoslovakia who was brought to the UK in 1939 by the Quaker-led Kindertransport train—the audience was asked who among them had a family connection with refugees. Nearly everyone raised their hand.

A group of my constituents runs Haringey Welcomes Refugees to provide a warm welcome for Syrian refugee families and to help with practical support and friendship. As we marked Holocaust Memorial Day in Haringey last month, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and I gathered with our communities to hear the personal stories of survivors of totalitarianism. We also heard the stories of survivors of the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia, and of many others who have found sanctuary here in the UK. As I remember and reflect on the stories of those families, I am immensely proud that my first ever ten-minute rule Bill seeks to support asylum seekers by empowering them to rebuild their lives by allowing them to work and contribute to society.

I am pleased to have cross-party support for the Bill. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), who has been making the case to lift the work ban for some time, as well as to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for his work, most notably on the Syrian refugee crisis, and of course to the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), who presented her Bill on asylum seekers' work rights on 10 January. I also pay tribute to the excellent work of the all-party parliamentary group on refugees, under the fantastic chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), who leads a great coalition of supporters, as well as to the many charities and stakeholders who have really pushed on this issue.

Under the current rules, asylum seekers are able to apply for the right to work only after they have been waiting for a decision on their claim for over a year. Even then, the few people who are granted such permission are rarely able to work in practice because their employment is restricted to the narrow list of highly skilled professions included on the Government's shortage occupation list. We have an effective ban on asylum seekers working. I am sure that all hon. Members present today will have their own experiences of people attending their advice surgeries to express their deep frustration at this reality.

Just before Christmas, an old gentleman attended my surgery who had been waiting for a decision on his asylum application for over 12 years. He is desperate to work, but he has now been referred to mental health services to be treated for depression. He is in utter despair at a system that has forced him out of employment and into poverty for so many years.

Comparatively, the UK receives far fewer asylum applications than our European neighbours. We know that the total number of UK applicants represents a very small fraction of our national population—just 0.03% of the current UK labour force. In lieu of the right to work, asylum seekers can access a support payment of £5.39 per day. That allowance needs to cover clothing, transport, food, personal hygiene and often the cost of their asylum application. It is inhumane to force people who are seeking safety from persecution into poverty. It also reduces the chances of smooth economic and social integration and, in doing so, causes longer-term problems.

The OECD has found that legal barriers to employment create the risk of people resorting to informal and sometimes illegal work, which can manifest itself in the form of modern slavery. A change in the law would help to strengthen the Government's strategy on tackling modern slavery. It is our duty to ensure that our asylum system is morally sound. Whether an asylum application is successful or whether it is ultimately rejected, we must remember throughout the process that the applicants are human beings with needs. There is strong public support for a change that provides refugees with the human dignity of being able to provide for themselves and their families.

Beyond the strong moral case, there is an equally compelling economic argument. Currently, we have around 11,000 adults who have waited more than six months for a decision on their asylum application. The average annual cost of supporting one such person is approximately £5,563, including support payments and accommodation costs. In a scenario in which we extended the right to work to this relatively small group of people, the financial picture would be quite different. Assuming that an individual worked full time on the national minimum wage, they would pay a total tax and national insurance contribution of £1,400 into the Treasury.

In reality, we know that many asylum seekers are highly educated, with university degrees in the fields of law, pharmacy and optometry to name but a few, but those associated professions often fall outside the occupation shortage lists. Lifting the ban would provide an opportunity for the Government to generate larger tax revenues, given that the average UK earner pays £5,745 in tax and national insurance into the Treasury. Estimates indicate an annual economic gain of £42.4 million for the Government as a result of benefit savings and additional tax revenues. This concept has fiscal and moral merit.

I now appeal directly to Government Front Benchers as I quote the words of the then Secretary of State at the former Department for Communities and Local Government—now the Home Secretary—from his “Integrated Communities Strategy” Green Paper. He stated that it was the Government's ambition

“to build strong integrated communities where people—whatever their background—live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.”

That is an important statement of intent, which we can all agree to. The Home Secretary also indicated his desire to review asylum policy when he responded to my oral question in December 2018, and I hope that the Government will take forward my Bill's proposal at the earliest opportunity.

Before concluding, as I still have a tiny bit of time on the clock and as it is half term, even though one would not think this was supposed to be a recess week with all the goings on, I thought that I would briefly read from a poem called “Changed” by Miss Grace Barry, a student at Our Lady of Muswell Hill Catholic Primary School, from the “Welcome to Haringey! Poems from our schools” competition. She wrote:

“I watch her step off the bus on the 1st of May,
A permanent scowl etched on her face,
Eyes of coldness looking around,
Knotted, rough hard and a worn-out suitcase...
I watched her step off the bus on the 1st of September,
A permanent grin etched on her face,
Eyes of warmth looking around,
Brushed, silky hair and a brand new suitcase,
Her healthy figure prancing towards me,
As she laughs and jokes, ‘What are you looking at?’
Her accent light and her tone friendly,
Her light footsteps skipping away,
With friends by her side,
Changed by a Haringey welcome.”

I hope that we can all go forward with the spirit of Miss Grace Barry from the constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green and be hopeful and positive. Instead of bigotry being emboldened, perhaps we can be positive about the newly arrived in our communities and think about making this Bill law.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Catherine West, Mr Andrew Mitchell, Dame Caroline Spelman, Anna Soubry, Christine Jardine, Kate Green, Mr David Lammy, Alex Sobel, Deidre Brock, Alex Cunningham, Janet Daby and Caroline Lucas present the Bill.

Catherine West accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March, and to be presented (Bill 338).

ESTIMATES (LIAISON COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 145(3)),

That this House agrees with the Report of the Liaison Committee of 19 February 2019: That a day not later than 18 March 2019 be allotted for the consideration of the following Estimates for financial year 2018-19: Department for Education, and Department for Work and Pensions.—(Amanda Milling.)

Question agreed to.

Exiting the European Union (Aquaculture)

[Relevant document: *Tenth Report of the European Statutory Instruments Committee, HC 1794*]

2.52 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I beg to move,

That the draft Aquatic Animal Health and Alien Species in Aquaculture (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 15 January, be approved.

This instrument extends to Northern Ireland only. The island of Ireland has only 10 native species of fish—40 fewer than in Great Britain and 80 fewer than continental Europe. With fewer species, it has fewer aquatic pests and diseases and, consequently, has a higher aquatic health status. We must ensure that that situation is maintained. We also acknowledge the vulnerability of the aquatic environment and the aquaculture industry to the introduction of diseases and alien species.

In Northern Ireland, aquaculture is a small but valuable market. In 2017, aquaculture production accounted for 1,248 tonnes of finfish at a value of over £6.5 million on 36 active licensed sites and 5,831 tonnes of shellfish, mainly mussels and oysters, at a value of over £9 million on 43 active aquaculture sites. The sector employs 93 full-time and 33 part-time staff.

Disease freedom underpins international regulations on the trade in live animals and their products. Northern Ireland enjoys a higher health status than the rest of the UK, as it is free from many of the most serious aquatic animal diseases. The maintenance and protection of Northern Ireland's aquatic health status safeguards the interest of the aquaculture sector, as well as the public, who derive health and wellbeing benefits from angling and other recreational activities.

This statutory instrument will provide the necessary technical corrections to the Aquatic Animal Health Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009, which are the principal regulations, and the Alien and Locally Absent Species in Aquaculture Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 to ensure operability when the UK leaves the EU. The instrument does not introduce any policy changes.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I fully support what my hon. Friend is trying to do for continuity, but can we expect further legislation shortly after leaving—if we leave without signing a withdrawal agreement—because we would presumably want our own policy then?

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend will be aware that once we leave the EU, whether without an agreement or after the conclusion of the implementation period, the UK will be free to legislate independently in such areas, rather than having to do so in accordance with EU directives.

The UK Government remain committed to restoring devolution in Northern Ireland. However, in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, UK Ministers have decided that, in the interest of legal certainty for Northern Ireland, the Government will take through the necessary secondary legislation at Westminster for Northern Ireland in close consultation with the relevant Northern Ireland Department.

The proposed amendments fall into three main categories. First, cross-references to EU instruments are amended so that they are operable after EU exit. The amendments modify cross-references to the 2006 directive contained in the principal regulations. The modifications are essential to ensure the operability of the principal regulations following the UK's exit from the EU. They are common amendments that appear throughout Northern Ireland, England and Wales and Scotland EU exit statutory instruments. For example, the amendments substitute references to "Member State" or "Member States" with "Northern Ireland", the "Competent Authority" or the "UK or a constituent UK territory", and references to the EU are changed to the UK. The amendments also include the substitution of references to articles in the directive with references to provisions in the domestic Northern Ireland regulations that transposed the directive to ensure a reference point in the regulation itself, rather than to an EU directive. Some cross-references contain further cross-references to the directive and, in these cases, the cross-references have been followed through to modify all the necessary provisions.

Secondly, a group of provisions will be redundant or inoperable in Northern Ireland law after EU exit. This instrument makes an amendment to the Alien and Locally Absent Species in Aquaculture Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 to remove the reference to a representative of the European Commission being able to accompany an inspector of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, because it will no longer be appropriate for such an official to attend after we leave the EU.

Finally, there are cross-references to directly applicable EU instruments to reflect technical amendments made to such instruments by other UK-wide SIs. Part 2 of annex 4 to directive 2006/88 contains listed diseases. It was replaced with a new annex 1A inserted into regulation 1251/2008 by the Aquatic Animal Health and Alien Species in Aquaculture (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 to enable the UK to amend the list of diseases in retained EU law following exit from the EU. The amendments are made to replace references to annex 4 of the directive to annex 1A to the regulation, which will ensure correct references to retained EU law in the domestic Northern Ireland regulations.

Given the unique biodiversity of the island of Ireland, DAERA officials work closely with their Irish counterparts on a range of fish health issues, especially with regard to contingency planning, trade matters, disease issues and biosecurity. Co-operation on such matters was in place long before we joined the EU and will continue when the UK leaves the EU. There is a close working relationship across the island of Ireland on fish health and aquaculture.

For example, the Bottom Grown Mussel Consultative Forum facilitates the management of the seed mussel fishery on an all-island basis. It consists of officials from Departments, scientists, enforcement agents, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the aquaculture industry. The group has been instrumental in securing the Marine Stewardship Council certification for Irish bottom-grown mussels. This prestigious status ensures premium market access for Ireland's top-quality mussels, and it demonstrates that the sector is vigilant on disease prevention and control, maintains high biosecurity standards and is environmentally aware.

The intention of the regulations is to maintain the status quo and keep the aquatic animal health and alien species in aquaculture regimes functioning much as they do now. The regulations do not create new policy or change existing policy. As a result, no significant impacts are expected to arise from them. In moving this statutory instrument, a workable legal framework underpinning business as usual in the aquatic animal health and alien and locally absent species in aquaculture regimes will be preserved after exit.

John Redwood: I seek to clarify my earlier question, which did not seem to get through. Is the Department working on a better regime for fishing in general, and for fish health in particular, for once we have left? This is a great opportunity, and fishing is an area that has been very badly damaged by EU membership.

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the purpose of these regulations is to ensure that we have an operable law book on day one after leaving the European Union, but he will also be aware that, separately, the Fisheries Bill is going through the House—it has completed its Committee stage and will return shortly on Report. I can confirm that the Bill has a dedicated provision that gives the Government power to legislate in the area of fish health in particular so we can improve on the current regime and make any necessary changes. These regulations are simply about ensuring we make retained EU law operable, and I commend them to the House.

3.1 pm

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): I put on record the Opposition's general concern about how the Government are scheduling secondary legislation and the limited means of scrutiny it offers. Given the serious dangers that would accrue if we get any of these statutory instruments wrong, it is regrettable that, nearly two years after invoking article 50, we are now having to rush everything through in the last few days. Neither Opposition parties nor other stakeholders can have any confidence about when each statutory instrument will be debated. Even when they have been scheduled, we sometimes do not know from hour to hour.

The explanatory memorandum states:

"Without this instrument... This may prevent trade between Northern Ireland and the EU and Third Countries after the UK leaves the EU."

It also states:

"If this legislation is not progressed then this would result in an incomplete statute book on Day 1 of the UK's withdrawal from the EU."

The Opposition will support these regulations today, but I would be grateful if the Minister addressed our questions about the process, about what replaces EU procedures and, specifically, about the replacement for Council directive 2006/88.

Some stakeholders were not able to comment on this statutory instrument because they needed to prioritise many other much larger, more contentious pieces of secondary legislation, such as the Floods and Water (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and the Fisheries (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, both of which we opposed recently. We run the risk of exposing ourselves to unintended consequences if we continue to pass rushed legislation that has not had external scrutiny.

We have, at most, 90 minutes to consider this statutory instrument, and there is no real chance for amendments. There has been no time for impact assessment and only very limited consultation. Can the Minister be absolutely certain that no mistakes have been made, such as the blunder on the revocation of some of the powers of the inshore fisheries conservation officers as part of the Government's so-called red tape challenge?

The explanatory memorandum states that this statutory instrument has

"no, or no significant, impact".

Can the Minister tell us how significant an impact would have to be before it is reckoned to be significant?

One consequence of leaving the EU will be the potential loss of pan-European scientific expertise. We currently have access to Europe-wide research and analysis to shape our decisions. What steps are being taken to ensure that the scientific advice will be of the same technical and authoritative standard after these regulations are transposed? What additional funding will be allocated to Northern Ireland research to plug this gap? How will we continue to tap into EU scientific expertise, and what negotiations are taking place on continued participation in the EU's intelligence-sharing networks?

Although we do not doubt our scientific community's expertise on aquatic animal health and plant life, unless we adhere doggedly to European Union standards, over which we will no longer have any control, we will be placing an extra workload on our scientific advisers, which they may not have the resources to fulfil.

The Minister mentioned the changes to directive 2006/88 but, for the avoidance of doubt, what will replace the EU standing committee on the food chain and animal health in Northern Ireland? Given that the Northern Ireland Assembly is not sitting, and probably will not be sitting after 29 March, what elected body will take on the responsibilities of the European Parliament in this matter, as per the procedure referred to in article 62(2) of the directive?

The explanatory memorandum states:

"Whilst the UK will be under no legal obligation to adhere to EU rules for aquatic animal health following EU exit, failure to do so could result in the UK being unable to trade in aquaculture... products with EU Member States and third countries."

The UK exports a very large proportion of fish and shellfish, so it seems important that there should be a similarly rigorous system for establishing disease-free zones—one that mirrors the current EU process—otherwise there would be a very real likelihood that the EU would refuse to take Northern Ireland's produce in future. What plans does the Minister have to mirror the current level of scrutiny for declaring disease-free zones?

This statutory instrument changes the Northern Irish law that implements directive 2006/88, and it is designed to preserve the existing level of environmental protection by maintaining the current approach to aquatic animal health and the management of aquaculture. The Minister mentioned regulation 2016/249, which will apply from 2021, and I fail to understand some of the links in this statutory instrument—I apologise for that, but I could not find anyone who does understand them—so will he explain what his Department will do?

What are the Minister's plans to introduce UK legislation to implement the commitments provided for in the new EU animal health strategy? What assessment has the

[Sandy Martin]

Department made of the influence of climate change on the emergence of new diseases, the prevalence of existing diseases and the geographic distribution of disease agents and vectors, as mentioned in the EU animal health strategy 2007 to 2013? If the Department has not undertaken any such assessment, and has no plans to do so, does it not mean that we will need to continue to rely on the EU to do this work for us and that we will have to adhere to whatever further directives the EU comes up with?

We will support these regulations because we need to address the deficiencies in domestic legislation that will arise from Brexit. Northern Irish law must be able to operate after the UK leaves the EU, and it must not leave Northern Ireland unable to trade with European Union countries including, of course, the Republic. We must be careful there are no unintended consequences that would risk the health of aquatic animals or that would fail to facilitate trade, so I would be grateful if the Minister addressed the points I have raised.

3.8 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the details set out by the Minister. As we know, aquaculture is not a big sector of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland, but it is a critical part of it. Aquaculture creates a large number of jobs and, more importantly, it boosts the local economy—the 36 licences have been mentioned.

The Minister mentioned mussels and oysters, and we have an excellent, disease-free product in Northern Ireland. Strangford lough, which gives its name to my constituency, has a strong oyster base, and I want its importance to increase for the export market. The statutory instrument refers to alien species, an issue that often comes up in this important sector, because waters can bring in invasive species. The Minister outlined how the regulations will continue things.

The co-operation between the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the fisheries Department in particular, and the Republic of Ireland is of some interest to me, as it should be to everyone in this House. Can the Minister confirm that the Republic of Ireland accepts the rules as put forward in the SI? I understand the issue he referred to in respect of the Northern Ireland Assembly and devolution. I thank him for his confirmation about the process of secondary legislation and about no delays. It is important that we have no delays and that we have a fluent system that flows easily into the new devolution and new position we will have after 29 March. With the secondary legislation in place, will the licences continue to be issued by the fisheries division at the Northern Ireland Assembly? The “nothing changes” regulations and scrutiny, to which the shadow Minister referred, mean that the produce can continue to be exported, and that is very important. Our mussels and oysters in Northern Ireland have excellent health and our markets remain open.

The Minister has always had at heart the interests of the fisheries sector and, in particular, the aquaculture sector, which although small is significant in what it does. I have spoken to the local fish producers organisations and asked for their opinion, and they are quite happy with what is going forward. If we have the support and blessing of the local fishing sector—those who are

involved in aquaculture, and the mussels and oysters sector—we should let this SI make its way through the House of Commons, ever mindful of the importance of having these things in place come 29 March.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) is poised like a panther. Does he wish to speak?

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) *indicated assent.*

Mr Speaker: Yes, well then I call Mr Alan Brown.

3.11 pm

Alan Brown: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will be brief. The way these SIs have been presented today sums up the chaos and farce of this UK Government. The one that merited the most debate was the one on motor insurance, but it has been pulled by the Government at the last minute, leading us to the one before us. In principle, I do not like this place legislating for Northern Ireland when something should be undertaken by the devolved Assembly. I suggest that the UK Government should be doing much more to get the devolved Assembly up and running, to allow it to take responsibility where it has the right competences.

Despite that, I accept that we are dealing with mainly technical amendments, bringing EU legislation into domestic legislation. For that reason, I certainly would not oppose this SI. Leaving aside the technical amendments, one reason why this SI has come here for debate is that the Commons sifting Committee expressed concerns about the legislative function of appropriate buffer zones to prevent the introduction of exotic diseases to aquatic species in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister say what the implications are for the competent authority in Northern Ireland? Will he confirm what the outcome of his consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs officials was? The consultation is referred to in the explanatory notes, so will he confirm its outcome?

Finally, if we are looking at a potential no-deal scenario, I suggest that the UK Government should be absolutely focused in their efforts on ruling out a no-deal outcome. They should get it off the table and listen to the will of this House, because that will have a far bigger potential impact on the aquaculture industry and it really should be the focus for this Government. Their focus should be on taking a no-deal scenario off the table.

3.14 pm

George Eustice: First, let me address the points made by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). This is an important issue and I take exception to the suggestion that a transport issue could be more important than aquaculture. As I said at the beginning, it is an important industry in Northern Ireland, but it is also an important industry in Scotland. He will be aware that the Scottish Government have brought forward their own regulations to ensure that these EU regulations are operable in UK law and that Scottish authorities can continue to regulate the aquaculture sector in a way that is important.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important issue about the sifting Committee, which had indeed recommended that this SI be debated on the Floor of the House and is an affirmative resolution, rather than a negative resolution, as was the initial proposal. As he said, the Committee picked up on the reference to the ability to establish buffer zones. It raised a concern that this was a new power, but I can confirm that it is not a new power. This power already exists and it was probably a misunderstanding of the way the provision is phrased that led the Committee to consider that this was a new power being taken. In fact, DAERA, on behalf of Northern Ireland, has always been able to exercise this power. That said, given the importance of this issue, we chose not to challenge the sifting Committee recommendation that it should be debated, even though we believe it may have been based on a misunderstanding. I am happy to clarify here on the Floor of the House that the power to establish appropriate buffer zones is not a new power, but one that already exists.

Turning to the points made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), I can confirm that his understanding is exactly right: officials in DAERA will continue to be responsible for the licensing of aquaculture activities. The whole purpose of all these Brexit SIs is that they maintain the status quo and that there will be no change. Indeed, without them, there would be some doubt about whether DAERA would be able to exercise the full suite of powers available to it, because elements of the retained EU law that it will rely upon would become inoperable. This SI corrects any of those said deficiencies.

Finally, let me address the comments made by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin). He asked what we will do when we do not have the EU to give us the science in these areas, to make regulations and to tell us what we ought to be doing. I simply say that as we leave the EU it will be for us to decide these things and we have some of the best fisheries science in the world. Across the UK, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science is our lead fisheries science agency. It is a world-leading agency and other Governments right across the globe seek input and expertise from our British fisheries science agencies.

Northern Ireland has its own CEFAS equivalent—its own Northern Ireland-based fisheries science capability, hosted within the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. The AFBI is a multidisciplinary organisation, with 650 staff involved in all sorts of high-technology research and development. It leads on fisheries science. This morning, I met Mark McCaughan who is a chief scientific officer on fisheries. The AFBI has a fisheries science base in Stormont and it leads on all the key technical work that needs to be done on issues such as fish health and preventing invasive species.

As I pointed out in my opening remarks, the Northern Ireland Administration and the Irish Government have had long-standing co-operation on building joint management plans for sectors such as mussels that predates the EU. These arrangements will continue; they do not need the EU to stand behind them. The island of Ireland is a single epidemiological area, and there has always been close co-operation on these matters.

There is a tendency for all these debates to cover lots of technical detail, as the hon. Gentleman said. However, it is important to remember that all we are doing with

these SIs is substituting the words “United Kingdom Government” for “the European Commission” and making other such amendments. We are not making substantive changes. Members need to bear in mind that probably the most pernicious so-called Henry VIII power of all was the European Communities Act, because section 2(2) of that Act meant that with negative instruments all over the place the European Commission was in effect able to rampage through our domestic law book. The irony is that when any of these regulations were introduced in the House via a negative SI, sometimes to implement delegated Acts from the European Union, there would have been little or no parliamentary scrutiny. It is only now, as we seek to make those regulations that have been in place for some time operable, that Members seem to be concerned.

Jim Shannon: To reiterate and strengthen the opinion the Minister has just rehearsed, it is important to note that the local fish producers organisations that I referred to endorse what the Minister is putting forward today. If they have faith in the Minister and what he is putting forward, we in the House should have the same faith.

George Eustice: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that confirmation. There was indeed consultation, but it was led by DAERA. It is important to recognise that we are doing this on DAERA's behalf and at its request. DAERA has co-operated and consulted widely with stakeholders in Northern Ireland, and I understand that the regulations have their support. In conclusion—

Sandy Martin: The Minister has not fully answered my question about the way in which directive 2006/88 is being replaced by regulation 2016/249. He mentioned something about an automatic carry-over, but I do not really understand how that works. The statutory instrument says:

“After regulation 21(6), insert—

‘(7) For the purposes of paragraph (1), regulations 19(3)(c) and 21(1) and paragraphs (1)(c)(iii) and 4(d) of Schedule 1A, Part A of Annex 3 to Directive 2006/88’”

and so on. It is almost impossible for anybody to work out what is actually happening. Will the Minister describe how we are going to take on regulation 2016 rather than directive 2006, as a result of this statutory instrument?

George Eustice: The point that hon. Gentleman describes in some detail is a point that I explained in my opening speech when I talked about cross-references. If the retained EU law retained a reference to an EU directive, that would no longer be operable, because EU directives would no longer apply in the UK. The only way to make such provisions operable is to have a reference point in UK law. The 2006 regulations will become retained EU law on a UK legal basis. All we are saying is that we will change references to the original directive that gave rise to the regulation and make them references contained within the regulations themselves, so that they will remain operable. It is quite complicated, but essentially it boils down to this: EU directives will cease to have effect in the UK after we leave, but retained EU law will continue to have effect, so if there are provisions in directives that we wish to retain, we must bring them over in the retained EU law. In this case, we do that with the regulation concerned.

[George Eustice]

We have explored some of the key areas of this statutory instrument. I hope I have been able to reassure Members not only that this instrument is essential to ensure that we have an operable rulebook in this area on day one of exit, but that we are not creating any policy changes or new policy through this statutory instrument. We are simply ensuring that the arrangements that pertain today can continue. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Exiting the European Union (Agriculture)

[Relevant document: *Eighth Report of the European Statutory Instruments Committee, HC 1699.*]

3.24 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I beg to move,

That the draft Fertilisers and Ammonium Nitrate Material (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.

This instrument makes amendments to domestic legislation and retained direct EU legislation that would otherwise not be operable after our exit from the European Union. It makes only those changes required to ensure a smooth exit from the European Union and does not change the definition or compositional requirements of fertilisers.

Fertilisers are essential yearly inputs for the UK agricultural, horticultural and amenity sectors. The UK is a net importer of fertiliser products, with only domestic production of potash, polyhalite, ammonium nitrate and lime contributing to the UK's total fertiliser requirement. The legislation on fertilisers concerns the manufacturing and marketing of products. It provides for the definition, composition, labelling and packaging requirements for specific categories of fertilisers that are set out in lists. This legislation does not address the application or use of fertilisers. Such issues tend to be dealt with through separate provisions in measures such as the nitrates directive.

In 1975, the EU created its first set of legislation relating to fertilisers. However, the wide disparity in existing fertiliser rules between member states, and the bulky nature of these materials restricting cross-border trade, meant that it was not suitable to fully harmonise rules on all fertilisers throughout the EU. Instead, fertiliser rules were partially harmonised to begin to remove technical barriers to trade within the EU. The UK has therefore kept its existing domestic framework alongside the EU framework. The EU regulation sets out the requirements for so-called EC fertilisers, or previously EEC fertilisers, which can be sold freely across the European Union. Manufacturers can choose which framework to market their products under. This partial harmonisation remains in place today.

The current domestic framework for any material described as a fertiliser is the Fertiliser Regulations 1991. In the EU, the current framework is the EU regulation EC 2003/2003, which applies only to fertilisers labelled "EC fertiliser". It was implemented in UK law by the EC Fertilisers Regulations 2006. In addition, ammonium nitrate fertilisers are controlled through safety regulations that apply to all ammonium nitrate in Great Britain.

This statutory instrument amends domestic legislation that is out of date and addresses the failures of retained EU law to operate effectively, along with other deficiencies arising from the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Part 2 of the instrument amends out of date references in the domestic legislation. For example, it omits references to "EC fertilisers" and "EEC fertilisers" to ensure clarity for users of the legislation.

In the case of EU legislation, part 3 of this instrument amends retained EU law to ensure that it will operate effectively after exit day. For example, references to

member states and the Commission are amended to refer instead to UK authorities. A requirement on the language to be used on labels is also amended. It replicates the EU framework in UK law, replacing the “EC fertiliser” label with a new equivalent “UK fertiliser” label. The requirements will otherwise remain the same. The instrument also amends the EU framework to include a provision that preserves the ability of relevant bodies in the UK to continue to be able to take certain actions such as prescribing how specified fertilisers should be identified. Part 4 amends domestic legislation as a result of exit, ensuring continuity of supply by recognising the EC fertilisers label for a two-year transitional period after exit day. This will minimise burdens on businesses and authorities and enable suppliers to use up existing stocks, both of fertilisers and packaging. The amendments in the statutory instrument do not change the definition, compositional requirements, or labelling or packaging rules for fertilisers, whether they are marketed under the existing domestic framework—the 1991 regulations—or the EU framework.

Ammonium nitrate fertilisers are additionally covered by domestic safety regulations, since they can be misused as improvised explosives and pose safety risks if mishandled in manufacture, transport or storage. It is worth noting that part 4 of the instrument also amends the regulations surrounding ammonium nitrate fertilisers with high nitrogen content in Great Britain, to treat imports from EU member states the same as imports from other third countries in line with World Trade Organisation obligations.

Under the GB ammonium nitrate regulations, the rules for imports from the EU are different from those for imports from outside the EU. In the light of WTO rules, it would not be possible to retain these differences, so the instrument amends some aspects of the ammonium nitrate regulations, in particular the detonation resistance tests, to apply the more stringent of the two regimes to all imports after the end of the two-year transition period and to uphold current safety standards.

The definition of what constitutes a “batch” of ammonium nitrate differs depending on whether the import comes from the EU or elsewhere.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): This is a very important issue for the fertiliser industry. Could the Minister clarify whether this provision would give the opportunity to Ministers and the Department to charge fees to cover the costs of tests needed for official control measures?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes an important point. That is why the regulations were referred by the sifting Committee for debate. There is already a power in the existing regulations for authorities to make charges for that testing. All we sought to do in drafting was retain that ability. Broadly speaking, the testing we do here in the UK is run by the Health and Safety Executive at our facility in Buxton and it tends to be a commercial choice for the fertiliser companies whether to use that or to use an alternative at their own cost. There is not really a cost recovery mechanism that is deployed beyond that; it is simply based on research done by the companies. We have clarified and made a change to the drafting of the regulation to be clear that we simply seek to retain the existing abilities to charge rather than to create new ones.

Continuity of supply is ensured by a transitional period for imports from the EU, which provides 99% of imported ammonium nitrate to the UK. That allows the continuation of current rules on the time limit for detonation resistance tests and the ability to recognise EU laboratory test certificates. These arrangements give manufacturers time to prepare for compliance with the import rules post exit and reduce any burdens on UK laboratories immediately after exit.

The definition of what constitutes a “batch” of ammonium nitrate differs depending on whether the import comes from the EU or elsewhere. We have taken a view on that regarding when the quantity of material manufactured without alteration of composition or characteristics is longer than 92 days. We will therefore retain the EU definition of “batch”.

The instrument was previously presented to the sifting Committee on 1 November 2018 as one that should be subject to the negative procedure. As I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), the sifting Committee did not agree. It considered that the effect of one regulation was to allow Ministers to charge fees. In addition, it considered that the instrument conferred powers to legislate. It therefore recommended that this instrument be debated in Parliament. The instrument has been amended since it was presented to the sifting Committee to reflect certain recommendations in the Committee’s report. For example, the provisions that the Committee considered to confer powers to legislate have been redrafted to make it clear that they do not contain new legislative functions.

In general, fertiliser policy, as with other agriculture policy, is devolved. The devolved Administrations were closely engaged in developing these regulations, which apply to the same geographical area as the original legislation that they amend. All Administrations have agreed to maintain a single common framework for fertilisers labelled as UK fertilisers, while continuing their own domestic framework. That will make the marketing of fertilisers much clearer for industry, and is a good example of how well the four Administrations work together towards a common goal.

The instrument relates to the maintenance of existing regulatory standards, with no significant impacts or new administrative or economic burdens on business or other stakeholders. Although there was no statutory requirement to consult on the instrument, officials have held discussions with key stakeholders, including the fertiliser manufacturers’ representative body, which is the Agricultural Industries Confederation, and the farmers’ representative body—obviously, the National Farmers Union. Their main concerns have been addressed by allowing for a transitional period for existing rules and compliance with the amended rules.

In conclusion, the changes to the rules on ammonium nitrate have been developed in conjunction with the HSE and the Home Office, to ensure that safety and security elements are maintained. This package of measures is essential to ensure that retained EU law continues to operate effectively in the UK once we leave the EU. I commend the regulations to the House.

3.35 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to take part in this statutory instrument debate and welcome the Minister to his place. A couple of weeks

[Dr David Drew]

ago I thought, when we got Committee Room 14, that we could not get a bigger audience to listen to these statutory instrument debates. How little did I know that we would end up in the main Chamber? I will sound the usual caveat that the Opposition do not think this is the way to scrutinise secondary legislation. Some of it is very important, and it is being rushed through at the speed of light. With the best will in the world, it is very difficult to scrutinise, and we are obliged to rely on the capability of the civil service to ensure that the exercise they are doing, which is largely a cut-and-paste job, is right; otherwise, mistakes will be made, which we will only learn about in due course.

The Minister was right to say that the process became an affirmative procedure at the request of the House of Commons sifting Committee, and the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) was right to point out that one reason for that was that there is a cost implication, because DEFRA has the ability to charge fees for the costs of tests. The other two reasons were that the instrument confers powers to legislate, changing the functions of the UK as a member state to functions of UK public authorities—presumably a reference to the Health and Safety Executive—and that these amendments had an impact on the safety regulations governing the import of ammonium nitrate materials from outside the EU.

The instrument before us is not a contentious piece of legislation, but it is important because ammonium nitrate, for those who know, is explosive. My own port of Sharpness, which imports fertilisers, including ammonium nitrate, was regularly policed in the days of the IRA because of what could happen to that ammonium nitrate. So we cannot but do our best to ensure that the instrument is as foolproof as possible.

I have a number of questions for the Minister. We do not intend to oppose the instrument, but it is important that we get it right. Clearly, fertilisers are crucial to agriculture, but they are also controversial. If the Agriculture Bill does return to the Floor of the House, amendments will be tabled on Report on the relationship to the Government's environmental strategy, which is about using fewer fertilisers, and on looking at agri-ecology as an alternative way of producing our food supply. So this is quite a controversial area to the extent that there are those who would say that we should reduce, if not remove, fertilisers and find other ways to grow our food.

This instrument provides for the definition, composition, labelling and packaging of fertilisers, and given that the UK imports the vast majority of its fertiliser, we are dependent on those who wish to export it to us. That will be a substantial change, if and when we leave the EU, because we may choose to import from different parts of the world, and we must ensure that we are completely clear on the safeguards and that the regulatory regime is fit for purpose.

At the moment—I am not sure whether the Minister said this—businesses can choose whether to use the current UK regulatory regime for fertilisers or one that is available from the EU. It will be interesting to know what the Minister thinks about potential changes, and the implied costs. Again, we make our usual criticism that there is no regulatory impact assessment. It is only fair and reasonable to ask what the cost implications are.

Yesterday, I managed to take part in a debate with the Department of Health and Social Care on pharmaceuticals, and it provided a regulatory impact assessment. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not seem to be very good at producing such assessments. Its argument is always that there are no explicit cost implications. That is easy to say, but it would be much easier for us to make a judgment if we could look at that and investigate it.

The explanatory memorandum—this may be my inability to access IT—refers to a technical note on page five, but I cannot download that note. It would be useful to know what it contains, but I may be able to obtain it in a different format. It is important that that is made available to those who need to know, whether they are in the business or whether they wish to scrutinise what we are up to.

As I have said, I have a series of questions for the Minister, as always, to keep him on his toes and make sure that we know what we are doing. The Nature Friendly Farming Network raises the case of those who have stored fertilisers that have been labelled under the EU system. What is the status of those fertilisers after the two years are up? Should they be destroyed? Can people continue to use them? Do the fertilisers have to be re-regulated? What is likely to be the situation? As we know, many farm products are stored for years, if not decades, so it is important to know the timeframe for existing products. Will the Minister say something about that, as people want certainty about it, and they need to know exactly what the implications are.

The Nature Friendly Farming Network says that the rules for imports from the EU are different from those for imports outside the EU. Presumably, we need a standard trade agreement, otherwise we will have a differentiated trade in fertilisers. What will the Minister do to ensure that that is the case, so that there is consistency?

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board does not have any particular bones of contention, but it is important that we listen to what it says, especially on the environmental effects of non-organic fertilisers. It would be a retrograde step to move away from the progressive approaches to which we have signed up as part of our membership of the EU. What are the Government doing to make sure that there is not a race to the bottom if we look for cheaper, non-organic substitutes, which would lead to all sorts of problems if they got into the water supply. At the very least, they would be likely to damage soil quality, which we discussed at great length when we considered the Agriculture Bill and which features heavily in the Government's draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill.

The principal concern of the Agricultural Industries Confederation is about certainty, which is not there because of the current Brexit situation. It would be interesting to know what discussions the Minister has had with the AIC. If we crash out and have to adopt WTO tariffs, that will have a major impact on the industry because of its reliance on imports. What analysis have the Government made of the impact on the industry and on farmers in general?

Likewise, the National Farmers Union is clear that it needs continuity and an uninterrupted supply of fertilisers. It is worried about the cost implications if we cannot

continue to source our fertilisers. I believe that most come from Spain and some come from elsewhere in the EU. That is important.

The Landworkers Alliance states that the agrochemicals, antibiotics and nitrate fertilisers used in intensive farming have a negative effect. What is being done to ensure, as I said earlier, that there is no race to the bottom and that we pay more than just lip service in our commitment to the environment? That is also important.

Although the Soil Association has no specific reason to doubt the Government's intention for the faithful transposition of measures into UK law, it is concerned about the environmental objectives of the regulations, which are not necessarily spelled out as clearly as they could be. When the Minister sums up, it is important that he says something positive about that.

In conclusion, farmers need fertilisers. They need certainty about access and supply. On agroecology, we need to understand that, as the world moves forward, we will need fewer of them, but we will also need to ensure that they are good quality and, I hope, organic and that people are able to eat good, wholesome food. The one drawback from lack of access to fertilisers is that we could end up with an overabundance of phosphates and nitrates, which will have an impact on the food that we eat and the human food chain. It is important, therefore, that the Government commit to no diminution of standards. We have regularly heard them say that, but we have yet to see it in legislation, and there is no better place to put it than the Agriculture Bill. I hope that the Minister is listening and that the Government will ensure that they do not just talk about the issue but carry it through in the Bill so that our soils are replete and our farming can guarantee wholesome food, which is what we all want.

Mr Speaker: The natural modesty of the hon. Gentleman has prevented him from announcing to the House and for the edification of those observing our proceedings that in speaking from his party's Front Bench he does so not as David Drew but as Dr David Drew, blessed with a doctorate in rural economy. That is something that should be known to the world. I call Minister George Eustice.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)
rose—

Mr Speaker: I do beg the hon. Lady's pardon. There was a change of personnel on the Scottish National party Front Bench. Although we very much look forward to what the Minister has to say, it will not be before we have heard from Deidre Brock.

3.48 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Here we are once again creating legislation to replicate legislation that the dastardly EU has imposed upon us. EU legislation is so oppressive that we have to pass the same legislation to free ourselves of the tyranny of EU red tape—taking back control to change nothing.

We should take a moment, however, to consider the imports of products used by the agricultural industries and how logjam at entry points may well affect that process, no matter how many lorries park on old airfields.

The UK imports about 70% of fertilisers, very little potash but half the ammonium nitrate and all of the phosphorus used. They cannot be stockpiled because there is no significant additional capacity, and ammonium nitrate in particular needs storage that minimises the risk of explosion. The lorries need to keep running, the ports need to keep functioning and the imports need to be frictionless, or there will be little in the way of harvest bounties, and that is before we get on to imported seed, plant protection products and animal feed. If the ports get choked with border checks and UK red tape, it will not matter what these regulations say, because food production on these islands will suffer.

I welcome the two-year transitional period, but I can see no reason why the acceptance that the EU regulations work cannot be extended indefinitely. Let the fertilisers be sold as they are now, and indeed the plant protection products, seed and the animal feed. We trust the EU, don't we? I also welcome the requirement for Ministers to get the approval of the devolved Administrations before making regulations about fertilisers. That seems a very sensible way forward and a path that other Departments could consider following. The various Administrations offer wisdom that should be welcomed, and we trust the Scottish Government, don't we?

I do have concerns about the regime to control the quality of the products available, particularly when I consider that Ministers will face the temptation of reducing the tariffs on Russian products, particularly ammonium nitrate. The anti-dumping duties that the EU imposes on Russian ammonium nitrate will disappear unless they are replicated by the regulations, and the implications that will have for the quality of imports is certainly worth considering carefully. It will be an issue that gets snarled up in any future trade negotiations both with the EU and with Russia.

I would like to believe the Government will ensure quality and resist the temptation to cut tariffs and duties, but I would have liked to believe there was actually a plan for the Brexit negotiations, or at least some impact assessments that looked at what is actually happening. I have certainly been sorely let down on that. I would be grateful for the Minister's view when he responds. Further to the fact that the Minister mentioned that more stringent regulations will now be applied to ammonium nitrate from the EU, in line with those currently applied to countries outwith the EU, what added costs might result from those extra regulations?

This is one of hundreds of statutory instruments that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—despite the best efforts, I am sure, of its civil servants—is lagging behind on. The National Audit Office report on DEFRA's readiness for Brexit was scathing in its assessment, to the point that I think we have to regard it as an impossible task for DEFRA to get ready.

I wish there was a way of ensuring that the products farmers need to produce food will get to them, but the sudden shutting off of the supplies that they need looks set to become a reality, whatever secondary legislation is passed here. A better decision by far would be to extend article 50 and see whether things could be reconsidered. I am tempted by the thought—the hopeful possibility—that we could pass this legislation and guarantee supply, but I know that is not realistic. I have many concerns about the import regime to follow and the corralling of powers in Ministers' hands.

[Deidre Brock]

It is disappointing to say the least that this is the best on offer. It is disappointing that a Government who claimed so much was possible is content with this. I really hope that that failure does not come back to haunt us all.

3.53 pm

George Eustice: I now have even more points to try to address, and I will do so as comprehensively as I can.

First, I turn to the points made by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew). He raised a general point about the use of fertilisers, which is that we should be trying to encourage more sustainability, perhaps through the use of organic fertilisers. He will be aware from the discussions we have had in the Agriculture Public Bill Committee that we are looking, in clause 1, to be able to incentivise more environmentally sustainable farming, which could include, for instance, supporting the use of organic farmyard manures more than manufactured fertilisers. He should also recognise that increases in fuel costs have anyway had a major knock-on impact on the cost of fertilisers in recent decades, such that in the past 30 years or so fertiliser use in the UK has fallen by about 40% already. He pointed out that at the moment we import most of our ammonium nitrate, predominantly from the European Union; there is one manufacturer of ammonium nitrate here in the UK.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the impact on security—in particular, whether there is a risk that the material will get into the hands of terrorists. As I pointed out, we have gone for the more stringent detonating test regime, meaning that any consignment imported to the UK, whether from the European Union or a third country, would have to have had that detonation test within the previous 60 days. We are applying the more stringent set of rules that we have for third countries to all countries.

On the general issue of security, I also point out that in 2006 a fertiliser industry assurance scheme was set up between the Government and the Agricultural Industries Confederation, and it has since successfully created and monitored voluntary standards in the industry supply chain to ensure that ammonium nitrate fertiliser can be traced and does not end up in the wrong hands.

Although we have made changes to the GB regime for detonation testing and the ammonium nitrate regime, as I said in my opening comments Northern Ireland has its own specific rules in this area. The ammonium nitrate safety regulations apply to Great Britain. Owing to the past misuse of ammonium nitrate in making improvised explosive devices, Northern Ireland has its own controls under the Control of Explosives Precursors etc. Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, under existing rules, the Explosives (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. Those prevent any import, storage or use of ammonium nitrate fertilisers without a tier 1 explosives precursor licence from the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The situation in Northern Ireland is more thorough still, given the tragic history of which we are all aware.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that we have not conducted an impact assessment. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) pointed

out, that is because we are not seeking to make any substantive change to policy—indeed, the stated aim of all these EU exit SIs is, as far as we are able, to maintain the status quo from day one after we leave the European Union, to ensure that we have an operable law book. He also made a specific point about the technical note on page 5, which he claimed he could not download. I am reliably informed that, since he mentioned that, my officials have been online to double-check and successfully downloaded it. Perhaps the issue had more to do with the hon. Gentleman's IT than with our system; nevertheless, I thank him for raising that so that we could at least double-check.

The hon. Gentleman also raised an important point about storage: what happens if material is stored beyond the two-year transition? We arrived at the two-year transition period for sale having consulted the industry. The industry generally thought it an appropriate period both to be able to market its existing stocks and to give it plenty of time to use up any residual fertiliser packaging and order new packaging.

Julian Sturdy: I draw Members' attention to my declaration of interest. Would what the Minister has said apply to on-farm stock as well?

George Eustice: No. I was about to come to precisely that point, which was also made by the shadow Minister. If during the two-year transition period a farmer has bought products labelled under the previous EU regulations, he can then store them on farm. As I pointed out at the beginning, these are marketing regulations—pertaining to the sale of product, not storage or use after sale.

Finally, the hon. Members for Stroud and for Edinburgh North and Leith asked about the specific issue of tariffs on fertilisers. This is an issue that the Government are currently considering. As hon. Members may be aware, while farming representative groups such as the NFU would like to retain tariffs on some agricultural commodities, they are equally keen to have tariff rate suspensions on some fertiliser products. We are giving that consideration. It is important to note, however, that if we were to set a unilateral autonomous tariff rate quota or suspend tariffs on a unilateral basis, we would have to offer the same terms to all countries in the world, probably including Russia, notwithstanding the approach the European Union is currently taking.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that SNP Members were deliberately scare-mongering when they said that farmers would not be able to import any more after 29 March? Will he confirm that foreign suppliers are not cancelling contracts for after Brexit?

George Eustice: I can confirm that we do not envisage any problems at all with the importing of fertiliser, even in a no-deal scenario. That is predominantly because these products—

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

George Eustice: Let me conclude my point first and then the hon. Gentleman can decide whether I have answered the point adequately.

Fertilisers tend to come in bulk, predominantly through Harwich on container vessels where we envisage no issues with capacity. They tend not to come in on roll-on, roll-off ferries on the backs of lorries through Calais. It is right that there are some concerns about the potential impacts on the all-important Dover-Calais crossing, but they do not specifically affect fertilisers. We see no particular problems in ensuring that we can import the fertilisers we need for this year.

The hon. Lady asked why we cannot simply have an indefinite extension of the recognition of the EC fertiliser logo. The reason is that we have to treat all countries equally under WTO rules. Once we have left the European Union and become an independent country again, we will not be able to discriminate and give unfair privileges to the European Union in the way that she advocates.

The hon. Lady asked a specific question about what had changed in relation to detonation testing. The principal change on strengthening detonation testing is that it will apply to each consignment that comes into the European Union. Put simply, all that importers will need to demonstrate is that each consignment has been subject to a detonation test of a suitable standard within the previous 60 days. At the moment under EU derogations it is possible for that to run longer because they simply apply it to individual batches rather than consignments, so there will be a small change. In the longer term, once the transition has ended, those seeking to export their goods to the United Kingdom would need to have that detonation test done, probably by the Health and Safety Executive in Buxton. We have world-beating expertise in this area and that testing would be done effectively.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In terms of scaremongering, was the Minister's boss, the Environment Secretary, scaremongering yesterday when he said that in a no-deal situation he could not guarantee exports and imports would continue at our borders and that livestock exports from the UK would be subject to high tariffs? Was that scaremongering as well?

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was referring to the export of sheep. We all acknowledge—I acknowledge it, too—that border inspection posts would frustrate that trade and that tariffs imposed on sheepmeat exports would affect that trade. He was explicitly not talking about fertiliser imports. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) was making a very specific point about whether there would be any threats to the import of fertilisers. As most of that trade comes through Harwich, we do not anticipate any problems at all on those grounds.

In conclusion, we have highlighted a number of important areas in this statutory instrument. We have had a thorough debate, but, as I have been at pains to point out, it does not seek to introduce any new policy. In keeping with the spirit and requirements of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, it is simply about ensuring that retained EU law is operable on the day after exit. I therefore commend this statutory instrument to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Antisemitism in Modern Society

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, I point out for the benefit of the Front-Bench representatives, of whom there are three for the purposes of this debate, that no fewer than 18 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch the eye of the Chair. I know, therefore, that while addressing the issues fully, they will wish to tailor their contributions to take account of the likely level of Back-Bench demand.

4.5 pm

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

That this House has considered antisemitism in modern society.

Today's debate is timely, given the growing challenge of antisemitism, and fittingly, it comes less than a month since we marked Holocaust Memorial Day and a short few weeks after I had the privilege of joining mourners from around the world to bury six unknown victims of the holocaust—the Shoah—including a child. It was the first time that this has happened on British soil and probably the only time that it will. These were incredibly moving moments not just for the Jewish community, but for our entire country. For me personally, it was a poignant reminder of my father-in-law, who escaped Nazi Germany and came to Britain with the help of the MI6 agent Frank Foley, whose actions also saved the lives of thousands of other Jews. Millions of others were not so lucky. I pay tribute to Members across the House for their powerful testimony and reflections in remembrance of what was one of the darkest chapters in human history. That chapter should have been, as the last of those who lived through it leave us, the final word on the evil of antisemitism and hatred and bigotry in all their forms, but sadly, as the need for today's debate demonstrates, the oldest hatred is still with us.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I wish to say how grateful so many of my constituents who attended that service—as did Lord Pickles and I—were when they saw Government representatives at that event. I did not know what the event would entail. I did not know how many people would attend and I did not even know if I was even invited to the funeral, but it was truly a special event that I certainly will never forget. Many people are very grateful to my right hon. Friend for his attendance on the day.

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I certainly endorse his reflections of a very poignant, very powerful and very special moment for us all, and the message that it was able to send about this country's position and the sense of safety and security that we all want to underline.

For the third year running, the number of antisemitic incidents in the UK is sadly at an all-time high, according to the figures released this month by the Community Security Trust. This equates to 1,652 incidents last year, with over 100 incidents reported in each month for the first time in a single calendar year. The surge of antisemitism online, up 54% on 2017, is a particular area of concern, with the CST finding that almost a quarter of all

[*James Brokenshire*]

reported incidents had an online association—a development that echoes the experiences of other organisations such as Tell MAMA that work to combat Islamophobia.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for celebrating the work of CST, which has done extraordinary work to keep many of us safe. The Government currently provide a significant proportion of funding for security guards, on a commercial basis, to support CST's work and to keep schools safe. Has he considered making that a multi-year grant, rather than a one-year grant, to ensure that political affiliation does not matter and that the Jewish community has assurances that they will be kept safe?

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for highlighting the incredible work of the CST not simply at these memorials and annual events but week in, week out, in schools, synagogues and other places, and the safety and security it conveys in so doing. She will understand that funding decisions are quite germane, particularly given the upcoming spending review, but I understand her call for a multi-year settlement, and I will take that away and reflect on it further. This is about providing assurance and confidence, and I know the difference the CST makes in that regard.

Some of the increase in the number of antisemitic incidents will be down to increased reporting, which we encourage through our hate crime action plan. Similarly, however, a survey carried out by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in December found that 89% of respondents felt that antisemitism had increased in their countries over the past five years. When asked how big a problem antisemitism was, three quarters of respondents from the UK answered that it was either a “very big” or a “fairly big” problem. I say that with a very heavy heart. It troubles me deeply that some Jewish communities are concerned about their future. It should trouble us all.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The House will know that through my mother I am of Jewish descent, and in 1938 my uncle found a safe haven in this country. Does the Secretary of State agree it is regrettable that this country might lose its good reputation as a safe haven if we continue with this tendency?

James Brokenshire: I believe that this country is a safe haven. It needs to be that safe haven. It is important that across the House we underline the significance and importance that we as a country attach to that intrinsic value.

On that point, I want to give the following assurance to our Jewish communities: you are an intrinsic part of what makes Britain great, and the Government will always stand by you to challenge bigotry and intolerance. We will not walk by on the other side when that is present. That means learning the lessons of the past and facing up to modern manifestations of antisemitism, which continues to evolve. To quote the former Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks:

“Antisemitism is not a belief but a virus. The human body has an immensely sophisticated immune system which develops defences against viruses. It is penetrated, however, because viruses mutate. Antisemitism mutates.”

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State think it possible that the term “antisemitism” itself is not sufficiently understood in this country and that there are plenty of people who, once they are clear that we are talking about race hatred directed against people who are Jewish, will want to have absolutely nothing to do with it and will want to make no effort to excuse, justify or defend it?

James Brokenshire: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. At its heart, this is racism. That is why it is so intolerable and unacceptable. As the powerful analogy I just used suggests, repelling this insidious threat takes a strong immune system, in the form of leadership at all levels, in all parties and in all areas of public life, and nowhere is this more important than here at the heart of our democracy. It is why we have chosen next door to Parliament as the site for our new national holocaust memorial and learning centre, which commands cross-party support. I believe there can be no more fitting place, no more powerful symbol of our commitment to remembering the men, women and children murdered in the holocaust and all other victims of Nazi persecution, including Roma, gay and disabled people, than placing the memorial in Victoria Tower gardens, literally in the shadow of our Parliament.

In that context, I welcome the cross-party support, which was evidenced today by a joint letter signed by more than 170 Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords endorsing the memorial and the positive and enduring impact it will have. It will draw on the history of the holocaust and subsequent genocides with an education and learning centre at its core as a national resource. It will stand as a national memorial at the heart of our democracy, but equally it will stand as a warning of where hatred can lead; the role that government can play, both good and bad; and what happens if people are bystanders as it develops—what happens if they walk by on the other side. It is not just for future generations, but for us all in Parliament.

It pains me hugely to hear the powerful testimony of colleagues in the House of the abuse they have suffered either for being Jewish or for standing up to antisemitism. Some have even asserted that part of our politics is poisoned by antisemitism in an institutional way. That does not reflect the country we are or the politics for which we stand. Our debate today gives us the chance to say that we reject and oppose antisemitism and to stand together against anyone seeking to advance a narrative of bigotry, hatred and division.

For our part, the Government are taking comprehensive action to fight antisemitism and all forms of hatred. We are proud to have been the first Government to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism in 2016. Although not legally binding, it is an important tool for criminal justice agencies and other public bodies to understand what antisemitism looks like in the 21st century. It covers examples of the kind of behaviours that, depending on the circumstances, could constitute antisemitism. Those examples include making mendacious, dehumanising, demonising or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective through the myth of a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions, or accusing Jewish citizens

of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.

Those narratives have increasingly poisoned public discourse and we should speak out against them wherever they arise, but aside from pinning down what we mean by antisemitism, the Government's first priority must be to keep people safe, as underlined by the horrendous events last October in Pittsburgh. That people should be attacked in that way while gathering in prayer is profoundly shocking. To strengthen our determination to ensure that the Jewish community here are safe and feel safe, we continue to support the Community Safety Trust to provide security for Jewish places of worship and institutions. In recognition of the vulnerability felt by all faith communities, the places of worship security grant scheme allows places of worship facing threats to apply for funding to improve their security. To that end, the Government have provided more than £2.4 million to increase security provision for churches, gurdwaras, mosques and temples across the country. We committed further resource for that in the hate crime action plan refresh.

I am hugely conscious of the problems online, which we need to confront further and which I am sure will be a focus of a number of contributions to the debate. We will continue to work to strengthen our approach and confront all types of hate crime to ensure that it is appropriately dealt with. We will soon publish a White Paper on online harms that will consider legislative and non-legislative approaches to combat online hate crime and hate incidents alongside other forms of harmful behaviour.

Our engagement with communities on the ground and education are vital, particularly when it comes to tackling stereotypes and prejudices at an early stage before they harden and become more harmful. That is why we are supporting programmes that work with young people to challenge over-simplified narratives and encourage open conversation.

I want to pay tribute to the outstanding work of our partners. I have already mentioned the CST, whose work to facilitate reporting, to support victims of antisemitism and to provide security for Jewish institutions is vital and greatly appreciated. I want to thank the all-party group against antisemitism, so passionately chaired by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and supported by the Antisemitism Policy Trust. The work of the group ensures there is continued momentum to tackle antisemitism as part of the working group and helps to hold the Government to account. I also want to pay tribute to the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council, whose input to the cross-Government working group is invaluable in ensuring the community is properly represented, and to our Haredi stakeholders, including representatives of Shomrim and others, who make sure the specific needs of orthodox communities are not forgotten.

Together, we can and will overcome the challenges we face. Antisemitism has no place in our society—however it evolves, it is still hatred and bigotry—and we should not be afraid to call it out and to champion our Jewish community, which continues to make a towering contribution to our society without reservation. Indeed, Britain would not be what it is without our Jewish friends, neighbours and cousins. That is why in standing

up for them we are standing up for all communities who are facing hatred and for the values of tolerance, freedom and fairness that define us and define our country.

This is a mission bigger than politics—bigger than any party—and it is in that spirit that I urge all hon. Members to be standard-bearers for these values: values that are our best hope of ensuring that when we say, “Never again,” we mean it.

4.22 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): May I just say that I agree with every single word the Secretary of State said? I thought he spoke incredibly powerfully, with great seriousness and with great measurement.

It has always been a mystery to me how anyone can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow human beings, yet here we are again in 2019 debating history's oldest hatred. I am glad to have the opportunity to express my opposition to this unique evil and I thank you, Mr Speaker, for presiding over the debate today on antisemitism in modern society.

Antisemitism has led to some of the worst crimes in human history: pogroms, massacres, oppression, dispossession and of course the holocaust—the systematic and bureaucratic attempt to erase European Jewry from existence. Thirty years ago, in the summer of 1989, I travelled through the Berlin wall into what was then East Germany and on into Poland, where I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is one day in my life I will never forget as the full scale—the industrial scale—of the atrocities and mass murders that were committed there etched themselves into my consciousness. Never before and never since has the world seen such a cold, calculated and industrialised plan for the murder of an entire people.

That Jew hatred—for that is what antisemitism is—still exists should shock us; that it is on the rise should appal us. Antisemitism is a cancer that finds new ways, as the Secretary of State said, to mutate and to infect our political discourse, and it is not enough to be shocked and appalled; we have to act to stop this disease poisoning our society.

Before I go any further, I pay tribute to the work of the Community Security Trust and Shomrim in the Haredi community. Those organisations are tireless in their defence of the Jewish community and its synagogues, businesses, youth clubs and schools.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): May I also pay tribute to the CST and thank it for the work that it did with us in working out our community cohesion policy? I found it to be an organisation that was very engaged with the wider concerns about racism in our society, and it helped me enormously.

Barry Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am sure that we all have similar stories to tell about the CST's work in our constituencies. In my own constituency of Brent North, we have a Jewish community of just under 2,000 people, and we are the home of the Jewish Free School, which is one of the oldest Jewish institutions in the UK and the largest and most academically successful Jewish school in all Europe. I worked with Arnold Wagner and David Lerner to help the school to move

[*Barry Gardiner*]

from its old home in Camden to the purpose-built facilities in my community. I particularly want to thank the CST for all that it does to keep the pupils and staff there, and in all the other primary schools, safe. I just wish, as we all do, that its work was not necessary.

The CST does more than work on safety. Its work to record and analyse antisemitic hate crime is integral to our understanding of the scale of the problem that faces us. Last year, it recorded 23 antisemitic incidents in my borough of Brent alone, and 1,652 across the country. That makes for sober reading. Antisemitism is at a record high, with a 16% rise in incidents nationwide year on year and 100 incidents every month. This is the lived reality of our Jewish fellow citizens living under the strain of antisemitism. It is appalling—the arson attacks on synagogues, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, the neo-Nazi graffiti on posters for Holocaust Memorial Day, the vandalising of centres of Jewish life, the physical attacks on Jewish children at their schools or on public transport, swastikas daubed on Jewish homes and antisemitic hate mail sent to Jewish workplaces and schools. These hideous crimes are a warning to us all. We must do better, and we must be better.

That brings me to the issues facing my own party, the Labour party. It was the Labour party that introduced the Race Relations Acts and the Equality Act 2010, and it has put fighting inequality, racism and prejudice at the core of who we are and what we believe in. How can it be that we are struggling so badly to eradicate antisemitism from our own membership? I joined the Labour party because I believed it was quite simply the best vehicle for progressive social change in this country. I still do, but no party has a monopoly on virtue, and in the Labour party we are learning a bitter lesson. For all the strength and passion that we have derived from the mass influx of new members that has seen our party grow to more than 500,000 strong, we have not had adequate procedures in place to react swiftly and decisively to that small minority of members who have expressed sometimes ignorant but often vicious, dangerous and vile antisemitic views.

On behalf of my party, I want to publicly apologise to the Jewish community that we have let them down. We know it and we are trying to do better. We are trying to become the party that we have always aspired to be. We will not stop working until we once again become a safe and welcoming political home for people from the Jewish community, as from every other. The Secretary of State said that we stand here today to say of antisemitism that we reject it. We do. We must.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an important point, but the reality is that words, however sincerely meant, must be matched with action. Does he agree that it is completely unacceptable to have, for example, elected Labour representatives saying things like, “The Jewish community have got it all in their own heads.”? He gave us examples of the reality of antisemitism affecting communities, and I have seen it with my own eyes in my communities in Cardiff. It is not “in their own heads.” Neo-Nazi and far-right activity are real and hateful, and we must stand against them unequivocally.

Barry Gardiner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do not understand how the people who say the things that he quotes can, with any integrity, think that they belong to our party.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What message does my hon. Friend think is sent to the Jewish community when the Labour party readmits Derek Hatton, who tweeted something that seemed to imply that every Jew, wherever they live in the world, is responsible for the actions of the Israeli Government? Does he share my view that Derek Hatton has no part to play in our Labour party?

Barry Gardiner: This morning, I saw the reports that I am sure my hon. Friend saw about not just the readmission of Derek Hatton, but the tweets that he mentions, and I wrote to the general secretary of our party and lodged a formal complaint. I understand that action has since been taken in respect of the complaint, and I will be looking out to see precisely what appropriate action is taken in due course. I totally agree that it was a travesty. I think many of us knew for some while that Derek Hatton had applied to rejoin the party, but it was appalling for the news of his readmission to come to public attention on the very day when some members of our party were forced out.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Barry Gardiner: I will in a minute, but I want to make a little progress.

We recognise that social media can be a tremendous tool, enabling a more democratic and open media, but too often it has become the fertile breeding ground for antisemitic trolling and bullying. We have seen that in the horrifying antisemitic and misogynistic abuse targeted at several of our MPs, and I want to speak specifically about the disgraceful treatment of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). I deeply regret that she has left our party, but I regret most of all the antisemitic abuse that made her feel that it was necessary to do so. I have not always shared her political judgments, but she is a strong and principled woman and a kind and loving person, who has been bullied by antisemites to a point at which most of us would not have had the strength to bear it. I wish that she had stayed to help us defeat the evil in our party, but whichever party we stand for in this Parliament, she should have our unqualified solidarity as she stands against her aggressors.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and I am listening carefully to what he says. Why does he think that the Labour party allowed the antisemitic bullying of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) to continue? He has expressed concern about it, but it is the Labour party that allowed it to continue. The problem is with Labour party members, not the people of Liverpool.

Barry Gardiner: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Indeed, it is those who have bullied my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree who will have to answer for it. I hope the processes within our party will be able to deal with that.

Stella Creasy: I thank my hon. Friend for recognising that we have let down the Jewish community. We have lost a very good colleague because we failed to stop what was essentially constructive dismissal. Does he agree that this is not about asking our Jewish members to stay and sort it out? In a movement built on solidarity, it is for us all to act. In this instance, the concern that many of us have is that there are so many cases outstanding, yet time was found to deal with Mr Hatton's application for readmission. We want to show that we are serious about this, and we must change our priorities and deal with these cases now.

Barry Gardiner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we are responsible for dealing with this. She will know there are procedures and committees within the national executive committee that deal with complaints and others that deal with other processes.

Let me be clear that anyone who denies the reality of antisemitism on the left, anyone who thinks that antisemitism is a legitimate part of criticising the political actions of the Israeli Government and anyone who says that complaints about antisemitism are smears on our party is wrong. They do not have the endorsement of the Labour party; they do not have the endorsement of its leader; and they need to take a long, hard look at themselves. They have adopted what Bebel labelled the "socialism of fools."

Our party must call out this poisonous ideology, which encourages people to place the blame for society's ills at the feet of the vulnerable and persecuted, whether they be immigrants, the unemployed, refugees or those from a different ethnic or religious background. The Labour party has long fought the dissemination of such false narratives, which we know serve only to divide us and distract us from our common cause of a fairer society.

Antisemitism, with its conspiracy theories, seeks to divide ordinary working people. The lies that it propagates about wealth, power and designs on world domination are as dangerous as they are stupid. Those on the far left who are foolish enough to believe that their antisemitism is a form of anti-elitism or anti-imperialism have no place in the Labour party or any modern political party.

Last year, a major study analysing news stories across the English-speaking world found that, according to every metric, fake news is more popular and more widely consumed than factual, accurate stories. We truly live in an era of fake news and imagined enemies, where explicit abuse hides behind anonymous avatars and where political debate is shaped by memes and viral videos. The rise of fake news is dangerous for us all, but this danger is most acute for the Jewish community and it is felt intensely. There are approximately 170,000 antisemitic online searches each year in the UK alone, but the scale of the challenge must not daunt us or deter us from what needs to be done.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Over the last 16 years, I have written repeatedly to every single party here today to raise specific issues, with great success across every single party. In every single instance, I have written to the relevant party leader. Does my hon. Friend accept that people are interested in the structures, in the machinations of those structures and in leadership? What leadership will the Labour shadow Cabinet specifically give to Jewish members of the Labour party and to the Jewish community?

Barry Gardiner: Quite simply, my hon. Friend is right, and I pay tribute to the work he has done for many, many years; it is for our shadow Cabinet, as it is indeed incumbent on us all in this party, to ensure that we have the processes in place to eradicate this poison from our party. If we look at what took place in our party recently after the change in leadership, we see that the number of places on the committee concerned, the national constitutional committee, had to double to deal with the cases that were there; new processes were introduced so that we could speed up dealing with the number of cases that were there. That is the process that is going to take place, but he is right to say that it is not just about process—it is not. It is about leadership and politics, and making sure that we get the message out there into the wider society that wherever this happens it is unacceptable and will be dealt with. Yes, it will be dealt with by the proper process, but the outcomes at the end of that process must be the right ones.

Ruth Smeeth *rose—*

Barry Gardiner: I will give way, but it will be for the last time.

Ruth Smeeth: Does my hon. Friend, to whom I am grateful for making this speech, agree that any other leader of the Labour party would have instructed people to be expelled?

Barry Gardiner: I cannot agree with my hon. Friend on that point because it is for the national executive to take that decision—

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab) Would my hon. Friend, who invoked the national executive committee of the party, of which I am a member, like to give way?

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman wants to take the intervention, we will then hear the content of it. Does he wish to do so?

Barry Gardiner: I will, of course, take, as I said before, one final intervention.

Mr Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As a member of the Labour party's NEC, may I just say three things? First, we have been far too slow to deal with some appalling cases of antisemitism. Secondly, I do not know whether it has been formally announced yet, but Lord Falconer has offered his services to look at how we can deal more effectively with such cases that are brought to the attention of the party. Thirdly, on a purely personal view, I agree with the comment made a few moments ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) that, frankly, there is no place for any of these people in the Labour party. Sending them on courses is not good enough; they need to be kicked out.

Barry Gardiner: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and I am glad he has been able to talk about the progress that the NEC is making. I believe that more progress will be coming in terms of education, but it has not been formalised at this stage.

It is important to recognise that the antisemitic views harboured by those people, a small minority within Labour, do not exist in a vacuum. No political party

[Barry Gardiner]

should fool itself that it is immune from this poison, and it would be wrong and dangerous to underestimate the scale of the problem across society at large. A few weeks ago, on Holocaust Memorial Day, a survey revealed that 5% of British adults do not believe the holocaust took place and one in 12 believe that its scale has been exaggerated. Clearly, something has gone deeply wrong with our education and our collective memory. The holocaust was the worst crime of the 20th century, in which 6 million Jewish people were murdered. Every single person in Britain should know that. I thank the Holocaust Educational Trust and Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for the work they do to ensure that this atrocity is never forgotten and never repeated.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con) *rose—*

Barry Gardiner: I am not taking any more interventions, as I said.

It is only through education that we will protect future generations from falling into these insidious falsehoods—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Mr Ivan Lewis, calm yourself, young man. I am sure what you are saying is absolutely fascinating—riveting stuff—but we would prefer to hear you on your feet in due course, rather than from your seat. Do the Front Bencher the courtesy of hearing him.

Barry Gardiner: It is only through education that we will protect future generations from falling into insidious falsehoods and conspiracy theories. I had the privilege of hearing Gena Turgel, the holocaust survivor who was known as the bride of Belsen, speak to a group of children at JFS school a few years ago. She was the most wonderful, humane and powerful voice, educating successive generations about the horrors of antisemitism. I simply record with sadness her passing since our previous debate on antisemitism in this Chamber last year.

Those horrors are not yet a distant memory. Our colleague Lord Alf Dubs was one of the children who came to this country as part of the Kindertransport, which brought 10,000 Jewish children to safety in Britain. Alf's work, both at the Refugee Council and in setting up safe passage for refugee children today, is just one example of the legacy that survivors have bequeathed to this country.

It is now 80 years on from Kristallnacht and we must amplify the voices of people like Alf, Gena Turgel and other holocaust survivors as they share their stories and educate the next generation. The holocaust happened. It counts as one of the greatest crimes in human history. This January, in Bushey, I was with the Secretary of State when 1,200 mourners attended the burial of those six unknown Jews—five adults, one child—murdered at Auschwitz. Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis spoke powerfully at the funeral, saying:

“We need a strong reminder such as this to let us know what can result, even within a democratic society, what can result if anti-Semitism, if racism and xenophobia, go unchecked.”

Looking around the world, it is clear that to tackle this evil we must adopt an internationalist approach. A survey published by the European Union in December found that almost nine out of 10 European Jewish

people feel that antisemitism has worsened in their respective countries over the past five years. Right-wing nationalist politics continues its forward march, with devastating consequences for minority communities. In France, the torching of synagogues and assaults on Jewish people on the Metro have resulted in thousands of Jewish people leaving for Israel.

The horrendous mass shooting of Jewish congregants at the Pittsburgh Tree of Life was the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in American history, and watching far-right protesters in Charlottesville chant “The Jews will not replace us” was quite simply chilling.

Last year, the Polish Government introduced legislation that reads:

“Whoever claims...that the Polish Nation...is responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich...shall be liable to a fine or imprisonment for up to 3 years.”

That is an attempt to whitewash the holocaust.

Viktor Orbán's Government in Hungary has deployed antisemitic rhetoric, and their campaign against George Soros has invoked obvious antisemitic tropes. I shall not talk about the support that the Hungarian Government received in the European Parliament, because the Secretary of State set the tone for the debate, which is that antisemitism is something that we need to tackle from every corner of this Parliament.

I thank all colleagues from all parties who are here to express their solidarity with the Jewish community. To all who may be listening and paying attention, I would like to say something very clearly: when Jewish people express their concerns about antisemitism, regardless of their background, their beliefs or where they sit on the political spectrum, they must be listened to. Their anxieties are genuine—they are real—and they should be a cause of concern for every person, for every socialist and for every anti-racist in this country. In this place, we create laws to solve the fundamental question of how, with all our differences, we can live together.

I wish to conclude by reading the words of one of Israel's greatest poets, Yehuda Amichai. He said:

“Once I sat on the steps by a gate at David's Tower, I placed my two heavy baskets at my side. A group of tourists was standing around their guide and I became their target marker. ‘You see that man with the baskets? Just right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period. Just right of his head.’ ‘But he's moving, he's moving!’ I said to myself: redemption will come only if their guide tells them, ‘You see that arch from the Roman period? It's not important: but next to it, left and down a bit, there sits a man who's bought fruit and vegetables for his family.’”

Once we can stop seeing the race, the religion, the colour of the skin, and to see through the man or the woman, perhaps we will rid our world of antisemitism, wherever it is found.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is no time limit yet, but I hope that colleagues will be sensitive to my determination to accommodate every would-be speaker in the debate. I call Guto Bebb.

4.50 pm

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I commend the speech of the Secretary of State, which I applaud and agree with fully, and I welcome the comments from

the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), too. It is not for me to comment on what is going on in the Labour party, but suffice it to say that what is happening to our politics and to some Members of this House as a result of antisemitism stains us all. We should all offer solidarity to those Members who have been affected by vile and disgusting abuse, whether online or in person. I have nothing but admiration for hon. Members in this place who are standing up to those threats and doing so with dignity, which shows why they have been elected to this place. I congratulate them all, whether they are in the Labour party or not, for the stand they are taking. They have the support of those of us on the Government Benches.

This is a cross-party issue. One reason I wanted to speak in the debate was that back in 2013, I joined the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism. I represent a small constituency in North Wales—I think it is the smallest constituency in population terms represented by a Conservative MP—and I have a very small Jewish community. I felt that the issue was coming to the fore, however, and I decided to join the APPG. That has been the most informative and valuable work that I have done in Parliament, as well as some of the most depressing. I pay tribute to the chair of the APPG, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), for his leadership of that effort and for the opportunities he has afforded to somebody such as myself.

Back in 2013, one of the few Jewish members of my constituency was elected mayor of Conwy, and I remember having a lot of fun at the fact that Edward I, when he gave Conwy its town charter, stated that no Jews and no Welsh would be allowed to live within the town walls. It gave me a certain degree of pride that Conwy had a Conservative Jewish mayor and a Conservative MP who is as Welsh as Welsh can be.

The APPG gave me the opportunity to see the virus of antisemitism. I went to Amsterdam with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, and I was absolutely shocked by what I saw. Back in 2014, when we were preparing a report on antisemitism, we went to a Jewish high school in Amsterdam, a city that I would consider to be a liberal city in Europe. We met a group of sixth formers, the same age as my children, and asked them a simple question, “How many of you, in a class of 22, see a future for yourselves in Europe?” One hand went up in that classroom—one single hand. If that does not shame us as Europeans, I am not sure what does.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Something bright is happening in Sarajevo. There are 1,000 Jews in Sarajevo—10,000 were killed by the Ustaše, the Croatian fascists, in the war. These 1,000 Jews consider their home, Sarajevo, to be the safest place for a Jew in Europe. Is that not amazing, colleagues, when we think what happened there just 20 years ago?

Guto Bebb: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. Obviously, it is good to hear that there are good news stories out there.

I undertook my second visit as part of the APPG to Brussels, with my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy). We visited another Jewish school. Imagine my horror, when we drove down that street in Brussels, the capital of the European Union, to be faced with armoured personnel vehicles, protecting

that school. It is very difficult to convey the shock that one feels as a parent when one sees that kind of thing happening on the streets of the capital city of the European Union.

As a result of that work, we produced a report in 2015; I think, Mr Speaker, you were there at Lambeth Palace for its launch. One success that I achieved as part of that effort was to ensure that the radio station in Wales—Radio Wales—decided to cover the launch, because in me, as a Welsh MP, they had someone willing to talk on radio about the issue. I was struck by the fact that the reporters who visited Jewish communities in constituencies such as that of the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) were taken aback by what they found. What we had noted in Amsterdam and Brussels was starting to infect the capital city of Wales and other cities across the United Kingdom. What I had seen in Amsterdam and Brussels as something new and strange, shockingly was affecting the very Jewish communities that we represent as MPs—whether in Wales, England, Scotland or Northern Ireland. That report was an important piece of work because it highlighted the need to change. We should take the APPG’s contribution in that respect very seriously.

Unfortunately, even though that report was produced in 2015, the situation has got worse. I am not sure how we explain the virus that has infected social media and our political discourse. I am not going to stand here and say that it is all the fault of the Corbynista takeover of the Labour party, because there are problems on both sides of the political equation. We must deal with a fundamental issue—the way in which the discourse on social media has been so badly polluted by this age-old hatred. There is a responsibility on us all, especially those in positions of leadership in any political party in the Chamber, to take those issues seriously. It is simply unacceptable, when members of political parties are identified as being responsible for this hate speech on social media and in person, that they are not thrown beyond the pale of our politics.

Stephen Doughty: I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does he agree that, unfortunately, what we are seeing on social media is a swamp in which everything else breeds, and whether that is going on in my party or in society more generally, it gives rise to some serious and violent behaviour? Does he agree that groups like System Resistance Network—neo-Nazi organisations operating in Wales, targeting Jews, Muslims, gays and the police—need to be proscribed and dealt with, and that Twitter, still hosting an account called Radio Arian that broadcasts neo-Nazi ideology, needs to take action today to remove it?

Guto Bebb: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. One of the APPG’s current work programmes deals with the behaviour of social media companies, such as Facebook. We all know that they have a responsibility, and it is imperative that we speak with one voice on that issue. How much more important it is, however, that we face those social media companies knowing that we have put our own house in order. So I fully agree with those comments, but we must do more.

I highlighted the fact that this issue does not just face one party in this place. Part of the Jewish conspiracy issue, which appears online, is the detachment from reality of those conspiracy theories. Nothing illustrates

[Guto Bebb]

that better than a rather vile piece of work that has appeared online, entitled, "A Very Jewish Coup: The Plot to Stop Brexit." It is really shocking. Mr Speaker, you are named as an individual who is part of the plot, as are my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). They are all highlighted as part of a Jewish plot to stop Brexit. That is utterly vile and unacceptable. It is also nonsense, because another individual highlighted as part of that plot is none other than my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole. Now, we are good friends, but on Brexit we do not agree. However, I would be hard-pressed to categorise my hon. Friend as an individual who is devoting his time in this place to stopping Brexit. That is the point—truth has nothing to do with anti-semitism, which is about hatred, inadequacy and attacking others for being different. That is the key point about this vile piece of work. It is an attack on others simply to justify political views that are unacceptable.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of the problem is that on social media people can hide behind an anonymous handle and can spread this type of vile abuse—lies and untruths—and bounce off one another? One of the things that social media companies could do to prevent that from happening is identify who these people are so that when these things are reported to the police, they can be prosecuted and banned from social media sites.

Guto Bebb: Once again, I agree with the sentiments that the hon. Lady has expressed. That was taken up with some social media companies on a recent visit by the all-party parliamentary group to Washington, so I subscribe to that comment.

Clearly, we have a problem, but there are good news stories out there. I want to touch on one of them, although it is tinged with a degree of regret. In my constituency, our holocaust memorial event, which takes place every year, has gone from strength to strength. It has been one of the greatest privileges in my time as Member of Parliament for Aberconwy to welcome holocaust survivor after holocaust survivor to speak at these events. It is not just one event on a Sunday evening with 300 or 350 people turning up. The organisers ensure that the speakers visit local schools on the following Monday and Tuesday, and the feedback from those schools has been absolutely phenomenal. The opportunity to speak to someone who survived the holocaust will never be forgotten by the young people of my constituency.

This year, for the first time ever, the holocaust memorial event in Llandudno highlighted not only the historical tragedy of the holocaust but invited a group of Jewish people from Manchester and their rabbi to highlight the threat that they face in 2019, in Manchester, in the United Kingdom. I have to say, listening to the comments of a Hungarian survivor of the holocaust, then listening to fellow citizens from Manchester on the same evening, was a truly shocking experience. If we have not learned anything, it is shame on us all.

Finally—and this is a point for my Front Benchers—the holocaust survivor from Hungary, Susan Pollack, spoke passionately. She was an 86-year-old lady, and she said at the event:

"We could not escape. We did not have passports. We had lost our passports. They had been taken away from us."

That really made me think very hard about freedom of movement, because there are Jewish schools in London where a significant proportion of the pupils are French by birth. Their families have opted to escape what is going on in France at this point in time. I would say to Ministers that when we talk about curtailing freedom of movement, we should be very aware of what freedom we are giving up in relation to the history of Europe in the 20th century.

It has been a pleasure to speak in the debate. It is a shame that we need to have this type of debate in the United Kingdom in 2019, but we do need it, and we need to carry on working as parliamentarians to make sure that this virus, which is a plague on our politics and on our communities, is dealt with.

5.3 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb). Although some time has passed since his resignation from the Government, this is the first chance I think I have had to say to him in the Chamber that Defence questions are not the same without him. His contribution was heartfelt and welcome, as indeed was the tone set by the Secretary of State at the beginning of the debate. I should acknowledge, not least because he is a fellow Glaswegian, the tone struck by the shadow Secretary of State.

It is somewhat depressing, as the hon. Member for Aberconwy has said, that we are debating antisemitism for the second time in less than 12 months, and we are doing so against the backdrop of Members of this very Parliament feeling that they have to leave their political party because of antisemitism. Although I have no desire to tread on the broader political grief of the Labour party, I will single out, if I may—I did not tell her beforehand that I would do this—the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). Having looked at some of the vile poison that she has put up with, I can tell her that she has the solidarity of Scottish National party Members and our admiration for the way in which she has stood up to it.

In the previous debate on antisemitism, I was able to say, in setting out the history of antisemitism in Scotland, that we are one of the few countries, if not the only country, never to have had an antisemitic law on the statute book. Indeed, the declaration of Arbroath, which is understood to be the most ancient medieval text in existence, specifically refers to Jews and gentiles as equal. To bring things a bit more up to date, I am pleased to say that the Scottish Government have accepted in full the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism.

I do not want to deceive Members into thinking that all is well and rosy north of the border, because the sad fact is that it is not. I thank Joel Salmon from the Board of Deputies of British Jews for the briefing he has given me, with some specific key figures on what is going on in Scotland. There have been 21 recorded incidents of antisemitism in the past year. Although that may not seem like a huge number, it does not feel all that small to Scotland's Jewish population, given how small it is.

I want to read out a few examples of what has happened in the past 12 months. A brick was thrown at a glass door on a synagogue, but thanks to their foresight

in expecting something like that to happen, a non-smash coating had been put on the glass so it did not shatter on that occasion. In another example, a woman who was converting to Judaism was spat at in the face while being called a Jew on a bus in Edinburgh.

In possibly the most vile of the examples sent to me, a Jewish organisation in Scotland received the following email:

"I'm going to kill every single one of you ugly rat-faced kikes. I think I'll use a knife. Then after I've cut you, I'll shut that dirty, filthy, lying Jew mouth of yours once and for all. Make sure you have a good hiding place ready. I'm gonna stick your children into an oven and then I'm gonna serve roasted kike to my dog. Good luck finding, you worthless piece of shit."

I will not read out the rest, as though that was not bad enough.

A few weeks ago, the front page of the *Sunday Herald* featured a story about the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities highlighting the deep problem of antisemitism that too often plagues elements of Scottish society. Too many responded to that story with conspiracy theories or by saying that somehow that could not happen in Scotland or that the Jews were complaining about nothing. That is rubbish. As with any other minority community, when the Jewish community complains about being the victim of hatred and highlights it on the front page of a national newspaper, any decent person would respond by extending a hand of friendship.

Wera Hobhouse: Is it not the case that we are all responsible for this problem? Sometimes we just say, "Oh, these sorts of things exist," but we do not stand up enough and we do not say loudly enough, each time, that this is totally unacceptable.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I completely agree with the hon. Lady. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) mentioned when he intervened on the Secretary of State at the start of the debate, there is perhaps a misunderstanding about how bad it actually is to be called an antisemite. I think the hon. Gentleman is right that the term perhaps feels a little too gentle sometimes. The Secretary of State himself said that people should be confronted with the fact that it is Jew hate. Let us put it to people in those stark terms, and then I think they can understand exactly what they are being accused of.

I want to draw the House's attention to a school, Calderwood Lodge, which is actually just outside my constituency and in that of the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton). This is a brilliant example of bringing together children of different faiths to better understand people from those faiths. Calderwood Lodge is the first joint Catholic and Jewish school anywhere in the world, and I encourage all hon. Members, if they get the chance, to visit it.

In thinking, as the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) just said, about how we get young people and others to better understand the problems and understand that this is a problem for us all, I reflect on what my own mother chose to do. My own mother, when I was in my early teens, gave me a copy of the book "The Five Chimneys", written by Olga Lengyel, a survivor of Auschwitz, and that book has stayed with me forever. I have read it a great many times, and I will probably give the book to my own nephew when he is of an age to take in the horrors of the holocaust.

That brings me to something that had never actually crossed my mind before. About this time last year, I was very kindly invited to dinner at my vet's house. My vet, who looks after my cat very well, is himself Jewish, and he invited me and my partner, Gordon, to come and have dinner with his family, which we duly did. This had not even occurred to me, but when we were there and we got talking around the table about antisemitism, he had to explain to me that he had not yet told his young daughters what the holocaust was and did not quite know how to approach it or at what time. It was not until I was in the car afterwards that I said to my partner, "How do you even begin to explain to your children that they belong to a faith that has been hunted in the way that Jewish people have over time?"

I want to draw my remarks to a close because I am conscious of time, and many hon. Members want to speak, so I will end with this. I was heartened, and at the same time quite depressed, to see the scenes last night from Paris, where a great number of people took to the Place de la République, rising up against antisemitism in France. The Chief Rabbi of France, Haïm Korsia, put it perfectly, in outlining the challenge for us all not just here but around the world, when he asked in Paris last night

"who must lower their eyes? The anti-Semites or the Jews?"

Let us flip that question around: who is it who gets to raise their eyes? I preferred the days when antisemites and racists felt ashamed and they kept their eyes to the ground. But when the Jew raises her eyes, what will she be confronted with? Will she be confronted with love or hate, friendship or hate, solidarity or hate, understanding or the ignorance that drives the hate we are trying to drive out of our society today? The Jew is looking up at this debate today, and although I suspect we will all speak with one voice, as we should, against antisemitism, what will happen when the Mace is lifted up? Will we all go back to our constituencies with a hand genuinely held out and renewed in our desire for friendship and in our desire to drive out antisemitism from society, or will we have a lot of warm words and not very much by the way of action? I sincerely hope not.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We will begin with a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, but I warn colleagues that I suspect that will not last for long.

5.13 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Like everyone in this debate, I want to emphasise that antisemitism is completely unacceptable—whether it comes from the hard right or the radical left—and it is utterly unforgivable if it permeates a mainstream political party. I also want to say that I rise with regret to make this speech, which is not one I ever thought I would have to make. It is deeply regrettable that we are all here to talk about this issue once again, but I feel I have to speak out about the current situation.

I found it truly shocking when, in September last year, the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna)—then, of course, one of Labour's own MPs—stated that the party's problem with antisemitism had become so serious that it had passed the threshold and could be considered institutionally racist.

[Theresa Villiers]

It is deeply disturbing that concern about problems with antisemitism in Labour are now so disturbing to the Jewish community that they felt the need to come to Parliament Square to protest about it. In many conversations I have had on the doorstep in my constituency of Chipping Barnet about this issue, a significant number of constituents have told me that they are making active preparations to leave the country if Labour wins the next general election. That is an appalling and unacceptable state of affairs.

In the debate last April in this Chamber, it was harrowing to hear about the abuse, threats and hatred to which colleagues such as the hon. Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) have been subjected. The fact that much of it appeared to be coming from their own party members and supporters was all the more shocking.

I believe that that powerful debate should have been a turning point—a point at which the Labour leadership gripped the problem and took action to rid the party of this poison. Yet it took another four months of wrangling before they actually managed to adopt the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism overseen by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. What was the cause of that prevarication and foot-dragging? Attempts by the Leader of the Opposition to preserve the right of Labour activists to call Israel “a racist endeavour”.

The leadership of the Jewish community is clear that much more effective action is needed. The Board of Deputies recently reiterated its disappointment at the lack of leadership on this matter shown by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). Indeed, there are many who doubt the Labour leader's commitment on this issue. He is, after all, the person who once accused “Zionists” of having “no sense of English irony, despite having lived here all their lives”.

He is the person who attended a ceremony that appeared to commemorate the Black September terrorists who slaughtered Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. He defended an artist whose mural featured obviously antisemitic imagery. He has shared platforms with and promoted a number of antisemites, including inviting the blood libel antisemitic conspiracy theorist Shaikh Raed Salah to this Parliament. Mr Salah is a man who has described Jewish people as “monkeys” and “bacteria”, yet the right hon. Member for Islington North chose to describe him as “a very honoured citizen”.

Those may be past episodes, but the present response of the Labour leadership to the antisemitism crisis in their party continues to be inadequate. The right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) set that out in her devastating resignation statement. Pointing out that it is three years since the Labour leadership pledged to tackle the issue, she said:

“At every turn, it has resisted, ignored and snubbed the legitimate demands of the Jewish community”.

She went on to say that the Labour leadership have “offered white-wash reports” and

“operated a revolving door disciplinary policy”.

She concluded:

“it has allowed its surrogates to belittle the scale of the problem and attack those who try to bring it to light.”

Even the deputy leader of Labour, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), has said that he sometimes does not seem to recognise his own party:

“We know in our hearts we have been too slow to respond to the shaming scourge of antisemitism in our ranks.”

This week, eight MPs who have spent decades in Labour left their party, and their criticism was damning. They describe a party

“hijacked by the machine politics of the hard left”,

where a message of optimism has been replaced by

“an all-consuming narrative founded on rage, betrayal and the hunt for heretics”.

The hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes)—someone whom I had always seen as being as Labour as Labour could possibly be—said he was sickened that the Labour party had now become a racist, antisemitic party. I believe he was right to be sickened and gravely concerned by what has happened to the official Opposition—so, too, am I; so, too, are many of my constituents. That is why decisive action is needed now to put this right, so we can see antisemitism driven out of British politics forever. Enough is enough.

5.20 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I rise to speak feeling a mixture of anger and anguish: anger at the shocking increase in antisemitic incidents in our country, and anger at the abject failure of the Labour leadership to root out the cancer of antisemitism within our party; anguish because of the stuff of antisemitism, whether online, verbal or physical, constitutes an unspeakably dreadful stain on our society, and anguish because my colleagues, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), both of whom have dedicated themselves to fighting antisemitism, feel that they can no longer stay in the Labour party and work with Labour MPs, both Jews and non-Jews, to eradicate antisemitism from our party.

It just beggars belief that on the very day the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree chose to leave the Labour party Derek Hatton was readmitted. This is a slight deviation, but I knew Derek Hatton in the 1980s. A leading member of Militant, he holds bigoted views and never believed in consistency between what he said and what he did. I remember a meeting of rate-capped councils when he harangued the leader of one council who had told us his council was going to set a rate that night. Hatton accused the man of betraying the working classes by complying with the law. I was fed up with his hypocrisy, because that was precisely what Hatton had done the previous year. When I told him to be quiet, he turned on me and shouted, “If it's too hot for you Margaret, get back in the kitchen.”

To return to the debate, I never ever thought that my Jewish identity would be central to my political work. I have always been secular. I arrived as an immigrant with my family at the age of four. We were not active in the Jewish community, although all our family friends were also Jewish refugees. But like so many other Jews, I lost family in the holocaust. In recent years, as my sisters trawled through family letters and diaries, that family history became more vivid and poignant for me. I read a letter from my aunt—after fleeing, she found herself in France—that she sent to Marshal Pétain, pleading with him to release her husband who had been taken from their home in the Ardèche:

"He is only a number to you. He is everything to me."

Her husband, my uncle, was later murdered in Auschwitz.

At Auschwitz, years later, I walked into a room filled with luggage and was confronted with a battered suitcase bearing his initials. I read my grandfather's diaries and heard the despair he expressed as he visited his parents' graves in Vienna for the last time before fleeing the Nazis. And most painful of all, I read my grandmother's last letter, written to her son, my uncle, nine days before she was shot in a trench outside a concentration camp, in which she twice says, "Don't forget me completely."

Stamping out antisemitism matters. We must never shirk our shared responsibility to prevent such horrors from happening again. We ignore the present increase in antisemitism incidents at our peril: a 16% rise, as others have said; the third year in a row that figures have reached an all-time high; a 54% increase in just one year in antisemitic abuse on social media. Complacency, denial, the shifting of blame on to others—all that is unacceptable.

This is not about weaponising racism for political advantage, an accusation that makes me profoundly angry. Likewise, for some people to claim that those fighting antisemitism are simply protecting the Netanyahu regime in Israel is deeply insulting and utterly wrong. I often criticise the actions of successive Israeli Governments where I feel that is justified, but legitimate criticism of a foreign Government should never morph into racist abuse against all Jews, as it too often does.

The increase in antisemitism comes from both the left and the right. On the right, CST analysis tells us that one in four of the incidents of recorded abuse involved language used by the far right, but under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), a platform has also been given for antisemitism, which was always present on the hard-left fringes, but has now moved into the mainstream of my party. That is why we have experienced a surge in abuse against us—abuse particularly targeted against female Jewish MPs.

I have seen the internal Labour party documents leaked to LBC that formed the agenda for one single meeting of the group tasked with investigating allegations of antisemitic abuse, and I congratulate LBC on doggedly pursuing this story. There are 47 antisemitic allegations in these documents against Labour party members. The evidence of abuse is shocking. I quote:

"He needs to check out the love fest between the Zionists and the Nazis.

People are finding out how much power Jews have. They seem to have a lot of power over the main opposition party. Might they rebel if...the reason they didn't get a job or a home was because a Jew got it.

You are paid by Israel to destabilise UK Labour.

A Zionist plot to oust Jeremy Corbyn.

A swastika is appropriate as Israel is a fascist state."

Some of the abuse is directed at Members of this House. LBC gave the file to Mak Chishty, who ran the hate crime unit for the Metropolitan police until 2017. He identified 17 cases that he judged were "race hate incidents" and four cases that crossed the threshold for criminal investigation. It took three months for the Crown Prosecution Service to give the police the go-ahead just for a criminal investigation. Will the Government urgently inquire into why this delay occurred and will

they also provide me with written assurance that the delay will not result in cases being dropped because they run out of time?

The documents leaked to LBC covered less than 50 cases. The Labour party has received hundreds and hundreds of complaints, yet only 12 individuals have been expelled from the party since April. I could have identified more than that from the one set of papers I saw. This tells me that the leader of the Labour party is not demanding zero tolerance of antisemitism in our ranks. Until he does, I and other members of the party will continue to call it out fearlessly, loudly and persistently.

Trust between the leader, his staff, Labour headquarters and Back-Bench Labour MPs has now broken down completely. I have absolutely no confidence in the integrity of the data that the party has provided concerning its progress. I submitted a dossier of abusive communications. The only communication that I have received back is a letter from a party member—about whom I had complained—in which he says of my complaint:

"I can't tell you how pathetic I think this is of you, going crying to the complaints department when someone says they don't like you."

He had accused me of "hysterically abusing Corbyn" to advance my own agenda and had said that Jewish people in this country are not victims of anything and that I was a nasty, dishonest person. The level of care provided to MPs by the party is so pathetic that the only response one gets to complaining about antisemitic abuse is further abuse from the culprit.

This week, two Labour MPs quit the Labour party, mainly because they think the party is institutionally antisemitic. I understand and respect their decision and mourn their departure. I joined the Labour party 56 years ago because it was the natural home for Jews, with its proud tradition of fighting racism, promoting equality and fostering tolerance. I do not yet want to give up the fight for the heart and soul of a party I have worked for and with throughout my adult life. The leader of the Labour party must really listen, must really understand and must really change. If he does not do so, he will be culpable for sabotaging the values that led to the creation of the Labour party and responsible for the withering away of a once great political force.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. The limit on Back-Bench speeches is reduced to eight minutes with immediate effect.

5.29 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful speech of the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge). It is also an honour to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), who made an excellent speech. We have been great friends since I made a speech here against tuition fees in 2010. He told me I was wrong then and has not stopped telling me I am wrong about Brexit, but we have been great friends even since, and on this issue, as on so many others, we have worked together closely. I join him in paying tribute to my constituency neighbour the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) for the work he has done chairing our all-party group on antisemitism, often in the face of abuse and, sadly recently, of threats and abuse against his nearest and dearest. He deserves great credit for his work.

[*Andrew Percy*]

I want to start on the good news. As this debate is demonstrating, most people in this country are decent, tolerant and open-minded, and that is proven, I think, by surveys in recent years. The annual Eurobarometer has consistently shown that Britain is one of the most tolerant societies in Europe, with some of the most positive views on immigration. We should never forget that that is how most people in this country feel and think.

That is the good news. The bad news, as many Members have said, is the rise of antisemitism in our country. I share the growing concern and alarm. The statistics that the Secretary of State laid out—I will not lay them out again—should shame us all in this House, on whatever side, as should the views of young Jews living in this country. A recent survey showed that 29% of British Jews had considered emigrating because of safety concerns. That is up from 11% in 2012 to now nearly a third of Jews living in this country. About a quarter of them have suffered antisemitic harassment in the last year and about one in three have suffered such harassment in the past five years. This should shame us all. It makes me embarrassed as a Member of Parliament and should shame us all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy made a great speech about the experience of Jews living in mainland Europe. I cannot reiterate the feeling we had going to that school in Brussels, which is guarded by armed Belgian soldiers, with armoured vehicles outside. I was a schoolteacher. I never had to go through those hoops to get into my school to teach, and to think that pupils have to go through that in mainland Europe just to go to school and do the things they have a right to do is truly shocking. We asked the young people there if they could see a future for themselves in Europe and only a very few hands went up to show they could.

As many Members have said, we have a problem on both sides of politics in this country. There is a growing movement on the far right. According to all surveys, those on the far right hold the most antisemitic views in society, and that is a huge and growing problem. It should concern us all that the far right is getting younger in this country. It is tapping into this feeling of discontent and all the rest of it. As I said in the Holocaust Memorial Day debate, I am disgusted, as somebody who believes in and campaigned for Brexit, that some of these people are now trying to use that issue to further their own hateful, spiteful and poisonous political ideology. It disgusts me, and I say not in my name and not in the name of the nearly 70% of my constituents who trudged out and voted to leave the EU.

The CST contacted me a couple of weeks ago saying, “We’d like to come and talk to you, because your name is on a far-right list as somebody who is trying to stop Brexit,” as my hon. Friend highlighted. I will sit down with the CST and find out exactly what was said, but that is the nonsense perpetuated on the far right. It is fair to say that UKIP has now become a far-right party. The new leader and some of its members seem to be revelling in embracing a far-right, fascist agenda.

As many colleagues have said, antisemitism is a huge problem on the far left of politics. I will not say a great deal about that—Labour Members can speak to it better than I can—but I was outraged at the report on

Sky News that George Galloway, who has reapplied to join the Labour party, described the decision of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) to leave the Labour party as a black-ops plot against the leader. He also used the phrase “Goebbels-style” throughout.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): To reassure the hon. Gentleman and the House, the women in the Labour party have spoken today collectively to push our Front Benchers and the leadership of our party to say that Mr Galloway is not entitled or able to join our party not only because of the rules, but because he is not welcome as he is a misogynist and an antisemite. I would never be in the same party as him.

Andrew Percy: I thank the hon. Lady for saying that. Let us call this out for what it was: it was Jew-baiting and a deliberate use of language and of Goebbels to bait. It is exactly the same on the far left as it is on the far right. Let us call George Galloway what he is: he is a misogynist and a racist. That is exactly what he is. He has no place in this Chamber or in politics in this country.

What do we do about antisemitism? We have identified the problem and we know that it is growing in our country. I want to reflect to the Secretary of State on where we are getting it right in schools and the curriculum—I used to be a history teacher—but also on where we need to do a lot more. It is right that holocaust education is written into the national curriculum. When we teach holocaust education, we of course teach the history of antisemitism in Europe as part of it, but I fear that the teaching of the holocaust in isolation could leave pupils with the impression that that was the end of it. We say that antisemitism started and ended with the holocaust and the end of the second world war, but we need to look at how we can broaden the school curriculum so that the liberation of Europe and the camps is not the end of the antisemitism story. It is right that holocaust education is on the curriculum, but we need to look at how we can go further.

I had another good idea, but, as a former teacher, I cannot read my own writing. Not for the first time, I will follow up on that excellent idea with the Secretary of State as soon as I have deciphered my own code. I will end on that, but I associate myself with what other hon. Members have said. I am so proud that, in debates such as today’s, the Chamber is united in its revulsion of this disgusting scourge.

5.38 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Ind): Why are we joined here for this debate? It was almost a year ago that I shared with the House my family’s history and experience of antisemitism through the centuries. My mother’s family were expelled from Spain in the 15th century. I spoke about the more than 100 members of my family aged from four to 83 who were murdered by the Nazis in the gas chambers of Treblinka, Sobibór, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz.

What has happened since that last debate? It pains me to say this and share with the House that we have gone backwards, as we have heard from hon. Members’ contributions. We have not seen the progress we should have seen over the course of the past 11 months. On a

personal level, I have in the past year alone seen a further two people convicted: one from the far-right, imprisoned after he threatened to kill me, convicted under counter-terrorism legislation, and another just before Christmas, a former member of the Labour party convicted of harassment. That takes my tally to six or seven individuals, depending on how you interpret it, convicted of antisemitic-inspired hate crimes and threats.

And there is a significant amount of antisemitism that might not reach the criminal threshold but that has surfaced. I have been subjected to thousands of messages of antisemitic abuse and hate, and I want to reflect on what I have seen in just the past week and share with the House the range of terms I have seen; they range from the ridiculous to the truly disturbing. There might be a small minority who think I am a “Zionist lizard” or that I am responsible for Eurovision taking place in Israel. It is sadly all too common to be addressed as “an evil little witch” or a “murderous Zionist.”

Abuse is only part of the problem. Arguably more concerning, as we have heard already, is the rise of insidious antisemitic conspiracy theories: that I am an agent of Mossad, that I am a traitor to my country, that I am paid directly by Benjamin Netanyahu, based purely on my Jewish background. The comments underneath my posts on social media are filled with individuals calling me the MP for Tel Aviv or asking whether a Member of Likud can stand for election in our country. And just yesterday an individual who says they are a member of the Labour party and with the hashtag “JCforPM” in their bio—they have been on Twitter for an extended period and have hundreds of followers, so this is not a bot that has been created—said:

“shame on Luciana Berger, A Zionist Bitch, I hate her, I hate her baby, her Israel.”

Elsewhere an official Labour-affiliated group, Young Labour, announced that the departure of my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) would mean that “Palestine Lived” and then proceeded in bullying the Jewish chair of Young Labour, while influential Twitter users have wished “good riddance” to “Israel’s fifth columnists.” They have called myself and hon. and right hon. Friends “the Israel stooges party”, “the Israeli apartheid democratic front” and so on. Others have alleged that the Rothschilds and George Soros will declare their backing for the new Independent Group. I share all this because this is what is happening in our country, from people across the country, during the past week and today in particular.

In the Labour party, my political home for nearly 20 years until I resigned from it on Monday, I have seen obfuscation, smears, inaction and denial every step of the way. We had a debate in this House following the unprecedented event of a minority community in our country, the British Jewish community, taking to Parliament Square outside this place to say enough is enough when it comes to antisemitism. It was not a demonstration against National Action or Tommy Robinson; it was against the Labour party, a political movement that is supposed to pride itself on the values of equality for all and anti-racism against all.

Yet what has happened in the wake of that unprecedented event in our country and in the wake of the debate in this House that took place just a few weeks later? Mr Speaker, you could not make up the catalogue of

events that has shamed the Labour party since that happened: the countless individual cases, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) has alluded to already, that have been dropped or have not been responded to. In the run-up to Holocaust Memorial Day this year, we learned of members of the Labour party in high-profile positions, a number of them councillors and one a Welsh Assembly Member, who had made antisemitic comments and had as their sanction a “reminder of the rules”. That was somehow a zero-tolerance approach to antisemitism. We have heard the audio recording of a member of the Labour party’s highest governing body, the national executive committee, accuse 70 British rabbis of being Trump fanatics rather than addressing their very serious concerns about antisemitism. We had to fight for months to see the international definition of antisemitism with all its examples accepted and adopted by the Labour party, and even with a last-minute attempt to dilute it.

We had the summer of antisemitism, when not a day went by without another story in the British press about antisemitism in the Labour party and about its leader’s connections to the issue. One in particular, which caused gross offence, was the claim that British Jews do not get irony. We were told that the Leader of the Opposition was present, but not involved, at the laying of a wreath for the individuals who orchestrated the Munich attacks and the murder of the Israeli athletes. The commitment to meet a deadline to deal with high-profile cases has been deliberately missed, and the party is withholding details of physical threats to MPs, including myself. Just last week, the leadership of the parliamentary Labour party held members in contempt despite their reasonable request to answer 11 straightforward questions and to respond to serious concerns about antisemitism, which was ignored.

This is a shameful record, let alone from a leadership and a political party that seek the highest office in our land. That is why I have arrived at the sickening conclusion that the Labour party is institutionally antisemitic in its processes, its attitudes and its behaviour. We ignore this at our peril. Colleagues have referred to the figures. We have seen a 16% rise in the number of incidents since 2017, and behind every one of those incidents is a person who has been affected.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): The hon. Lady is making some powerful points. I am reminded of the Russian saying that the fish always rots from the head. Does she agree that that is apt in this case?

Luciana Berger: I hear the right hon. Gentleman’s comments, and of course people will contend with this issue in different ways. I have not held back from speaking out and seeking to challenge at every available opportunity what I have seen as antisemitism within the ranks of what was my party. This is an issue not just for us here in this country but for countries across Europe. We heard that there were demonstrations yesterday in 60 towns and cities against the increase in antisemitism there.

I will certainly not be intimidated, bullied or silenced. I have used and will continue to use the full force of British law to ensure that people are held to account for the crimes they commit. There should be no tolerance, and that extends to all issues and crimes when it comes

[Luciana Berger]

to racism. However, this cannot be the British Jewish community's fight alone. History tells us where this can lead. I am clear that, across the Chamber and in every institution in every part of our national life, we must drive out antisemitism and promote the values of respect, equality and tolerance. I am sick and tired of debating this and describing it. We have had enough warm words and read enough tweets of solidarity; now is the time for swift, strong and decisive action, so that when we debate this again in a year's time, we can celebrate our progress rather than having to reflect once again on our collective failure. I implore all Members from across the House to do everything they can to tackle antisemitism in our country.

5.47 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It is hard to follow the speech by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). I pay tribute to her for the actions that she has taken in the past couple of days, as well as for all she has done since first being elected in 2010. It takes a huge amount of courage to do what she has done.

I have a large Jewish community in my constituency, and the work of the Community Security Trust is particularly important there. In fact, I called for this debate after the release of the CST's figures. I pay tribute to the trust for the work that it does and for its selfless action in looking after the community. I was pleased that my first parliamentary question here asked for money to pay for the trust to look after schoolchildren at their schools. My right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) agreed with me at the time that he did not see why parents should have to pay to keep their children safe just because they were going to school. We continue to fund that work.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the fact that there have been 1,652 antisemitic incidents in the past year, but that is not the whole story. A further 630 potential incidents were reported, but they were not included by the CST because there was no evidence of antisemitic motivation, targeting or content. However, many of the people who suffered those incidents were from the Jewish faith. Previously, we have seen spikes in the number of incidents following military action in Israel or conflict in Gaza or even the west bank, but that has not occurred in the past year. There have been some border skirmishes in which people have been killed, but two particular periods stand out in which there have been spikes in antisemitic incidents.

The first period when the CST recorded an additional number of incidents came during April and May last year, which coincided with the Leader of the Opposition's past support for a mural in Tower Hamlets coming to light. The so-called graffiti artist Mear One, whom many of us will remember, produced a mural showing people who very much looked like elderly Jewish men sitting around a table supported on the backs of, presumably, African-Caribbean slaves. Many comments were made at the time, which coincided with an increased number of incidents. The second period came in August and September last year, when there was much discussion in the media about whether the Labour party would adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

definition of antisemitism, and the number of antisemitic incidents increased to 150 in those months. I certainly did not want this debate to be about criticising the Labour party per se, but I want Labour to know that when people make comments, there is an effect beyond the coverage in the newspapers.

Bob Stewart: I have listened carefully to everything being said today, and I want to assure my colleagues on the Labour Benches that we on the Conservative Benches support them and feel deeply that they are not antisemitic as a whole. We are sad that this is happening.

Dr Offord: I do not believe that that intervention was aimed directly at me, but I will say that I have for some time been asked in hustings and during elections, "Is the Labour party antisemitic?" and I have never really engaged in that debate. The simple reason why I could not do that is because the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) is certainly not antisemitic and was very much part of the Labour party. I have therefore always resisted saying that the Labour party is antisemitic, and I have resisted saying that the Leader of the Opposition is antisemitic. I will let others make their minds up about that.

In a very good book by Anthony Julius called "Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England" that I found in the Library, the author suggests that there have been four periods in history when Jews have been prominent and have received antisemitic abuse, and I think that we are now in a fifth. The antisemitism of recent years has taken the form of criticism of Zionism and of the actions and policies of the Government of Israel, which has often manifested itself in direct action, such as the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. However, the new line of attack is different from traditional antisemitism, meaning the hatred of Jews, claims that Jews are inferior to others or a belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy or the Jewish control of capitalism. The new antisemitism differs in the political voices from which it comes. Previously antisemitism was perceived as coming from the political right, but the new antisemites are primarily on the left and, indeed, the far left.

I have a concern about how such views are communicated to the public through social media. The Antisemitism Policy Trust and the CST found that when Google removed "Are Jews evil?" from its autocomplete function in December 2016, 10% fewer people searched for "Are Jews evil?" than in the previous year. Search companies should stop directing people to antisemitic content on the internet, and we must better equip users and remove content when it is uploaded.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and I went to Dublin with the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism to visit Facebook and Twitter. I am sure that he will remember that when we spoke to Facebook, its reaction to any kind of racist, sexist, homophobic, misogynistic comment was, "We must remove it as soon as possible." However, when we spoke to Twitter, it likened any such posts to comments made in the street to someone as they pass by. We felt that was certainly not an appropriate response. I would like to see the Government and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport consider legislation to prevent such comments from being allowed to remain online.

I am particularly disappointed by two comments that many of us will have seen online yesterday. The first was in response to the right hon. Member for Enfield North when she moved to her current position as an independent Member. Young Labour tweeted:

“Joan Ryan Gone—Palestine Lives”.

As though she had any effect on either Palestine, the west bank, Gaza or Israel.

The second comment, and I do not think it necessary to name the Member, was about the financial backers of the new Independent Group:

“Support from the State of Israel, which supports both Conservative and Labour ‘Friends of Israel’, of which Luciana was chair, is possible and I would not condemn those who suggest it”.

Well, I certainly would. I cannot speak for Labour Friends of Israel, but I am sure it is the same as Conservative Friends of Israel, which does not receive any money from the Israeli Government—it receives its finances from within this country, as per the law.

I ask Labour Front Benchers to do more, and not only about the members I have mentioned today and the comments they have made online; they also need to actively seek out those who are causing a terrible and emotional time for so many of my residents.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree has shown us today what antisemitism feels like, but many of my constituents show me on an almost daily basis how it affects them. One comment, on which I will end, came from a gentleman today and, like me, he is very concerned about the removal of a passport from a British person, “If Mr Corbyn was to be elected, he would know that I have the right of return to Israel, and no doubt I would have my passport taken away.” I do not believe that, and I certainly hope this country never ends up behaving in such a way, but we cannot go on like this. We cannot allow people to behave in the way they have, and we must stop it before people leave this country.

5.57 pm

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): This debate comes at a time of unprecedented anxiety among the Jewish community in this country. A significant majority increasingly worry about their safety and security here, and they question whether their children and grandchildren have a future in the country they love. Yes, this is partially the result of a record number of antisemitic incidents, as reported by the Community Security Trust, and it is also because of the eternal threat from the far right and fundamentalist terrorism, which means that Jewish schools require permanent security guards and security fences, but it is mainly provoked by the fear that the Leader of the Opposition could become Prime Minister of this country.

That is distressing for the community, but it is heart-breaking for those of us whose lives and life chances have been shaped by both our Jewish and Labour identities. How the Labour party, a party that has always had anti-racism as a core value, has got itself into this position is both tragic and extraordinary, and I will devote my contribution to that today.

The current leadership have enabled it by associating for decades with people whose hatred for capitalism has included false assertions about the alleged malign influence of powerful Jews. The problem is not only their association with such people but their refusal to condemn them and

call out their antisemitism. People who were previously involved on the fringes of mainstream politics are now members of the Labour party.

Then there is the leadership’s long-standing support for the hard left’s demonisation of Zionism and its global strategy to equate Zionism with racism and to bastardise the word “Zionism”. In the hard left’s world view, the west is the problem, especially the US, and Israel is a proxy of the US in the middle east, where it does not belong.

In reality, Zionism is the Jewish people’s right to self-determination in their own state. It is not expansionism, aggression or the policy of any particular Israeli Government. Many Zionists, including me, oppose settlement expansion and hope that, at some stage in the future, there will be leaders on all sides with the authority and credibility to create the conditions for a two-state solution.

The problem is that those in the current Labour leadership have always believed that the creation of Israel was a catastrophe and, whatever their protestations, favour a one-state solution—Palestine, not Israel. This is in stark contrast to their campaigning for the rights of minorities around the world to self-determination. So in their world view, Jews are the only minority who do not have that right to self-determination. Israel is singled out and demonised when human rights abuses and lack of democracy in many other countries are on a much greater scale, including countries deified by the hard left. Jewish people are held responsible individually and collectively for alleged actions of the Israeli Government.

After a summer when the Labour party was engulfed in a perfect storm as a result of its refusal to accept the internationally agreed definition of antisemitism, what was the reaction of the party leader? It was to go to a meeting of the party’s national executive with his own proposed amendment that people should have the right to say that the creation and existence of the state of Israel is a racist endeavour. In other words, based on this definition, the leader of the Labour party supports people’s right to be antisemitic. This is extraordinary.

Then, we must consider the long-term support for terrorist organisations who kill and incite the murder of Jews— Hamas and Hezbollah. Of course, there is a perfectly respectable argument to be made for talking to terrorist groups to persuade them to end violence and become part of political and peace processes, but with neither Hamas nor Hezbollah, or the IRA, was this the objective of the Leader of the Opposition. His interactions were clearly to show solidarity with their cause and hence legitimise their use of violence in pursuit of their goals. That is the hard truth. Because of this, how can Labour, under his leadership, tackle the “cancer” of antisemitism when many of the accusations refer to people who articulate views he shares and their loyalty to the leader takes precedence over the party’s anti-racist values?

Why should this matter to the vast majority of UK Jews? It is quite simply because Israel is our best, and perhaps only, safe haven against the persecution Jews have suffered in every generation through history, most recently, with the pogroms of Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the horrors of the holocaust only 80 years ago. Jews’ fear of persecution is based on historical and contemporary facts, not irrationality or paranoia. Even in civilised France, we have seen tens of

[Mr Ivan Lewis]

thousands of Jews leave our neighbouring European Union country in the past 20 years because of their direct experiences of antisemitism.

I salute my former colleagues who have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish community. But it has made me sick to the stomach to observe the silence of some in the party and, in other cases, the denial of the problem or attempts to smear those who have spoken out. The abuse and threats meted out to my courageous hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) have disgusted most decent people. Instead of empathy and support, the response of the hard left was to call a vote of no confidence in her—and they call themselves socialists! Quite simply, if all this has happened in the party, imagine what would happen in our country if the right hon. Gentleman ever became Prime Minister. That is why UK Jews are afraid, and why I urge my friends and former colleagues to examine their consciences and act to put an end to this shameful chapter in the Labour party's history. Antisemitism is not some second-class form of racism. A party rooted in the values of equality and anti-discrimination cannot collude with racism as a price worth paying for chasing an election victory.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: A six-minute limit now applies.

6.3 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I am sure that I represent all Members of this House in saying that the Jewish community is and has been a real blessing to our nation throughout its history; both inside and outside this House, Jewish individuals have contributed in extraordinary ways to the culture and prosperity we all share. We should take this opportunity to honour and thank their community for the contribution they make to our common good. In recognising and celebrating the Jewish community, we should condemn unequivocally all antisemitic behaviour suffered by our Jewish brothers and sisters. One antisemite is one too many, and there is much work to be done to tackle this.

Today, I wish to focus on the responses to the problem. An effective response will flow partly from the following two principles. First, we must do all we can through education to understand and accept our differences, and in this context our religious differences in particular. Although respect for freedom of religion and belief should not give special privileges to the religious, it should allow believers like our Jewish brothers and sisters the maximum possible freedom to live out and profess publicly who they are and what they believe. Secondly, we must re-emphasise the things that bind us all together, whatever our background or beliefs, and first and foremost that means our innate value as individual human beings—our shared humanity.

Before I touch on those principles in a little more detail, let me just say that true tolerance cannot just be of religions or practices with which we agree; it must also be of those who may be quite different from ourselves. Neither is true tolerance best fostered by state-established measures of what is good for all; rather, it is fostered by enabling those who are different to exist

freely and together with those differences. One way to promote that is to facilitate better religious education in schools.

As chair of the all-party group on religious education, I am aware of the number of highly dedicated RE teachers throughout the country, yet as our report "Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate" highlighted, over recent years RE has not been given the priority or resources that it should have had in many schools. I am pleased that Education Ministers are now seeking to address this, because for many children today RE serves as the main or sole space in which they encounter and discuss different religious beliefs, values and meaning.

Poor-quality RE can have a lasting detrimental effect on the extent of children's ability to understand and engage with those of different faiths. In turn, that can affect their ability throughout life to engage intelligently and positively in an increasingly diverse society. A submission to the all-party group from the University of Chester department of theology and religious studies said:

"Religious literacy enables willingness and ability to live with religious and cultural tensions and with conflicting beliefs and practices. It supports social cohesion by providing spaces where different views can be aired, listened to and engaged with without the pressure to conform to an overall perspective."

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have been moved by the speeches we have heard, and particularly by the hon. Lady now. Does she agree that we need the three themes of love, tolerance and respect of everyone in society? That is what this debate is about and we should all practise those themes in our own lives, and those outside this place should do the same.

Fiona Bruce: The hon. Gentleman hits the mark absolutely.

Good religious education will help to promote community cohesion, which is critical as the shape of our communities changes. I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Education appreciates that, too. He noted recently:

"It is mandatory for all state funded schools to teach RE and it is important that they do this well. Good quality religious education not only helps schools meet their legal duty to promote children and young people's spiritual and moral development. It also gives them knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and so fosters mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs."

Lord Alton said in the other place:

"Religious literacy and understanding of faith and no faith, the honouring of difference, the determination to understand one another and to reconsider bigotry, prejudice and caricatures, must surely be at the heart of how we form tomorrow's citizens."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 December 2018; Vol. 794, c. GC158.]

We can promote true tolerance by reasserting the rights and respect owed to each person simply by virtue of their humanity. These rights, as intended in the universal declaration of human rights, assume that we all have equality by virtue of our humanity.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Before my hon. Friend moves on further from religious education, I should say that on the basis of what she has described, perhaps it is time for new

guidance from the Department for Education, along exactly the lines she has described, to reinforce the importance of religious education and to firm it up and make it more substantial.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady has three more minutes, but I gently suggest that she is not obliged to use them.

Fiona Bruce: I will endeavour not to, Mr Speaker.

I was speaking about the importance of our individual humanity, which we should respect before any differences in intelligence, strength, religion, ability or political views. We should understand that each of us is individually and uniquely created, and that no insignificant person has ever or will ever be born. It is this vision of dignity in our shared humanity that was lost during the holocaust.

My favourite teacher at school—I know we all had one—was a German who had, with her father, helped Jewish children escape from the Nazis. They then had to escape themselves. She taught me German, but she also taught me something far more important than that. She taught me that no ideology should take precedence over respect for an individual as a human being and as a person.

I note that we subtly enable persecution every time we promote the use of language that often accompanies identity politics. Our political opponents are not necessarily wicked. They are certainly not scum. They are due a respectable ear and proper dialogue. Those who differ from us, whether in their political or religious views, or in their ethnicity, are first and foremost our brothers and sisters in humanity. I know that our Jewish brothers and sisters teach and promote these principles. As a society, let us stand alongside them and do all we can to enable them to flourish in their unique identity and beliefs.

6.11 pm

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): This is a traumatic time. In the past three days, eight highly respected hon. Members have left the Labour party, citing the Labour party's antisemitism as the key reason. The antisemitic abuse that I receive includes claims that I do not have human blood, that I am a racist supporter of child abuse, that I am a Zio, a Zionist shill and the Jewish Labour Movement's bitch, that I accept the Israeli shilling, that I am prepared to sacrifice the Labour party in support of a foreign power, and much more.

That could never have taken place in the Labour party that I joined, but today's Labour party is dominated by a hard-left faction that too easily embraces centuries-old antisemitic conspiracy theories couched in left-wing terminology. It struggles to recognise that it has a problem. Perhaps it is the problem. That is why the party finds it so difficult to deal with the deluge of antisemitism it has unleashed. If the term "Jew" is replaced by "Zionist", today's Labour party is perfectly at ease with anti-Jewish conspiracy theories. Even as the eight hon. Members left, they were accused of being manipulated and funded by Israel.

Why is Jackie Walker, who repeats Louis Farrakhan's racist lies that Jews were the main financiers of the slave trade, still in the Labour party? How could Kayla Bibby be let off scot-free after downloading an antisemitic image from the website Incogman that presents Jews as

"Parasites responsible for financial heists of entire nations"

and that is headed "Bloodsucking Alien Parasites Killing America", the alien parasites being the Jews?

This is an abject failure of leadership for a party that aspires to government. No amount of reassurances from spokespeople can make matters right. In fact, they are insulting. Who do they think they are kidding? It is only action in drumming out the antisemites in the Labour party that counts, and there is little sign of that happening—unless, of course, the party becomes embarrassed by the public exposure of its failings. This is not just a problem for the Jewish community. It is about the nature of our society and the soul of the Labour party. Labour prides itself on being an anti-racist party, but a party that struggles to combat anti-Jewish hatred is complicit in racism. That is the reality.

Why am I still in the Labour party? I am not used to giving up. I still believe in the values that brought me into the Labour party 56 years ago—anti-racism, the struggle for equality, seeking the means to create a better society. I am still fighting, and I will not be hounded out. Indeed, I suspect that the leadership would be delighted to see all its opponents go.

I am encouraged by the support of the overwhelming majority of Labour MPs—Jewish and non-Jewish—and many members, including those in Liverpool. I am still battling for the soul of the Labour party as, with my Jewish and non-Jewish colleagues, I oppose antisemitism wherever it raises its ugly head.

6.15 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman).

One of the most poignant sayings is that history has a habit of repeating itself. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) put it in excellent terms this afternoon—that history tells us where all this will lead. Whether it was in the holocaust, or whether it was other genocides that followed, in which people of different faiths and from different communities have been tortured and murdered, whether it was in Rwanda, whether it was the Rohingya, the Yazidis, or in Srebrenica—all followed a similar pattern before genocide and holocaust took place. The warning signs are there long before the action happens.

Antisemitism was clearly evident long before the holocaust in which 6 million Jews were executed. Looking at the parallels between then and now, there are some disturbing similarities. Only a few weeks ago, as the Secretary of State said, many of us were signing the book of remembrance for Holocaust Memorial Day, promising that we would speak out if we saw those patterns of behaviour emerging in our society. That is part of the purpose of today's debate. It is important not to sit silently by, not calling such behaviour out.

At the time in 1933 when Hitler took over as Chancellor, few saw that the creeping antisemitism would lead to the murder of 6 million Jews. Look at the building blocks that were put in place to get to that stage. A man got into power—a man that, in 1919 when he joined the German Workers' party, many thought a political lightweight that would never lead the party. But he got into power, promising the masses, in the time of austerity following the first world war, that he would end austerity.

[*Maria Caulfield*]

Hitler denounced international capitalism; he said he would install a new order to dismantle the broken politics of that generation. He promised increased public spending to build more hospitals, schools, roads. He would curb big business and end capitalism. He had sidelined traditional trade unions and established his own new group, the Labour Front. He set up a youth wing to indoctrinate the next generation so it would follow his values and beliefs. They were often found chanting at popular events such as the Olympics.

Hitler changed the rules in his own party, so that people could not challenge him and get rid of him. He got rid of the moderates in his own party, using the Enabling Act, so that no one could speak out, and if they were afraid, they were gone in an instant. He ended the freedom of the press, and it was after he got into power that the antisemitism was really ramped up. Anyone looking at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum website should listen to the testimony of someone like Hedi Pope, whose parents lived through that. She said they were Jewish, but they dismissed some of the changes; they thought they would never last—he would be gone in a few years, and things would return to normal. But they never did.

After 1933, the Jews were dismissed from the civil service. People were told to boycott Jewish goods. They could not attend schools. They could not go to public areas, such as cinemas. There was the physical destruction that we have heard so much about this afternoon—of synagogues, Jewish homes, places of business. In 1938, Jews started to leave, but for many of them it was too late.

At Prime Minister's Question Time this afternoon, I spoke about Anne Meadows, a councillor—a Labour councillor—since 1994. I know Anne because I was a Conservative councillor with her in the ward of Moulsecoomb and Bevendean—I was the first Conservative councillor there for 20 years. Anne is a fierce, patriotic Labour woman. You did not mess with Anne. I found that to my cost when I was a fellow councillor. To see a woman like that having to leave the Labour party because of antisemitism against her husband is absolutely shocking. What did her local Labour MP tweet today? That this was nothing more than a bare-faced career move by Anne. There was no sympathy for the plight of Anne and her husband. That tells us where we are today. If we think that antisemitism is something that happened in the past and could never escalate to the same levels, we are fooling ourselves and denying what has happened. There is antisemitism today, and as we remember the lives that were lost in the holocaust and previous genocides, we are confronted with a question—what would we have done? Would we have prevented what happened then? Will we have a chance now, because history tells us that if we do not take it we know where this will end?

6.20 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I beg the indulgence of the House. I have never stood before to make a speech in the House without notes and without something explicit to say. I never thought that I would do so on an issue so important to me, because I would be so emotional about it. I beg the indulgence of the House for the next six minutes.

A year ago, I stood in this House and read out some of my greatest hits. I got huge solidarity, and lots of people, both within the Labour party and outside, stood with me and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) as we continued our fight—a fight I never thought I would have to have inside my own party, and I promise one that I never wanted. As much as I would love to—not love; happily—share the ongoing abuse that has happened over the past 12 months, I say with respect to everybody in the Chamber that it simply is not about us. It is about the chilling effect that this is having on people outside. It is about the young women who should be joining the Labour party who no longer have a political home. It is about those young women and young men who have decided that their identity stops them getting politically involved. It is for them that we continue this fight. It is for them that I stay on my Benches, inside my party. It is for them that I will fight every single day to ensure that antisemitism is removed from my party.

I say to the leadership of my party that one antisemite is too many. It should not be the case that I or my colleagues have to mention the names of antisemites either in this Room—in this wonderful Chamber—or to the parliamentary Labour party for someone to be thrown out. I would like to report to the House that Derek Hutton has been suspended from the Labour party. It took a complaint by my friend the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), and for that to be mentioned in the House.

I am sick and tired, and my heart is breaking a little more every day, because of what I have to experience and what I have to read. I am devastated that my closest political sister in this House has been hounded out of my party, but I have a message for everybody. I will not be silenced. I am going nowhere, and they will have to take my membership card away from me, because this is too important—not for me, not for you, but for the people we represent outside.

I want to say thank you to everybody who has supported us. I want to say thank you to the CST, which has kept me safe. I want to say thank you to the police, who have kept me safe, and I want to say thank you to the Government, who have been there when my own party has not, which is shameful. But this fight continues, and it continues on behalf of us all. Everybody should grant the CST more money, and they should support and join the APPG. Now is the time not only for words, not only for things in the Chamber, but for action, because we so desperately need it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There are six people wanting to speak—four minutes each. I call Stephen Kerr.

6.24 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): That was a most extraordinary speech and I compliment the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) for delivering it in the way she did.

I almost feel that little more needs to be said, but when I was first elected as Member of Parliament for Stirling, I made a commitment to myself that I would stand up in this place, and in all other places, to defend

any persecuted minority and to speak up against hatred in all its grizzly, ugly forms. That is why I want to take a few minutes of the House's time to make it clear that I stand with my Jewish friends and neighbours against the racist vileness that is antisemitism.

Where are we going as a society when a person's ethnicity or religion is used to demean them and their right to freedom of speech? I have never felt the need to apologise for or hide my religious convictions or affiliations, and no one in this country should ever have to do so. No one should ever have to suffer being the subject of public pillory because of their origins or their religious affiliation. Freedom of religion or belief is a foundational human right.

Based on my limited experience as a Member of this House, I cannot imagine the bullying, abuse and mockery that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and others have had to endure and are enduring. The grotesque treatment to which she and other hon. Members have been subject is deplorable and must be condemned, not least by the leadership of the Labour party.

I am deeply concerned about the rise of this hate, here and around the world. Jew hate seems to me to be a significant element in the overall increase of intolerance and hatred of all kinds. There is a coarsening of public discourse in the way in which intolerance and bigotry are being normalised, not least because of the prevalence of the abuse of social media platforms.

There is so much to be critical of in this world when it comes to injustice, whether it is the treatment of religious minorities in Saudi Arabia, the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar, or the official Chinese persecution and imprisonment of more than 1 million Muslims. There is no small amount of injustice in this world, but it is telling that far more energy and importance is attached to divestment and boycott campaigns against Israel than against any other country. That was demonstrated last month, when Malaysia banned Israelis from participating in the world Para swimming championships. We have also heard calls for the boycott of Eurovision when it takes place in Israel, but protests against awarding the World cup to Qatar or against holding the Olympic games in China are muted at best.

In the minute I have left, let me say that this instinct of hatred, which some on the left and the right wish to bring to the surface of our natures, can only be truly defeated by love. Tolerance is not enough. Tolerance implies that we may dislike something but we will politely keep our mouths shut and grudgingly allow people to behave in a way that is destructive to our way of life. It is only when we truly see the common humanity that we share, free of the strictures of difference, that we will become free of intolerance and hatred. It is for that reason that I have made freedom of religion or belief one of the issues that I will continue to speak about in this Chamber. These hatreds—racism, religious persecution and intolerance—make us all slightly less human and diminish us all wherever they are. I cannot think of a more important subject to speak out on.

6.28 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I shall comment on one issue only—not the racists and the antisemites who have been exposed, but the enablers, because the enablers are an equally big problem and there are a lot of them, not least in the Labour party.

I will give one example from the previous debate in which I spoke. One enabler went online and put out to a lot of people the suggestion that I had exaggerated and lied about an incident relating to a dead bird that was sent to my wife by a misogynist antisemite in 2012, for which someone was prosecuted. This enabler found a press cutting from the *Workshop Guardian* that showed that someone was prosecuted for the misogynist crime. That is accurate, but this enabler, a journalist, did not bother to contact me before he put this out to very many people. He did not ask me whether what I had said was wrong. He therefore did not know that, when in advance of that, I had given the specific antisemitic literature from a man called Roger Dyas-Elliott to Nottinghamshire police, the police requested that the antisemitism was not included in the prosecution—as a dead bird had been sent through the post, the prosecution would be immediate and successful, and this would therefore delay things—and, on that basis, I had agreed.

Dyas-Elliott is an antisemite whom I have challenged repeatedly in my local Labour party. I banned him from my office, and through his union, the National Union of Domestic Appliances and General Operatives, had his pass taken away at the Labour party conference in 2010. This is what he said in 2010, which led to my first action against him. In a letter to the *Workshop Guardian*, during the general election, he called for an investigation into the motives and machinations of the Zionist fraternity and the conduct and behaviour of the Bilderberg Group. He is an antisemite who repeatedly, in letters to the press and letters to me, put out this vile stuff, and therefore I challenged him. I took him on in meetings, and I banned him, kicked him out of campaigns and stopped him being a candidate.

That is the truth of what happened with Roger Dyas-Elliott, a misogynist criminal and an antisemite, yet this enabler, Kevin Maguire—a national journalist, associate editor of the *Daily Mirror* and correspondent for the *New Statesman*, a press pass holder here and one of the people used by Labour party Front Benchers to put out their message repeatedly—puts this out, and what do I get as a response? Let us quote from Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party forum the next day:

"I enjoyed the too and froing when Mann was accusing a guy of being anti-semitic and racist",

and

"I hate this man!... I'd like to punch him in the face!"

I do not have time to go through the rest, but that one was from Joe Kelsall in a private Facebook group. He was a Labour party member in Sefton, Liverpool, and he is still a Labour party member, despite my complaints. Joe Kelsall is a man who wants to punch me in the face, following the enabling of Maguire.

The enablers of antisemitism are as big a problem as the antisemites, and they are more numerous. It is time the enablers were exposed. I have exposed one: Kevin Maguire—an enabler of racism.

6.32 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): For me, this debate is personal. I am not Jewish, but as a black man I know what it feels like to experience racism of both the individual and the institutional kind. I understand how a racist insinuation is not just offensive, but isolating, making you suddenly feel vulnerable and excluded. I know how the repetition of a well-worn stereotype or

[Clive Lewis]

trope, followed by the inevitable denial that it is racist, can be undermining and exhausting. I know, because I have seen it and felt it, as well as read about it, that hostility to Jewish people and age-old antisemitic stereotypes are becoming more common.

Many people speaking in this debate will have experienced antisemitism at first hand, as we have already heard in some of the distressing testimonies today. As has been stated, it is clear that most of the well-documented rise in antisemitic incidents here and in many other parts of Europe is driven by the alt-right, the far right and the fascist right. They are emboldened by the xenophobic rhetoric of our age to form a sickening new far-right internationalism, with sometimes devastating consequences for all racial minorities.

Did I believe that in 2019 I would wake up to the news that “No blacks” signs had been daubed on the front door of the home of a 10-year-old boy who had just started a new school, or that Islam would be seen as a threat to the British way of life by one third of people in the UK, according to a poll commissioned by the anti-fascist group, HOPE not hate?

I know that racism can take different forms and all of us can hold unconscious biases. In a frank self-admission, George Orwell, writing in 1945, suggested that the starting point for any investigation of antisemitism should be not just condemning others but looking inside ourselves. This is good advice, even today, that I know some people in my party seem to find quite difficult to follow. The fact that the left is opposed to racism in principle does not mean that it is immune to being, consciously or unconsciously, racist or antisemitic in practice. It can be all the more difficult for us to face up to this fact given the extent of unacknowledged racism in other parties, which goes deep.

In the 1930s, assertions of hidden power and wealth were routinely hurled at hundreds of thousands of poor Jewish immigrants living in the slums of London and Manchester. Today, similar projections, conscious or otherwise, can be heard in the repeated association of Jewish people with shadowy conspiracies, often associated with Israel—especially when complaints of antisemitism are made, even when the evidence of it is before our eyes. And it is before our eyes.

The same HOPE not hate report affirms the seriousness of modern antisemitism, online and off, including the very real problem of left-wing antisemitism. Sometimes I hear it said that antisemitism should not be focused on at all in modern Britain as that takes space away from highlighting racism against other groups—as though there is a finite space for this discussion that cannot expand. That can unwittingly reproduce a stereotype of Jews as somehow powerful and privileged even when they are calling out the racism that they experience.

As a black man who has experienced racism all my life, I see the situation very differently: to my mind, closing our eyes to racism against one group only emboldens racism against us all. The only way to combat racism is to show no tolerance to any of it, ever. In that spirit, a few of us have recently formed the new Black, Asian and Jewish Alliance, which we call BAJA. Through our existence, we aim to highlight diversity within our groups as well as between us. Based on the principle of mutual solidarity, we recognise that what

we hold in common is considerable, but we also try to listen and learn from each other about our distinctive experiences.

Above all, we know that racism can be defeated only if we stay united and refuse to be divided by any of the current tensions that swirl around us. As we look around the world today, with the rise of the hard right in the form of Trump, Bolsonaro, Salvini and too many others, we know that tackling the scourge of growing antisemitism, wherever it is found, has rarely been so urgent.

6.36 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Ind): It is a great sorrow that we are once again debating the rise of antisemitism. As a Labour party member for 40 years, now a former member, I am sickened and ashamed that we have seen antisemitism rear its ugly head in British society—and at the core of British politics: in Her Majesty’s official Opposition.

Yesterday, I made the terribly painful decision to resign as a member of the Labour party. I could not remain a member of a political party whose leadership allows Jews to be abused with impunity and the victims of such abuse to be ridiculed and have their motives questioned and integrity called into doubt. It is that antisemitism that is found on the left, and the connection between it and anti-Zionism is what I particularly want to address today.

There is nothing antisemitic about criticising the policies and actions of the Israeli Government—millions of Israelis do so every single day—but there is an undeniable link between antisemitism and anti-Zionism: those who deny the Jewish people’s right to self-determination, who attempt to demonise and delegitimise the world’s only Jewish state and who invoke antisemitic conspiracies accuse Jews of dual loyalty and—most offensive of all—compare Israel’s actions to those of the Nazis during the holocaust. To deny the link does a disservice to the victims of antisemitism and prevents us from tackling evil.

Let me be clear: no one can pretend to be an ally to the Jewish people while denying their right, and only their right, to self-determination in their historic homeland. No one can oppose antisemitism if they also oppose the existence of a state that exists to provide the ultimate safe haven for Jews facing antisemitism. No one can declare themselves to be a lifelong anti-racist if they single out for disproportionate criticism, above and beyond that expected for any other democratic nation, the world’s only Jewish state and its citizens and deny the religious significance of Israel to the Jewish people.

Over the past three years, we have seen in the Labour party how quickly hatred of Israel and attacks on Zionists can morph into vile racism against Jews—whether through repellent myths about the Rothschilds or the sewer of holocaust denial. Those in the current Labour leadership opened this door. They have shamed and demeaned a once-great party. They have allowed its bonds with Israel to be severed, its anti-racist credentials to be shredded and Jews to be driven from its ranks. I can no longer fight for the values that brought me into politics—equality, solidarity and against discrimination—from such a party. I respect my former colleagues—and still my friends—in the Labour party who have made it clear that they will carry on that fight from inside the

Labour party. It needs to happen inside and out. I hope that what I and other colleagues have had to do will be a real wake-up call.

6.40 pm

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (Ind): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan).

In my limited time, I would like to concentrate on just a couple of points. I am not Jewish, but I was talking to a constituent of mine a few months ago, a perfectly ordinary, normal middle-aged lady who is a Brit. I did not even know that she was Jewish, but during the conversation, it became clear that she was. She told me something quite shocking. She said that, with the change in antisemitism over the past couple of years, she and her friends no longer feel safe in the United Kingdom. This was so astonishing and extraordinary that I chanced it a bit and said, "How can you really feel that, considering all the challenges around the rest of the world?" but she was absolutely clear on that. In the ensuing months, I spent time talking to a number of other Jewish British people in Eastbourne with a similar background—they are not into politics or campaigning—and again and again I found that genuine fear.

That brings me to two outstanding speeches, one of which was from my friend, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) who I have known for a long time. He made a very strong point about enablers, which is crucial. The other speech—I am sorry to see that she has left the Chamber—was from the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge). Again, I have known her for over 30 years from before I got into politics. She made a crucial point about how promoting pro-Palestine and pro-Palestinian rights has over the years gone over the line, so that it is no longer a case of, "I disagree with the Israeli Government," but "I disagree with Jews."

How did that happen? Unfortunately, I am old enough to remember the hard left from 30 years ago. I hate to say it, but many of us in the Chamber will know that that was always there in the hard left 30 or 35 years ago; it was just that the hard left then did not have any control. Bluntly, it was ignored. Should something have been done? Perhaps, I do not know, but it was ignored. What has changed—I am afraid this is true, although I do not mean this about every member of the Labour Front Bench—is that a cabal of people I would define, many would define and I suspect colleagues behind me would define as the hard left now controls the Labour party. That very same nonsense—and it is nonsense—openly talked about 30 years ago, but by those who had no power, influence or traction, is now everywhere. It has got into normal, ordinary day-to-day conversation. That is why my constituent—this lovely lady who is a friend of mine in Eastbourne who is British, middle-aged and just happens to be Jewish—feels frightened.

That strand now walks the land, and I do not really know what the Labour party is going to do about it—I really don't. It is different from the hard-right antisemitism that is hundreds of years old. That is thuggish and thick and has been around forever. We could almost take that on. It was easier in a way. But the antisemitism we now have is mainstream with a lot of the supporters of the current Labour party, sadly, and some of its members.

That is a real problem. What I do know is that that type of antisemitism is the canary in the mine. The canary is choking and we really have to deal with it. We have to deal with it now or we will all live to regret it.

6.44 pm

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): Antisemitism is trending again. Antisemitism is rising again. Antisemitism is an attack on Jewish people, and when our Jewish communities speak of the fear that they hold, we must listen. When there is anxiety and anger, we must learn and act on these determinations. Whether we are talking about Macpherson, #MeToo or the motion today, this begins with believing the victim and their powerful testimony. It strikes me as well that, as we consider antisemitism, all too often the haters hate harder when it is a woman, so let me condemn both antisemitism and the misogyny we see.

The endless values that we share bring me here today—values of equality, fairness and social justice. Let me also say that it is sometimes more important to single out the calling-out of antisemitism than it is to simply smooth the issue over with a catch-all view of being against racism—just as sometimes I tell each of my children by name that I love them.

Humbly I say that I have no easy answers, but my own perspective guides me. I am the son of a Church of England minister. I am not Jewish, but my wife is. Her Jewish heritage is one of the many things I love about her. We are raising our young family in the traditions of both our faiths, both our cultures. That pursuit is not borne easily. Time spent with mixed-faith couples before my wife and I got married highlighted to us both the anguish that many people face when love and relationships collide across cultures to form family. I am not here just to defend Jewish people from the rising attacks or to call out antisemitism, though I do both; I want to celebrate and affirm Judaism and Jewish people and the contribution that they make to our society, our country and to my life.

My mixed-heritage family is a picture of the messy, beautiful multiculturalism of our country and of modern Jewry. It is also a portrait of hope—I hope—for a better future. For me, this is not about party; it is primal and my principled, personal belief. Modern love, relationships and family across races, religions and cultures can blur the old lines of religious dogma, intolerance or hate-filled political division. Rooted from here, even the most steely glare of these ugly politics can begin to soften.

6.47 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): This has been a difficult debate to listen to, and it is one we have repeated. This is not the first time that we have had this debate but it is important that we have done so, and I hope that if we have such a debate in a year's time, we are reflecting on a year of progress, particularly in my party. I take no pleasure at all in—in fact, I am very hurt by—the experiences of people in my party and what they have to go through on a regular basis.

I pay tribute to a number of people who have spoken today. My right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) talked about her family history and told us some very human stories. When someone looks at their family tree and goes into the stories of

[*Jim McMahon*]

people from many generations ago, those stories are not distant or abstract. They form part of a person's identity and who they are. When someone reads stories that are so harrowing, it affects them as a person. I know that from my own family, although it is nowhere near comparable with the type of loss and suffering of members of the Jewish community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) spoke about how people's motives are being questioned. If legitimate views that a member of the Jewish community might have are posted online or are stated in the press, they are questioned on a range of motives. People ask, "Why is that being done? In whose name is it being done? Who are you really working for?" and I just find that sickening. I think that the questioning of motive that has infected our political debate is fundamentally damaging for democracy.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) for his outstanding work on the all-party parliamentary group—he has shown real leadership. He told a very personal story about the impact antisemitism had had on his family. We choose to come into politics—we stand for office and we know what comes with that—but we are all hugely protective of our families, their privacy and their right to be normal, non-political people and to live their lives, and when they become the target of abuse in the way he explained, it hurts all of us who believe in common decency and fairness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith) talked about—celebrated, if you like—his life and how special it was. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) said that about 100 members of her family had been affected by the holocaust. I want to mention her in particular. Until a couple of days ago, she was a fellow co-operator in Parliament—one of our finest—and in case any members of the Labour party are celebrating the loss of someone like her from our movement, allow me to say this: we are much, much poorer for not having her part of it, and I am so sorry for what she has had to go through.

I believe in the Labour party. We do not have a right to exist, but I think we have a purpose to exist. There is a reason the Labour party was born, and that need is still very much here, but, as has been explained today in very human terms, we have a lot of soul searching to do—who are we and what are our values? I take responsibility, as does every fair-minded member of the parliamentary Labour party, for trying to address that. That is why I am at the Dispatch Box today—not to apologise for a system that is not fit for purpose or right, or for a party where people feel marginalised and as if they ought not to be a member, but because I believe we must all work together in solidarity to make it the party we want it to be.

We have a lot of work to do, not just to improve processes, not just to say it, but to live and breathe it, and we can only do that through our actions. It is important that the backlog of complaints be dealt with, and additional capacity has been put in, but Members are rightly questioning whether some of the judgments made were the right judgments, given that we ought to be taking a zero-tolerance approach. I apologise to other Members for focusing on the Labour party, but it has been a large part of the debate so it is right that I do.

There is an iconic poster from 1945 that reads: "Now let's win the peace". I reflect on that quite a lot. Many members of my family served in the armed forces, and it matters to me that every generation coming into this place should take on that responsibility. Every day, when I look at the news, when I go on social media, when I see what happens in my own community, I feel we are far from winning the peace. I take a generational responsibility in doing what I can do to win the peace, but at the moment I would say we are falling backwards. When I look at the rise of racism, at how people are being marginalised, at the tone of political debate and how polarised it has become, it does not seem to me that peace is valued or that we understand the sacrifice people made to give us the type of society we hold dear today.

I pay tribute to the work of the CST, the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council and the Shomrim volunteers, who work to protect, educate and make sure we never forget one of the biggest human tragedies in history. This is no theoretical or abstract debate; rather it goes to the core of who we are as a country and a society. I hope she does not mind, but I will conclude by quoting my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth):

"It is time to be counted in the battle to remove antisemitism from the Labour Party, as it is a battle for the heart and soul of the labour movement."

I agree with Ruth.

6.53 pm

James Brokenshire: With the leave of the House, I would like to conclude this extraordinary debate. It is a difficult debate to summarise, however, because we have had such wide-ranging, heartfelt and painful contributions that have underlined the chilling aspect of antisemitism and how, while this place is a bastion of free speech, actually that free speech is at risk from bullying and intimidation. That was hard to listen to. It gives us a warning that antisemitism is serious. I quoted the statistics in opening the debate, but it does not give us the colour or sense of reality that we were given by so many of the appalling examples that hon. Members underlined in their contributions.

Given the wide-ranging nature of the debate and the passion and honesty with which hon. Members have spoken, it feels slightly invidious to draw attention to specific contributions, but I was struck by the contribution of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth). Standing here at the Dispatch Box, I can see the Jo Cox coat of arms just above the hon. Lady and am struck by that sense of there being more in common than divides us, and yet this afternoon we have highlighted a lot of division.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) highlighted the theme of family history, which was mentioned by a number of colleagues. That history matters to us all. She rightly said that she will not be intimidated—I am going back to the issue of freedom of speech. She made the point, as did the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North, that she is not going anywhere, and nor should she. They or any hon. Member should be able to make the points they wish to make in the House as they have done.

The comments of the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) were equally notable. She talked about anger and anguish, which came through in

a number of contributions, probably most notably in the contribution of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). I pay tribute to him for his courage and bravery and for the leadership he has shown through his work and the all-party parliamentary group.

That sense of leadership was a theme in the debate. We need to show leadership as the Government, but equally all leaders of political parties need to show it. I deliberately opened by saying that we should not make this a partisan debate, but people outside the Chamber might wish to reflect on the powerful contributions that have been made by so many this afternoon.

Education and learning the lessons of the holocaust was a strong theme. Our holocaust national memorial and learning centre has been widely supported. It matters that it will be here, next to this seat of democracy, because of the warning it provides to us all. We may take comfort in having a democratic society, but we cannot take it for granted. A number of hon. Members gave that warning this afternoon.

The challenges of the online world were mentioned by a number of colleagues. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) also mentioned the education theme. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) spoke of the regret she felt at having to make the speech she made this afternoon. It is a regret that we are here today to debate this again. We have heard the message: we have had so much talking, but it is now about action more than words. We all need to instil that sense of action within us.

I conclude with the words of the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis. At a recent sitting of the Home Affairs Committee, he drew a black dot on piece of paper to represent the stain of antisemitism and said:

“The white area represents the situation of Jews in the UK today. It is great to be Jewish in Britain and we are proud to be British. This is a truly wonderful country. But, in that context, we’ve got a problem. It used to be smaller, but it has now got bigger, and it could get bigger and bigger unless we deal with it effectively.”

As long as I am in this role or involved in public life, that is what I will continue to do. It is our responsibility to shrink that black dot. I hope that, by virtue of what we have done today, we will help to turn it into a full-stop.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered antisemitism in modern society.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 7 to 9 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ANIMALS)

That the draft Import of and Trade in Animals and Animal Products (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 17 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ANIMALS)

That the draft Trade in Animals and Related Products (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Benchmarks (Amendment and Transitional Provision) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 24 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS)

That the draft Official Listing of Securities Prospectus and Transparency (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 21 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 11 to 14 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (PUBLIC PROCUREMENT)

That the draft Public Procurement (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 December 2018, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION)

That the draft Environment and Wildlife (Legislative Functions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 8 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (DATA PROTECTION)

That the draft Data Protection, Privacy and Electronic Communications (Amendments etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 11 January, be approved.

CHARITIES

That the draft Small Charitable Donations Act (Amendment) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 14 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT)

That the draft Employment Rights (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 14 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (TERMS AND
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT)

That the draft Employment Rights (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 14 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (TERMS AND
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT)

That the draft Employment Rights (Amendment) (EU Exit) (No. 2) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 31 October 2018, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (TERMS AND
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT)

That the draft Employment Rights (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) (EU Exit) (No. 2) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 31 October 2018, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES
AND MARKETS)

That the draft Financial Services Contracts (Transitional and Saving Provision) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 15 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 20 to 24 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Local Government (Structural and Boundary Changes) (Supplementary Provisions and Miscellaneous Amendments) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Equivalence Determinations for Financial Services and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 17 January, be approved.

PUBLIC SERVICE PENSIONS

That the draft Judicial Pensions and Fee-Paid Judges' Pension Schemes (Amendment) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 7 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ANIMALS)

That the draft Equine (Records, Identification and Movement) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 10 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CIVIL AVIATION)

That the draft Air Traffic Management (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 28 January, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Knife Crime in Edmonton

7.3 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton. The petition has over 200 signatures including from local businesses, the local community and our faith leaders.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of London,

Declares that on Tuesday 18th December Edmonton saw a young person lose his life to gun crime; further that in November there were gun and knife crime incidents in our area; further that according to the BBC around 132 lives have been lost in the capital over the last year; noting that this is too many lives lost with too many of them in Edmonton; and further that this has inevitably led our local community to feel unsafe, worried and concerned for our young people.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Home Secretary to urgently increase resources for both the Police and Youth Services to ensure that our young people and communities can live in a safe and positive environment.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002426]

Horse Tethering

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)

7.5 pm

Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): I am delighted to have secured this Adjournment debate on the practice of the long-term tethering of horses. Tethering is the practice of attaching horses to a stake in the ground using a collar, or sometimes just a piece of rope around the neck, that is then fastened to a chain. The animal that once defined our great nation is now being left at risk of neglect, cruelty and abuse because of loopholes in the very legislation that was written to protect it. This debate follows the Break the Chain campaign run by the excellent HorseWorld trust, a leading equine rescue charity in the south-west, just next door to my constituency. The Break the Chain campaign aims to amend the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to include restrictions on the tethering of horses.

Traditionally, tethering has been used as a short-term method of keeping horses, but it has transformed into a method of retaining horses without having to purchase land, by using public or private grassland, often by the side of busy roads, for grazing. Because the tethered animal can be moved quickly, it is easy for people to tether a horse on land that does not belong to them and then move the animal before the authorities can identify the landowner or the owner of the animal. This results in it being virtually impossible to monitor the welfare of these animals, leaving around 3,500 horses in a state of potentially compromised welfare with little or no chance of intervention from charities.

There are a number of reasons why there has been such a large public response to the public campaign. In my constituency and the constituencies that surround it in the west of England, there is a big problem with tethering. There have been incidents where horses tethered by the roadside have been visible from the council offices in Yate, but despite this being a clear breach of the Animal Welfare Act, it could not be acted upon because the law does not state explicitly that tethering is a welfare concern. Unfortunately, because these horses are not protected by law, most cases of tethered horses that HorseWorld gets called to do not end well. The horses are simply moved before the Control of Horses Act 2015 can take effect. One incident saw a tethered horse break free near a large shopping centre at Cribbs Causeway in south Gloucestershire, next to a major road. By the time the horse was rescued and able to be seen by a vet, the injuries that it had sustained, most likely from having been hit by a car, meant that it had to be put down.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important subject to the Adjournment debate tonight. The British Horse Society is on record as stating that although many horses will thrive on a diet consisting only of grass, it is vital that tethered horses are moved regularly to ensure a constant supply of fresh food, and that during the winter months or at any other time when grass is scarce, additional work and feeding needs to be carried out. Tethering is clearly not a long-term solution for any horse, and this has to be looked at. Does he agree that the change to the legislation that the Minister has a chance to bring in would be a way of addressing the issue?

Luke Hall: It is a genuine pleasure to be intervened on by the hon. Gentleman in an Adjournment debate, and he is absolutely right. I will come on to some examples of how long-term tethering has been detrimental and caused death to animals in a number of cases. The nature of tethering means that it does not require large amounts of land, so horses can end up tethered in inner-city locations. A pony in south Bristol spent years tied to a tree on a grass verge and was harassed by local children and frequently escaped on to roads. The reality is that that was not a one-off.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Do the majority of such incidents involve horses or ponies owned by Travellers who are just moving through?

Luke Hall: That can often be the case. If we are looking to change the legislation, we must ensure that we stamp out tethering and animal welfare abuses regardless of who owns the animal, but my hon. Friend is right to highlight that point.

As I said, such incidents are a regular occurrence. In 2016, a pony was found tethered among fly-tipped rubbish. It was so badly tangled up in a discarded bicycle that it could not even stand. This pony, which had a life-threatening injury, was lost to the authorities after the owner simply moved it and tethered it in another location before they could arrive. Sadly, just before Christmas last year, a member of the public came across a pony that had been tethered in a wooded area. The tether had become tangled around the surrounding trees and, in a desperate effort to break free, the one-year-old pony had strangled himself and lay dead in the mud at the end of his tether. It is therefore clear that the practice desperately requires stricter regulation.

HorseWorld, the charity that started the campaign, was spurred into action by the alarming case of a mare that gave birth to her foal while she was tethered. Unable to protect her foal from the other horses who roamed free in the same field, the mare became seriously distressed. Of course, protection of the young is one of our most basic instincts. Research into tethered horses in Wales, where tethering is rife, showed that 10% of tethered horses had young foals. Those are just a few examples of the horrors associated with long-term tethering, but because tethering is not restricted by law, people can tether horses unchecked beyond the reach of the law, resulting in tethered horses reaching despicable stages of neglect before they can be rescued.

I want to touch on the current regulations and legislation surrounding equine welfare and explain why they are not protecting tethered horses in practice. The Minister may refer to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs code of practice, which acts as a guide to safely tethering horses, but the code is not being adhered to in reality, as demonstrated by an investigation conducted in south Wales in 2014 by the excellent University of Bristol's veterinary school, which gave five main conclusions.

First, the code of practice states that water should be made available on a regular basis in a spill-proof container, but the research concluded that up to 90% of animals were not given water regularly. Secondly, the code states that animals should, as a minimum, have shelter from the sun and wind and that the area should be well drained in the event of heavy rain, but the research tells us that no shelter was provided in over 80% of cases.

[*Luke Hall*]

Thirdly, animals should be given the freedom to exercise off the tether for a reasonable period at least once a day. In reality, however, less than 3% of horses spent more than five minutes a day off the tether, and no one would argue that five minutes is a reasonable amount of time. Fourthly, according to the code of practice, the tethering site should not contain anything that might injure the animal, but the reality is that sites contained potential hazards in 50% of cases. Fifthly, the code states that tethered horses require a high level of supervision, with inspections

“no less frequently than every 6 hours”.

However, it was found that only a third of horses were visited that regularly. While we have a code of practice, it is clearly not being adhered to, and the fact that an individual can move an animal before they ever reach the stage of being prosecuted renders the code of practice redundant.

Bob Stewart: If a horse is tethered and left, the area around the tether will soon have no grass and will become muddy if it is wet, hugely damaging the horse. That is one of the other problems of tethering.

Luke Hall: My hon. Friend is right about damage to the environment, and I urge colleagues to look at some of the photos of horses that have been treated so badly. I mentioned the pony in south Bristol that was tied to a tree, and the surrounding area was a small stretch of grass between a pavement and the road. Yes, there was huge damage to the local environment, but there was damage to the pony, too.

The code of practice informs us that tethering is not a suitable long-term method of managing horses, as does the RSPCA, the British Horse Society, World Horse Welfare and Redwings, but absolutely nothing can be done legally to prevent someone from tethering a horse for its whole life.

Further, long-term tethering directly infringes the five freedoms set out by the Animal Welfare Act 2006: the need for a suitable environment; the need for a suitable diet; the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

A tethered horse is not free to express natural behaviours. A horse that is free to roam will, on average, walk or run 10.6 miles a day, and the reality is that a tethered horse can come nowhere near that. As my many colleagues who keep horses can attest to, horses are flight animals. A horse's most basic instinct is to flee from danger, which tethering does not allow. Tethering restricts a horse's most natural behaviour.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. A large number of my constituents who have seen horses tethered locally have contacted me to express their concern about these issues.

Luke Hall: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. We are seeing horses being tethered all across the country, potentially leaving them open to neglect, cruelty and abuse, and potentially posing a danger to the people around them, too.

Tethering is not deemed enough of a breach of the Animal Welfare Act to allow horse charities to intervene. A tethered horse also does not have the freedom to interact with its own species, as the Act says it should. Leaving horses isolated has been shown to increase stress levels and stress-related hormones, which can cause them to display stereotypical behaviours that cause physical and psychological harm.

Stereotypical behaviours are strongly linked to isolated horses; stabled horses tend to perform behaviours that engage with the stable around them, such as crib biting or weaving. Horses that are tethered long term have a total lack of environmental stimuli, so they are much more likely to develop stereotypical behaviours such as pacing or self-mutilation. This clearly raises questions about the clarity of the existing legislation and regulations on the grounds for removing a horse from a tether and on the capacity of law enforcers to act.

Long-term tethering is in direct conflict with legislation, yet in many instances authorities have not felt that the Animal Welfare Act is strong enough grounds to rescue horses, despite the obvious suffering. It is therefore my belief, and the belief of the charity that initiated this campaign, that the Act needs to be amended to state explicitly what constitutes inappropriate tethering.

One of the reasons why this is such an emotive subject is the location of tethered horses. As I said earlier, the main purpose of long-term tethering is free grazing, so horses end up on any strip of grass available, with the roadside, grass verges and even the middle of roundabouts, as we have seen in south Gloucestershire, being popular choices. It goes without saying that this is not remotely appropriate. Horses are easily spooked by traffic, and if the tether were to fail, there would be a loose horse on the road.

Advances in equine and animal science mean that we are much more able to understand what constitutes poor welfare, but our laws have not caught up with that deeper understanding. When I met HorseWorld staff, who are so passionate about what they do, I was told about a pregnant mare that escaped her tether and got on to a busy A road, where she narrowly avoided being hit by a lorry. Police had to attend the scene to monitor the horse until HorseWorld could assemble a team at 3 am. If the tethering laws were stricter, the lives of the mare and her unborn foal would not have been risked, a lorry driver would not have had to make an emergency stop on a main road and numerous hours of police time would not have been wasted.

That leads me on to my second point, which has been raised by other equine welfare charities in a number of reports: only appointed animal welfare officers or police constables have the authority to seize an animal. However, councils are in no way mandated to employ an animal welfare officer, so many choose not to do so. Our understanding is that as many as 40% of councils do not employ an animal welfare officer. In these areas, the police are the only organisation that has the power to rescue an animal from a situation where its welfare is compromised. I therefore ask the Minister to update us on what steps he is taking to gain a deeper understanding of the depth of the problem. The result of this situation is that police time is being spent attending horse rescues, which often just involve hours spent holding a horse at the side of the road when it had got on to the road. Only a police constable, once contacted, can authorise a

charity to remove a horse. It is clear from written parliamentary questions I have tabled that the Government have no idea about the amount of police time that is spent dealing with these incidents. Clearly, police time can be better spent in the community. Having clarity over who should be dealing with equine welfare complaints will reduce the time that it takes to deal with them and will save the lives of animals. The councils that do employ animal welfare officers need to ensure that they are trained to handle horses. That could easily be achieved by collaborating with voluntary organisations.

Let me now address what needs to change. In the past, DEFRA Ministers have said that the current legislation appropriately meets the needs of tethered horses. The 19,000 people who signed a petition to get the tethered horses rescued from Rovers Way in Cardiff would disagree. The 12,000 people who have emailed their MPs about getting tethering laws tightened would disagree. I also think that all the experts who have been in touch with me and the voluntary organisations calling for stricter laws on tethering would also disagree.

There are therefore four changes that I would like to see incorporated into the 2006 Act to improve the lives of horses. The first is that there should be a 24-hour legal limit on how long horses can be tethered for. That is important, because DEFRA's code of practice states that long-term tethering is inappropriate. That needs to be clarified, backed up and given status in law. The second is that there needs to be a complete ban on tethering horses on the roadside or in dangerous locations. The third is that if a tether is someone's only method of keeping an animal, they should not be allowed to keep that animal. The fourth is to make it a mandatory duty for local councils to employ an animal welfare officer or to ensure that arrangements are in place with neighbouring authorities to ensure that those officers are in place.

There is currently too much room for interpretation within the legislation. It needs to be clear-cut that long-term tethering infringes on equine welfare, leaving horses at risk of harm and suffering. We need to give the relevant authorities the means and confidence to rescue horses that desperately need protection. We need to step up and take action to protect these most majestic and iconic animals. Making these changes will protect thousands of horses across our country. Minister, please help us and break the chain.

7.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) on securing this debate, and I pay tribute to his campaigning activity in this House, on this issue and on many others, and to the hard work he does in the House.

I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the issues relating to horse tethering. I know it is an issue of concern to many, not only because of the important welfare issues involved, but because of the visibility of tethered horses in our countryside and by our roads and the many challenges that can arise if tethering is not undertaken properly and in line with established guidance and good practice.

As the Minister with responsibility for animal welfare, I am clear that we have to uphold, and continue to drive up, our already high standards of welfare in this country,

including in relation to the tethering of animals, and I applaud my hon. Friend for securing this debate and highlighting the issues that can arise. As he has so clearly set out, some people are not tethering their horses appropriately and are causing these poor animals distress and suffering. I was horrified to hear of the cases he set out of the suffering that poor tethering practice can cause our much loved horses and other equines. The practices in the examples he gave must be stamped out so that these noble animals can live without the threat of cruelty or a life of misery. I applaud the work that HorseWorld is doing to look after these horses, and I welcome the aims of its effective Break the Chain campaign which focuses on ending all inappropriate and long-term tethering of horses, and in particular on seeing a ban on the tethering of equines for longer than 24 hours.

As my hon. Friend clearly pointed out, it is an offence under section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to fail to provide for an animal's welfare. As he mentioned, that means that a person who cares for an animal—whether it is a pet, a working animal or a farm animal—must provide for its five welfare needs, as set out in the Act. Those needs are a suitable environment to live in; a healthy diet, including fresh, clean water; the ability to exhibit normal behaviours; appropriate company—for example, some animals need to live in social groups; and protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease. Section 4 of the Act goes even further and makes it an offence to cause a protected animal any unnecessary suffering—commonly known as animal cruelty.

Bob Stewart: The Minister mentioned the requirement for horses to live among their own kind. We can vividly understand how difficult it must be for a lone horse. Were a man or woman put in a herd of horses on our own for 24 hours, we would understand how lonely that can be. It is lonely for a horse, too.

David Rutley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The aim of the Government's work in this policy area is to highlight that tethering should be for the short term. We want these animals to be as socialised as possible.

The 2006 Act is backed up by a number of statutory codes of practice, including the code for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids. The code provides owners and keepers with information on how to meet their animals' welfare needs and includes a specific section on how to tether horses and other animals covered by the code. Although it is not a specific offence to breach a provision of the code, if proceedings are brought against someone, the court will look at whether they complied with the statutory code in deciding whether they have committed an offence. That makes the code a key document in relation to prosecutions for animal welfare offences. We are very grateful for the input and assistance from the British Horse Council and the Horse Trust in particular and for their advice last year on the changes we made to the code, which was updated in April 2018.

I should clarify that tethering is not a banned activity, as there are circumstances in which tethering may avoid a greater risk of harm arising—for example, if a horse strayed into a place of danger. That point was made by World Horse Welfare in the statement issued this week, which said:

[David Rutley]

“We are concerned that banning tethering could lead to more horses kept indoors where their welfare cannot be monitored, or left to wander freely, endangering both themselves and the general public.”

Tethering is defined under the code as “securing an animal by an appropriately attached chain, to a centre point or anchorage, causing it to be confined to a desired area.”

Furthermore, the code states that tethering “is not a suitable method of long-term management of an animal,” but “may be useful as an exceptional short-term method of animal management”.

I think that goes a long way towards addressing the first and third changes that my hon. Friend proposed.

Although tethering is not prevented or illegal under the code, the code does include detailed specific advice on tethering and how it should be done properly. It details which animals are not suitable for tethering and provides advice on a suitable and appropriate site—for example, a site should not allow the horse access to a public highway or public footpaths. That helps to address the second change proposed by my hon. Friend. To tether a horse in such a way that it can physically be on a pavement or road is clearly contrary to the code and therefore open to enforcement action.

In addition to the statutory welfare code, other organisations provide advice on tethering. For example, World Horse Welfare has drawn attention to the code of practice produced by the National Equine Welfare Council specifically on tethering. In addition, the British Horse Society has produced a helpful leaflet that is available online and provides advice to anyone with concerns. The Redwings equine welfare charity also has useful advice on tethering, as does the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which has also produced guidance on tethering. Our concern today, though, is not with necessary tethering that is undertaken in the short term, in the right way and in exceptional circumstances, to avoid a greater risk of harm arising; it is with avoidable and unacceptable tethering.

Under the 2006 Act, local authorities have powers to investigate concerns about the welfare of animals and if necessary to seize them—if they are suffering, for example. They can also prosecute if someone is neglecting an animal in their care. In addition, the way the Act is drafted means that anyone can bring forward a prosecution under the Act, and it is on this basis that the RSPCA prosecutes many hundreds of people each year for animal cruelty or neglect. It is important that we all recognise the important work the RSPCA does in this area.

Those convicted of such crimes under the Act can be subject to an unlimited fine or imprisonment for up to six months. I am pleased to say that the Government have announced that they are increasing the maximum custodial penalty for animal cruelty from six months to five years of imprisonment. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will be very aware that the five-year penalty is already in place in Northern Ireland and we look forward to having it in England, too.

If anyone is concerned about how a horse or other animal has been tethered, they should report the matter either to the relevant local authority or to the RSPCA, which can investigate and if necessary take the matter further. If a horse or other animal is found not to be tethered appropriately, that could lead to a prosecution under the 2006 Act.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate mentioned the important role of local authorities in this area and the need for them to appoint animal welfare officers. Local authorities have strong powers to enforce welfare controls and often work in partnership with the RSPCA or other welfare charities, or indeed with other local authorities that have expertise in horse management.

Enforcement can be targeted according to local priorities and needs. In some areas, for example, horse abandonment or poor tethering practice might be an issue. In others, it may be non-existent. We encourage all interested parties to work together at local level to use the available powers to address the problem of abandoned or incorrectly tethered horses. Local authorities have powers under the 2006 Act to appoint welfare inspectors, as my hon. Friend pointed out, and I encourage them to do so to meet the needs of residents and equines in their area.

Bob Stewart: The Minister refers to reporting to local authorities. A weekend is a long time, and local authorities close down. I should have thought that reporting it to the police might result in more action.

David Rutley: Local authorities often have emergency contact numbers, and the RSPCA can give a 24/7—or at least seven day a week—response. I think my hon. Friend’s concerns are addressed.

I am conscious that, in the short time I have left to speak, it is also important to highlight that the Control of Horses Act 2015 is also relevant. It was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) with support from the Government and introduced more flexible options for the management of unlawfully placed or abandoned horses—often known as fly-grazing horses—some of which might be tethered. It has been welcomed by landowners, local authorities, countryside bodies and animal welfare charities.

In summary, the appropriate tethering of horses is an important issue that the Government are taking action to address. We have put a number of protections in the 2006 Act, the code for the welfare of horses and the 2015 Act. The strong arguments made today and the concerns that have been raised mean that I shall call for a meeting with key stakeholders in the months ahead to see what more can be done in sharing and documenting best practice on horse tethering and ensuring that messages on best practice are more actively disseminated to horse owners. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate on these matters in the months ahead and I am sure that that will help us to deliver animal welfare at a continued high standard now and in the years ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

7.34 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 20 February 2019

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

Police, Fire and Rescue Services: Funding Reductions

9.30 am

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of reductions in funding of police, fire and rescue services.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I declare an interest as a member of a number of trade union groups, including the Fire Brigades Union parliamentary group. I start by placing on the record my appreciation for and gratitude to our police officers, firefighters and, indeed, NHS staff. I am sure that those sentiments will be shared by all Members.

The focus of the debate relates to the funding of the police and fire services, as pressures affecting those services in my constituency have been more acute in recent months. However, I in no way seek to downplay the funding challenges facing our health service and, in particular, the ambulance service. In many respects, they face similar pressures.

The last Labour Government had a well-known policy; it was a kind of catchphrase: “Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”. And they had a proud record. Indeed, finance, resources and police numbers were all increased. Being tough on crime was not just a slogan. It meant more visible policing, a priority being placed on community policing, intelligence gathering and the detection of crime. I well recall attending PACT—Police and Communities Together—meetings at which there were consultations with community safety partnerships and local priorities were determined. There was a real sense of partnership.

In 2010, when Labour left office, there was a record number of police officers; it was in excess of 143,000. However, in the last decade, we have seen a systematic reduction in funding and what amounts to a downgrading of the police service. In every community, we can see the effects of the missing police officers who once patrolled our streets.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. He is absolutely right. Greater Manchester police have lost nearly 2,000 police officers since 2010, and across south Manchester the problem is that the police are so stretched that they struggle to fulfil their duties, including proper investigation of the crimes that are happening. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the biggest effects of the reduction is a loss of confidence among the local community that crimes will be properly investigated, and that that is not the fault of the police?

Grahame Morris: Trust and relationships are built over many years. Sadly, the impact of sustained funding cuts over nine or 10 years has been that much of the good work from the partnership arrangements, and often valuable intelligence, have been lost. It will take a colossal effort to regain that.

There are many implications from having fewer police officers. I am thinking of the reassurance that comes from seeing a police officer talking to residents in Peterlee town centre in my constituency, seeing officers walking down Church Street—a rare occurrence in the current climate—or community police officers gathering intelligence to combat drug dealing or engaging young people to tackle antisocial behaviour.

It is the view of many that the Conservative Government have abandoned their support for law and order by cutting more than 20,000 police officers, taking us back to numbers that we have not seen since the 1980s. Crime is now rising as a result. In my own policing area, Durham, the number of police officers is down by 25% since 2010; we have lost 360 police officers. The National Audit Office report on the financial sustainability of police forces identifies Durham as having lost more resources than any other provincial force between 2010 and 2018-19, with its funding from central Government cut by one third.

I hope that the Minister will join me in acknowledging that, despite every funding challenge being placed before Durham constabulary, credit must go to Chief Constable Mike Barton, Police and Crime Commissioner Ron Hogg and all the officers, staff and support staff of Durham constabulary. It has been rated as the only outstanding force in the country for the past three years, and has the highest crime detection rate in England and Wales. It has endeavoured to overcome its difficulties. Nevertheless, the fact that we have fewer police officers is manifest, and the consequences are there for everyone to see.

I want to say something about Grenfell. The County Durham and Darlington fire and rescue service is experiencing the same financial pressures as the police in my constituency. Before I move on to the circumstances that apply in my constituency, I want to comment on the Channel 4 “Dispatches” episode that aired on Monday night. It was called “Grenfell: Did the Fire Brigade Fail?” Unfortunately, the episode had the same flaw as some of the questioning in the Grenfell inquiry, and was blinkered from the wider context of the incident that led to the dreadful loss of 73 lives because it focused solely on the night of the tragedy.

On 14 June 2017, the London fire brigade was confronted with a fire spreading at an unprecedented rate. The crews’ experience and training would have taught them that, in a high-rise building, a fire would be contained within a flat in an individual concrete unit built to contain the fire. In such cases, it is clear why a policy of “stay put” would work. On that night, as the fire developed, the crews on the ground had to make decisions in that moment of pressure, panic and uncertainty. I ask everyone to consider what they would do in that moment, with a fire spreading rapidly in an unexpected manner, with lives being lost in front of them, watching colleagues and friends entering a building in the belief that they might not return. Are we to expect a fire chief on the ground instinctively to change established policy and procedures that had been ingrained into the service through training, and to develop new strategies on the spot?

To scapegoat the firefighters—the men and women who bravely risk their lives in a service whose purpose is to preserve life—is nothing short of a scandal. It will not get us any nearer finding those responsible for the

[*Grahame Morris*]

tragedy. In the opinion of many people, including me, the fire service and the firefighters did not fail. The building and the policy failed. Policy fails when faulty and unsafe electrical appliances are not tested, when building regulations fail and when substandard windows do not contain the fire. A local authority fails when the cheap cladding that was used to wrap the high-rise building is actually made of flammable materials. Business fails when the companies that installed the cladding and produced it do not act when their product fails to meet safety standards.

It is easy to attack the fire service for decisions made in a moment of extreme pressure, but at some point those who made the decisions with time and forethought that placed residents in a dangerous building will have to be held to account. Perhaps that is not for this debate, but that programme raised such questions that I felt that I had to put something on the record.

I am offended when the fire service and firefighters are unfairly attacked. I have seen that in my constituency. County Durham and Darlington fire and rescue service is currently consulting on changes, as it is trying to manage excessive Government cuts. It has set out a number of options and is asking the public for their views. I have never met a fire chief or a firefighter who does not want to recruit more firefighters. The barrier to recruiting more firefighters is finance, which is determined by central Government, combined with the local authority precept. Our problem is that we are being systematically underfunded, and as a result, the fire service in our area is being downgraded. The Minister may disagree, but how can the loss of 11,000 firefighter posts nationally—one in five posts—be described as anything other than a downgrade of the service?

The scale of cuts to the fire service is nothing less than a national scandal. County Durham and Darlington fire and rescue service has lost 58% of its Government funding since 2012. In the current four-year settlement, its Government funding will reduce from £10.9 million to £8.9 million, and Government support for new fire appliances and other vital equipment has been almost totally axed. Hon. Members may recall that, some years ago, we were actually encouraged to develop resilience and to acquire equipment, particularly pumping equipment and boats, which might not be used so much in our area but could support neighbouring brigades during flooding incidents.

Our own chief fire officer in Durham, Stuart Errington, described a £1.3 million stealth cut, stressing:

“I’m not worried about PFI, I’m worried about capital spending.”

I place on the record my thanks to Stuart and to our firefighters for the work they do under the most difficult circumstances. I know from my conversations with the chief fire officer that he has raised concerns with the Minister about cuts and their implications for public safety. He said to me:

“I think everyone thought the cuts would stop after four years.”

He added:

“I’m still lobbying with the Home Office really hard to stop the cuts, because we’re getting to the point where we’re going to see some really big cuts, which will increase the risk to the public.”

I ask Ministers to look at the cuts to the police and to the fire and rescue service and to recognise that they have gone too far and are now endangering the public. The idea that fire services covering Seaham and Peterlee in my constituency could be reduced, at a time when they are actually dealing with more incidents, defies all logic and common sense. It makes the likelihood of death and injury greater, which cannot be acceptable.

I ask the Minister to address funding cuts. One issue in Durham is that the precept is not an effective means of raising finance. As a relatively deprived area, we have a low council tax base. Some 55% of households in County Durham and Darlington—it is more in my constituency—are classed as band A, whereas nationally a typical property is classed as band D. That limits the capacity to increase funding for the fire and rescue authority via the precept, compared with more affluent areas.

An example used by my own police and crime commissioner is that, if Thames Valley police increased its precept by the same amount as Durham, it would raise £17 million a year more. At some point we will have to question the sustainability of the precept as a means of financing both the police service and the fire and rescue service, particularly in the current climate, where the principle of resource equalisation—that more affluent areas should provide support to less affluent areas—which has stood since the second world war, seems to have been abandoned. We increasingly see a postcode lottery in resources and funding.

I point out to the Minister that the demands on policing and fire and rescue services—particularly in areas of high deprivation, such as mine—are complex and need to be funded appropriately. That will require the Government to recognise the needs of communities like mine and the limited ability of local areas to raise the necessary funding via the precept.

9.45 am

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (*Grahame Morris*) on securing this important debate. We are discussing some of the most important services in our constituencies—people who are there to keep us safe and who come to our rescue when we are in peril. I am pleased to put on the record my thanks to the police and fire services in West Yorkshire. Regrettably, the lives of the people who work in those services are being made harder by the Government’s decisions. Ultimately, resources are the burning issue.

Our police have to do more work than ever before. Most hon. Members will be familiar with complaints in their inboxes about illegal moped use and related antisocial behaviour, but I am now receiving a growing number of complaints about fighting, threatening behaviour, drug dealing and armed robberies. Violent crime is increasing in West Yorkshire and it feels as though robberies and burglaries are becoming more common. Regrettably, there is also an ongoing investigation into historical child sexual exploitation in north Kirklees.

In such circumstances, one would rightfully expect an increase in our police numbers and resources, so words cannot fully explain my frustration that West Yorkshire police is about to enter its ninth consecutive year of

real-terms cuts. West Yorkshire has lost 1,100 police officers and 152 police community support officers, and its overall budget has been reduced by £113 million since 2010. Between 2013 and 2018, there was a mind-boggling 227% rise in violent crime—the largest rise in the country.

It goes without saying that the visibility of officers has reduced, and local anger and blame is increasingly put on the shoulders of the police. We will all have experience of constituents who have been victims of crime and complained about response times or, worse, given up calling the police altogether.

That gets worse when there is a spate of crimes. In Birstall in my constituency, a number of small local businesses have been the victim of repeated burglaries, which put livelihoods at stake and drive local people to distraction. My mum used to have a café in that community, and if it had been burgled, that would have been the end of her business. These people's businesses are hanging by a thread because of the criminality of thugs. However, I am left in little doubt that if the police were able, they would have a greater presence in communities such as Birstall, Gomersal and Cleckheaton. That is why the Labour party's pledge to employ a new police officer for every community is important and resonates with victims of crime.

We cannot wait for that, however. People deserve to have faith in their police, and businesses need to know that their premises are secure for the good of our local high streets. The Government missed another opportunity in the most recent funding announcement, but they cannot continually leave communities such as mine out in the cold.

The debate about the resources of emergency services often focuses on the police, for good reason, as I have mentioned, but our fire services do inspiring work too. They have not been exempt from the harsh reality of austerity and continue to suffer. Hon. Members may have recently read in the news about a large domestic explosion in Batley in my constituency. It was an exceptional circumstance that received an exceptional response from the fire service. No fewer than 10 fire engines from across West Yorkshire were quickly on the scene and they dealt with the fire swiftly and professionally. I remain impressed that even when resources and numbers are tight, the fire service manages to be there when we need it most.

Having viewed the figures provided by the Fire Brigades Union, I am concerned that we will reach a tipping point where the cuts become too much to handle. Between 2010 and 2018, West Yorkshire fire service has faced massive cuts, which has led to 572—33%—fewer firefighters. By 2020 the overall national budget for fire services will have been nearly halved.

Our police and fire services are an absolute credit to our country. They constantly work hard for us and run towards danger when we run away, but we cannot take them for granted. For too long, all they have known are budget cuts and ever-tightening resources. I encourage everyone in this House to spend time, if they can, out on the frontline with both police and firefighters, as I have, to see the pressures that our brave men and women have to cope with. If austerity is over, it is vital that we start supporting the services immediately and guarantee that the fire and rescue services will suffer no further cuts to their funding.

I have several asks for the Minister. Will he please look again at the precept that unfairly hits communities such as Batley and Spen in the north? Will the Government guarantee future funding beyond 2019-20 for the increased employers' cost for the firefighters pension scheme? With the firefighters not having any real pay rise in the past eight years, will the Government make funding available so that firefighters' pay can at least keep pace with inflation? Will the Government now acknowledge that West Yorkshire in particular needs extra support for its police to deal with the exceptional rise in crime in order to ensure that people and my constituents feel safe as they go about their daily business?

9.51 am

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hosie. It will come as no surprise to anybody in this place that emergency services feel stretched; it is extremely challenging for them to operate within the constraints of nearly a decade of austerity, and that is the context of the debate today. The link between austerity and different types of crime has been well established. There is the global context of an increased risk of terrorist attacks, and forces across the UK are now also preparing for a no-deal Brexit. It is a perfect storm, and it can be remedied only with sustained investment from the UK Government.

The Scottish Government have been instrumental in ensuring that Scotland is protected from the austerity cuts that emergency services have faced in the rest of the UK. The Scottish Parliament does not have all the powers we require to increase our revenues in the way my colleagues and I would like, but we can make spending decisions that lead to much better outcomes for the people of Scotland.

Police numbers in Scotland are up by more than 5% since the Scottish National party took power at Holyrood in 2007. That is despite the wider context of nearly a decade of austerity cuts from the UK Government. In the same period, police numbers in England and Wales are down by nearly 14%. The headcount in Scotland is 17,175 officers, which is still 941 full-time equivalent police officers, or 5.8%, more than the figure we inherited when we came into office, which is significant. In September 2018, there were 32 officers per 10,000 people in Scotland, compared with 21 officers per 10,000 in England and Wales. That reflects not only our geography, but investment in our service, which needs to be protected, given the issues that have emerged in England around knife crime and so on.

The Scottish Government do not have the powers to mitigate absolutely everything, and emergency services are increasingly concerned about the impact of leaving the European Union. Police Scotland has said that a no-deal Brexit could have numerous consequences, such as officers being deployed elsewhere and a considerable risk of harm to the public if there were incidents of civil unrest. Nobody wants to see that, particularly not in Scotland, where we did not vote for Brexit, but we are at the end of the supply chain for many things, and if supplies start to run out, it could have a significant impact in terms of civil unrest.

I am absolutely appalled that our emergency services are having to squander public resources on preparing for civil unrest and other eventualities associated with

[*Alison Thewliss*]

crashing out of the EU without a deal. It is entirely within the Government's gift to take no deal off the table and offer reassurances to those on the frontline that such a catastrophe can be avoided. The Government have allowed internal politics within the Tory party to escape into the lives of ordinary citizens, and Scottish taxpayers and citizens are picking up the tab.

Scotland has its own distinct challenges that must be met by our emergency services. In a diverse geographical landscape, they respond to incidents and various challenges within our cities and towns. We have our own cultural challenges and a separate legal system, but our police force has, in good faith, acknowledged that there may be a need to provide mutual assistance to other forces in the UK should that be required. The only circumstances in which that would be necessary as a result of Brexit would be if the Prime Minister continues her reckless course towards a no-deal cliff edge.

There are also challenges in the funding of fire and rescue services, and I say that as a former councillor who sat on the Strathclyde fire board before it was merged into the single service. There were good and legitimate reasons for doing that; many like to see the pooling of shared resources, and it made sense for the service. It meant a change in nature, and there were challenges in coming together as one, but nobody would change back, and there was broad cross-party agreement for the merger.

One benefit of the change for fire and rescue services has been their ability to adapt to the changing nature of the fire service. Recent FBU figures stated that non-fire rescues now considerably outnumber fire rescues. In 2017-18, more than 3,000 rescues were at non-fire incidents, compared with around 500 rescues from fires. Before the Strathclyde board was dissolved, it invested considerably in a state-of-the-art training centre at Cambuslang just outside Glasgow, and I recommend anyone who can to go and see that fantastic service. Firefighters can access a range of training opportunities, and all services in Scotland can come and use the centre, which is of huge benefit.

Scottish fire and rescue services have tried wherever possible to make savings to reduce the burden on their services, and the West Dunbartonshire service recently worked hard to reduce by 23% the number of unwanted fire alarm signals, which can cause call-outs that do not need to happen. That is 23% fewer times that the service had to turn out when it did not need to, which is important.

I would be remiss not to mention funding, and the UK Government must do the fair thing and adequately compensate Scottish police, fire and rescue services for the expenditure involved in contingency planning for a no-deal Brexit. We should not be out of pocket because of the decisions of this Government. That additional expenditure is likely to amount to £17 million in policing costs alone—around the same amount that the UK Government have provided to Northern Ireland to cover its Brexit-related policing. Why should Scotland be treated any differently?

The UK Government have shown political discretion in funding the devolved nations in the past, and it is deeply unfair that the people of Scotland and those struggling on the frontline of the emergency services

should miss out. Last year, we were successful in finally persuading the Chancellor to stop charging VAT to emergency services in Scotland, which was a result of moving to the single service. That came about because of the intransigence of the UK Government as regards fixing that situation. Some have said that we chose to go forward with that merger, which we did, and the cost savings made it worthwhile. However, it was a political decision by the UK Government not to treat our services in the same way as they treat Highways England, or other services in England, and that should not have happened in the first place.

As things stand, compensation is overdue. Our emergency services paid £175 million to the UK Government before the decision to scrap the VAT obligation. That funding could have gone to the frontline, saving lives and improving the service. When will the UK Government give back the money that we are entitled to? If VAT is exempted now, it should have been exempted in the first place, and we are due our money back.

9.58 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing it. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Members for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) and for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who made their contributions forcefully and gracefully on behalf of the fire and rescue services and the police.

An attempt to lower the deficit has clearly led to cuts and losses, but I believe that a few areas must be untouchable, including frontline healthcare, funding for schools to provide basic education, defence spending to secure our nation and its interests, and—lastly, but no less importantly—the police, fire and rescue services. The fat on all those things can be trimmed, but I believe the emergency services are as lean as they can be. In fact, we are too skinny, and without the ability to do what the body is capable of doing if it is well fed. We have tremendous talent and ability, yet we cannot do what a well-funded body can do.

We also have a police service and a fire service that train the world, yet they are precluded from giving their best, due to a lack of funding. I pay tribute, as others have, to the fire and rescue services of Northern Ireland and the whole nation. I also pay tribute to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I know the debate is not about the ambulance service, but I also put on record my thanks to those who work in it for what they do. In many places, they are hard-pressed financially and resources-wise.

A few years ago, I was in Afghanistan with the armed forces parliamentary scheme. We had a chance to visit Lashkar Gah in Helmand province. It was remarkable to be in a camp and all of a sudden to hear a Northern Ireland accent—former police officers were being seconded to train the Afghanistan army and police. That incident told me a number of things. Those gentlemen had done their stint in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the PSNI. They then had the opportunity to train people in other countries, and they did that. The husband of the lady who works in my office is a retired police officer, and he trains police officers in Serbia, Montenegro and other parts of the Balkans. The expertise, commitment

and ability we have through our police forces is being used to train police forces in other parts of the world. That is an indication of just how highly thought of they are.

In Northern Ireland in 2017, the fire and rescue service of Northern Ireland warned that any more cuts would almost certainly result in preventable deaths. We are not playing with figures; we are playing with people's lives—the lives of families and children. That is backed up by findings from the Local Government Association. Many of us know the LGA from our days on councils. The hon. Member for Glasgow Central spoke about her time on the council. My hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) and I have been councillors, too, and I suspect others have the same expertise and knowledge. The LGA represents more than 370 councils and fire authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is a massive body with a lot of knowledge and expertise. It highlighted the latest fire statistics, which show that although the overall number of fires has fallen steadily, the rate of decline has slowed and certain types of fire have increased. Deliberate primary fires are on the rise, which is incredibly concerning.

The LGA further outlined a 22% increase in fire-related deaths involving those over 65 in the past two years. There is a need to raise awareness about elderly people on their own in their homes. In Northern Ireland, we have regular advertising on TV about smoke alarms, saying, “Check your smoke alarm on a Monday. Press the button. If it goes off, you know the batteries are not done.” It is important that people do that, because some elderly people probably do not have that ability. It is about how we raise awareness.

The LGA also said that, in deciding fire service funding, Ministers should consider the rising over-85 population and the increasing numbers of people renting houses. When it comes to raising awareness, landlords should be reminded of the responsibility they have, and elderly people should be helped. It is not hard to look out for our elderly neighbours and to call in and see how they are. In two minutes, we can check their smoke alarm and make sure everything is all right.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent point about the importance of people using their smoke alarms and ensuring that they work. Is there a system in Ireland, as there is in Scotland, of home fire safety visits, where the fire brigade will come out and check someone's house for fire safety and install smoke alarms if they are needed?

Jim Shannon: I am not sure we have that same service. I think it is left to many other organisations. The hon. Lady has highlighted what we can do, but we also have fewer resources. The fire service will call if it is asked to, but resources are stretched, and the services do not normally have the time or ability to do that. Fire and rescue services have had their funding cut by around 40% over a four-year period. That perhaps indicates why such things sometimes cannot be done.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the funding reductions we are debating have an effect on the morale of emergency services? Another thing that has a massive impact on their morale is attacks on them—attacks on police

officers, on those in A&E and the wider health service, and on firefighters. We need to send the message regularly that that is totally and utterly unacceptable.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend may have read my script and known that I was going to mention that. I have become very alarmed by attacks on the fire and rescue service, the PSNI and the ambulance service—and, indeed, on A&E staff, which he referred to—across Northern Ireland. There is something grossly morally wrong and evil about people feeling they can attack our rescue services when they are out doing their job of responding to a fire or to someone who is hurt. There is also the issue of the theft of property from ambulances and fire engines. Defibrillators, for instance, are stolen from the back of ambulances, as is other equipment. That all has to be paid for. Whenever people lay their lives on the line to save others, they should be shown an element of respect.

My hon. Friend referred to accident and emergency. Again, there is something grossly offensive about people feeling it is okay to go into A&E and verbally abuse nurses, doctors or other people who are there to help. There is something criminally wrong with those who would attack people in A&E. My hon. Friend underlines how we as a nation feel. It is time to respect our fire and rescue service; it is time to respect our police; it is time to respect our ambulance service; and it is time to respect the nurses and doctors in A&E. We must send that message from the Chamber today.

I agree with the chair of the Local Government Association fire services management committee, who said:

“Projected rises in both the elderly population, including those living alone, and the number of people living in privately rented homes will only increase the risk of more fires putting people's lives in danger.”

We have a duty to focus on elderly people who need help, and I look to the Minister for a response to that. The FBU says the number of firefighters has fallen by 22% in the past 10 years. The fire service is not sufficiently funded, and that needs to be changed.

The hon. Member for Easington mentioned electrical wiring, which he, I and others in the Chamber have spoken about before. That is about not only upgrading and checking the wiring in houses, but identifying faulty electrical equipment. We have had many Westminster Hall debates about that issue, and he is absolutely right to underline it. I back up what he said, which was important.

Grahame Morris: I want to make a small point about that. It is a very relevant issue, and it reminds me of the public health argument. The hon. Gentleman mentioned firefighters being involved in identifying areas of high risk and installing or checking smoke detectors. There is a payback for that, but resources are so tight that the fire service and the police service are now just completely reactive. Good work was being done, and we perhaps were seeing the benefit of that in reduced incidents. Since we are no longer investing in education, installing smoke detectors and so on, we will see a higher incidence of crime and fires that could otherwise have been avoided.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is not sufficient to be reactive; we should proactively address these issues. That should be one of the key messages

[*Jim Shannon*]

from the debate. Many Opposition colleagues have participated in Westminster Hall debates about electrical safety. It continues to be a massive issue, and we need to be proactive about it.

The same can be said for policing. We have some phenomenal officers, who work hand in hand with community workers to address problems on estates, yet the funding is not there to ensure that there are community workers on shifts at all times. I am a great believer in community policing—I always have been. I was probably reared in community policing, in my former life as a councillor. The relationship between the community officers, the estates and the people was phenomenal. Unfortunately, when those officers retired or moved on, that relationship fell by the way, which was a loss and a sadness.

The funding is not in place to ensure community workers are on shift at all times. Regular officers who are not up to speed with dynamics and who act as they are trained flare tensions, whereas a team who have built up a relationship would have been able to settle those tensions. How much of a talent it is to be able to solve, or salve, problems, rather than inadvertently inflaming emotions. That is down to a lack of funding. The losers are entire areas.

As I said, there are things that we cannot scrimp on, and the police and the fire services are one of them. I add my voice to those of Members who have called and will call for appropriate ring-fenced funding.

10.11 am

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is my pleasure and privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) on bringing the debate to the Floor of the Westminster Hall Chamber. I share his tributes to the police, the fire services and the emergency services of all the nations of these islands. I also take the opportunity to commend him for his comments on the dangers of making the fire service a scapegoat for the Grenfell fire. The thrust of what he was saying was that if we want to know who was responsible for the Grenfell fire, we should follow the money—see who benefited from the cheap cladding and the poor upkeep of the building—rather than blaming the men and women who risked their lives to save lives that night.

We have heard a number of interesting and diverse contributions, from the hon. Members for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). My hon. Friend raised in particular the role that the fire services play in Scotland, with their proactive preventive measures, such as offering to go into people's homes to assess their anti-fire readiness. That proactive strategy is reflected in the way the Scottish police force, the Crown Office and some Scottish social services have approached the problem of knife crime in Scotland, treating it as a public health emergency. My hon. Friend has spoken about that eloquently on a number of occasions.

This debate is really about funding. The hon. Member for Easington painted a concerning picture of the effect of the reductions in police and fire and rescue services

across England and Wales. Those concerns are clearly widely held. As the Scottish National party spokesperson for justice and home affairs, I want to contribute constructively to the debate by offering an overview of the somewhat different position in Scotland. In an era of severe funding cuts to police and fire services across England and Wales, the UK Government would do well to look to the example of the Scottish Government, who have managed to protect such vital public services from the worst excesses of the UK Government's failed austerity project.

Let us look at the stats on crime in Scotland, from the Scottish crime and justice survey. Since 2008-09, crime has fallen by 32%. The vast majority of people in Scotland—87%—say that they experience no crime. That is not to diminish the severe experiences of the 13% who do but, again, the Scottish Government have leading legislation for the victims of crime and for vulnerable witnesses. Since 2006-07, recorded crime in Scotland has fallen by 42%, and non-sexual violent crime is at one of its lowest levels since 1974, and represents a 49% fall since 2006-07. That is largely due to the public health approach to the problem of knife crime in Scotland, in which the police and emergency services collaborate with other healthcare and social services professionals to reduce violent crime at a time when it is sadly on the rise in England and Wales.

Alison Thewliss: My hon. and learned Friend makes a good point about the impact of that approach to tackling knife crime, particularly in relation to young people. Does she agree that that investment over an extended period of time has been valuable in dealing with knife crime and the impact of violence on young people?

Joanna Cherry: Absolutely, and I am pleased to say that the UK Government have recognised that, by coming up to Scotland to study the approach that we have taken. Cressida Dick from the Metropolitan police has been up to Glasgow to see the approach that has been taken there, and I know that UK Government Ministers have been to my constituency and to see Scottish Government Ministers in Edinburgh to discuss these issues. Witnesses have also given evidence to the Select Committees on Home Affairs and on Justice about the approach taken in Scotland.

However, key to the approach in Scotland is protecting the budget of the police and fire services from the consequences of austerity. As we all know, the Scottish Government's budget has been squeezed over the past few years. Between 2010-11 and 2019-20, Scotland's discretionary resource budget allocation will have been reduced by 6.5%, which is almost £2 billion in real terms. However, the Scottish Government's decisions on tax and borrowing have reduced the real-terms reduction to the total Scottish fiscal budget from 5.5% to 3.4% between 2010 and the current year, and their decisions on income tax alone in this coming year mean that we will have an additional £68 million to invest in public services. Such measures have enabled the Scottish Government to mitigate the worst of austerity in very challenging circumstances.

For example, while spending on police forces in England and Wales has dropped by 17% since 2010, and the number of officers has dropped by 14%, in Scotland we have gone in the opposite direction. As my hon. Friend

the Member for Glasgow Central said, since the SNP Government came to power in 2007, there are now 5.8% more police officers. There has also been modernisation, with one police force for the whole of Scotland. It is important to remember that in London there is one police force for the whole metropolitan area, whose population is nearly twice that of Scotland, so having one force for Scotland was a no-brainer. I will come back to that point when I address my hon. Friend's comments on VAT. In September last year there were around 32 police officers per 10,000 of population in Scotland, compared with around 21 officers per 10,000 of population in England and Wales.

The commitment to protect public services in Scotland from the effects of the UK Government's austerity project extends to fire services. The recent Scottish Government Budget—for the year 2019-20—introduced increases in the money available for fire and rescue services, as well as for the police. There has been a real-terms uplift for Police Scotland. The overall Scottish Police Authority budget will increase by 3.7%, meaning an additional £42.3 million. The police revenue budget will increase by 2.8%, meaning an additional £30.3 million. The police capital budget will increase by £12 million, meaning a 52% increase. Also, the Scottish Government remain committed to protecting the police resource budget in real terms in every year of the current Scottish Parliament, which means a boost of £100 million by 2021. So it can be done when the right choices are made by Governments.

Likewise, this year will see the budget for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service increase by £5.5 million, and that is in addition to increasing the service's spending capacity by £15.5 million in the previous financial year. The Scottish Government's Budget also confirmed that the £21.7 million increase in capital funding for the service announced in the 2017-18 Budget will be maintained.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central said, the Scottish National party, after much campaigning during this Parliament and the last, was successful in persuading the UK Government to end the VAT obligation on Scotland's police and fire and rescue services. However, more than a year on, the UK Government have still not repaid the £175 million taken by way of VAT before scrapping the unfair charges. They need to reverse that decision and return the money to Scotland's emergency services. Scotland's police and fire and rescue services were the only territorial forces in the UK asked to pay VAT—as my hon. Friend said, other national public organisations south of the border were not asked to pay VAT. Make no mistake about it: that was a political decision. It has now been reversed, and the money that was wrongfully taken should be paid back.

My hon. Friend also raised the funds required for policing in Scotland in relation to Brexit, which has been estimated at £17 million a year, including capital costs for uniforms, equipment and vehicles of around £800,000 a year. The UK Government need to recognise that when allocating spending. The majority of people living in Scotland did not vote for Brexit, and the Scottish Government's sensible, compromise solutions for ameliorating the effects of Brexit have been ignored. If the British Government are intent on imposing Brexit on Scotland against our will, the least they can do is meet the costs of the extra policing, as I believe they intend to do for Northern Ireland. Although there are

special considerations in Northern Ireland that must of course be respected, that does not mean that differing considerations in Scotland should not be taken into account.

I will end by putting three questions to the Minister. First, will she look carefully at the position in Scotland, to see what lessons can be learned for England and Wales, bearing in mind the crime figures I have quoted and the fact that the Scottish Government have managed, in a time of austerity, to find the money necessary to properly fund the police and fire and rescue services? Secondly, will she intercede with the Treasury to ensure that the £175 million wrongfully taken in VAT from Scotland's police and fire and rescue services is paid back? Thirdly, will she explain who will fund the extra policing needed in Scotland as a result of her Government's Brexit plans, which the Scottish people did not vote for?

10.22 am

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. This has been an incredibly thorough, if somewhat depressing, debate on the state of funding of our police and fire services. It is testament to how strongly Members feel about the issue that we have heard such passionate speeches and that it is frequently raised, both here in Westminster Hall and when the Government are dragged to the Chamber to answer urgent questions and through Home Office questions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), in his usual mild-mannered and constructive way, gave a thorough overview of the issues facing our police and fire services. He is fortunate to be represented by an outstanding police service in Durham and, by the sounds of it, an excellent fire service as well. However, they are under exceptional and unprecedented pressure and demand. He made a powerful speech, particularly on Grenfell, and spoke about the regulatory failings of that local authority and of businesses. There was in no way a failure of those firefighters—those men and women who risked everything to go in and save others.

My hon. Friend spoke about the madness of funding our police service through the precept, which I will come on to. He is particularly affected by that, representing, as he does, Durham, which has an exceptionally low council tax base and is therefore less able, even than other metropolitan areas, to fund the police to the level needed. He also asked the Minister whether the Government have abandoned the principle of resource equalisation. It certainly feels that they have, given that we are faced with a funding settlement that bears no relation to demand, need or operational resource—instead, it relates only to the number of houses in an area that are over band D. How can any sane Government allocate resources to the police service in such a way?

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) made an important intervention about the resilience and legitimacy of policing, which undeniably is being undermined by cuts. They have left communities feeling that there is no point in reporting crimes, because they do not believe that the report will be acted on or that the police will be able to respond.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) is a constant fighter for our police. In her usual impassioned way, she spoke about response

[*Louise Haigh*]

times and said that people are giving up on reporting. Entire communities feel abandoned, which has led some areas of the country to turn to vigilante responses, because they feel that the only way to deal with crime is to deal with it themselves. She gave some shocking statistics, such as the fact that West Yorkshire has experienced a 227% increase in violent crime in the past six years, which is the highest increase in the country. That is truly shocking. Yet again, West Yorkshire receives one of the lowest funding settlements. How can that be right?

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen explicitly asked the Minister to guarantee the pension costs for police and fire services after 2019-20. The Home Office barely covered them for 2019-20 in this year's funding settlement, and police and fire services across the country still have no guarantee beyond 2020. I would be grateful if she could respond to that point.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) made important points about the potential consequences of a no-deal Brexit and the demand being placed on our police services in preparing for them—not just the potential consequences of coming out of systems such as the Schengen Information System II or the European criminal records information system, or the potential impact of withdrawing from or playing a lesser role in Europol, but the potential for widespread civil unrest and for officers to be deployed to ports that they are not currently asked to police.

The lack of resilience in our police force to deal with unpredictable and large-scale disruption was highlighted when police were deployed all over the country to cover the visit of President Trump last year. If there had been a terrorist attack, a spike or even a murder during that time in any area covered by a police force that had deployed significant numbers of officers in mutual aid requests, it would have shown how stretched to breaking point our police services are.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made important points about the demand on the police and fire services. We had a debate about the important role the police and fire services play in prevention, and how the cuts have reduced our emergency services to nothing more than responsive or reactive services that turn up only when the absolute worst has happened. Again, that not only means that we are storing up problems for the future and failing to prevent crimes and fires from happening in the first place, but undermines the legitimacy of our emergency services and erodes the ability to police by consent, because that vital neighbourhood policing model has been eroded.

All hon. Members have rightly paid tribute to the police and firefighters in our emergency services, who we rely on in times of need. The Government's twin failure to invest in the police and fire services must represent one of the most chilling consequences of a decade of Tory rule. When the Government unpick the safety net and undermine the last resort—when they take such risks with public safety, as they have done—they must be held to account for the consequences of those fateful decisions.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis, no other major economy in Europe cut their police by proportionally more than we did—we are one of Europe's leading

nations when it comes to police cuts. The zeal with which the Conservative Government slashed our emergency services is unmatched. Our once proud police service, which was one of the best in the world, has been critically undermined by the party that once called itself the party of law and order. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) is absolutely right that different political choices can be made. We have seen the effect in Scotland of a Government making different political choices.

Despite an increase in the number of incidents that firefighters attend, funding for fire services has been cut by 15%. As the fire brigade says, one of the most important aspects of its work is to minimise risk and prevent fires in the first place. It is therefore staggering that, 19 months on from the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, there are still buildings in this country wrapped in Grenfell-style cladding, whose residents do not know whether their home is safe. There were 437 tower blocks with the same or similar cladding, and 370 have yet to be replaced. The Government must get their act together on that, and fast.

It is a matter of deep regret that, as the inquiry into Grenfell continues, phase 2 continues to be delayed. That is the phase in which answers will be sought from the building owners, the local authority and politicians—the very people who, as my hon. Friend the Member for Easington and Matt Wrack, the general secretary of the FBU, said, allowed public safety to be undermined. The one thing we know about the Grenfell fire is that the firefighters, in impossible, unimaginable conditions, showed bravery beyond what any of us could imagine. They put their lives at risk and risked their children and families growing up without them in order to save other families. In my mind—I am the granddaughter of a firefighter—and the mind of my party, they are absolute heroes. Those who are casting aspersions, as the disgraceful documentary did on Monday, long before the inquiry has concluded, should take a long, hard look in the mirror. Our firefighters and police have not let us down; they have been badly let down by the Government.

The consequences of the Government's actions are stark: more than 21,000 officers, nearly 7,000 PCSOs and 17,000 police staff are gone, recorded violent crime and knife crime are at record levels, arrests have halved in a decade, and there are almost 2 million unsolved crimes. With that as a backdrop, it was almost unbelievable that the Government chose to bring forward the funding settlement last month. The reaction to it from police leaders across the country has been stark. The chief constable of West Midlands police has calculated that it will mean another real-terms cut. In North Yorkshire, the police and crime panel has rejected the imposition of another council tax increase. In Lincolnshire, the chief constable has been forced to make £3.2 million in savings this year as a direct result of the funding settlement. Despite asking local rate payers to pay the full whack of £24 a year, it is still cutting officers this year. People are paying more for a lesser service.

At the heart of the inequity in the funding settlement, which hits policing hard, is the fact that it is basing increased funding on the ability of an area to pay. It is basing operational improvement on the number of big houses in an area. Why was each force asked to put together a management statement? Why did the Policing Minister go around every force to assess the level of

demand and then apparently completely ignore it? Serious crime is expected to increase substantially in many forces, as are areas of protection for vulnerable people. That means big increases in demand due to cases involving missing persons, stalking, harassment, cyber-crime and managing sexual offenders. The challenge is massive and is expected only to increase. People will be in utter disbelief that, once again, the Government are causing the police to suffer a ninth consecutive year of real-terms cuts, once the Government-imposed pensions black hole is taken into account.

The Policing Minister promised that he would help forces manage the pensions black hole. He said:

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

I am afraid that was disingenuous at best, and demonstrably false at worst. Nationwide, there will be a cut in central Government funding in cash terms, never mind real terms. That investment will not be used to help meet the operational demands from cases involving missing persons, child sexual exploitation and serious crime; rather, every penny of it will be sunk on pension costs. The Government are giving with one hand and taking with the other. It is perverse, and it is creating a postcode lottery.

These arguments are well rehearsed; hon. Members have made them in this Chamber time and again. It appears that there are fundamental differences between the two sides of the House on how our police and fire services should be funded. I ask the Minister to justify this if she can. How can West Yorkshire, which has experienced a 227% rise in violence crime, receive just 13% of the money that it has lost since 2010, in comparison with Surrey, which has seen half that rise in violent crime but is receiving 36% of the money that it has lost since 2010? How can Durham, which has seen one of the largest increases in police recorded crime, receive just 13% of the money that it has lost since 2010, in comparison with Wiltshire, which has seen one of the lowest increases in police recorded crime but is receiving 29% of the money that it has lost since 2010? Can she confirm that this Government have abandoned the principle of resource equalisation and that, instead, their philosophy is that only those areas that can pay deserve to be kept safe?

10.35 am

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): It is of course a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) on securing the debate and giving me what I think is my first opportunity to listen to a debate on police funding. I am conscious that, as the spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), said, many hon. Members have been in this Chamber and the main Chamber discussing this issue on a number of occasions.

I start, as the hon. Member for Easington did, by paying tribute to our police officers and fire and rescue officers across the country for their tireless work in keeping our communities safe. He mentioned in particular Durham’s police and crime commissioner and chief constable. I was reminded the night before last, when an officer was threatened in Romsey in my constituency—an individual has now been charged with possession of a knife in a public place—that such incidents occur across

the country and even in the most unexpected locations. Although I cannot comment further on the incident in my constituency, it reminds us that every day and every night officers face significant threats and dangers. I also cannot add to the comments that hon. Members have made about the “Dispatches” programme on Grenfell. The inquiry is ongoing, and I am conscious that I am not the fire Minister. I am not going to say anything that might in any way affect that inquiry, but it is absolutely right to point out that on that night it was our brave public servants who yet again were rushing towards a dangerous situation, not away from it. They were, as the shadow Minister said, putting their lives on the line, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

I will seek to respond to the comments made by hon. Members in this debate; I think it important to reflect on some of the comments that I have heard and respond to them. Of course, the recent funding settlement represents the biggest rise in police funding since 2010. There is not just more for our local police forces, but more for counter-terrorism and dealing with serious and organised crime.

It is important that the public have trust in the police and that we work as a Government to ensure that the funding is in place to enable the police to carry out their important roles. The ability to raise council tax, which a number of hon. Members mentioned, is taken into account when calculating the amount of Government grant, and the same is true for business rates. Areas that raise low levels of council tax receive higher levels of settlement funding. Reductions in Government funding do not necessarily show the full picture. Council tax has been a significant part of fire funding—on average, 60% of funding for fire and rescue authorities.

We heard interesting comments from—he is now back in his place—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who talked in particular about preventive work and the impact on loneliness. The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) is here, and of course her predecessor in the House was Jo Cox. I mean no disrespect to the hon. Lady when I say that we still miss Jo every single day, and perhaps more at the current time than previously. She did an enormous amount of work on loneliness, and I am delighted that we now have a loneliness Minister, who has made much of the issue of loneliness among the elderly, the legacy of Jo Cox and the importance of our continuing to emphasise it.

I am struck by the fact that our fire and rescue services up and down the country often do important preventive work with elderly people who live alone in their own home. The importance of checking smoke alarms was mentioned, and Hampshire fire and rescue service has provided me with—I do not know the technical term for the device; I refer to it as “the prodger”. It is a long stick with a hand on the end of it, so people do not have to stand on a chair to test their smoke alarm, which is a crucial way of avoiding accidents. It might seem a simple, straightforward and slightly odd-looking device, but it serves two purposes—not only is it easier for people to check their smoke alarms, but they are not putting themselves at risk by climbing up to do so.

When my daughter was in year 2 at school, she went on a visit to a fire station in Salisbury—the shadow Minister mentioned Wiltshire fire and rescue service—and she was given a fridge magnet. That might seem a

[*Caroline Nokes*]

simple thing for a year 2 child, but she is now 20 and that magnet is still on my fridge. Every month I have to write in the date with a specially provided pen that indicates when I last checked my smoke alarm. Such important preventive work continues across the country, and many fire and rescue services continue to do such work. Our fire station in Romsey has an annual “check the safety of your electric blanket day”. Perhaps we are particularly soft southerners who need electric blankets, but they can pose a significant fire risk and it is important that they have an annual health check.

Part of our fire reform programme is about establishing the independent fire inspectorate service, and although only the first 14 service reports are complete, questions have been raised about the extent of the focus on fire prevention, which is part of the inspection process. In a speech in January my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service raised with fire leaders the importance of preventive work.

The changing nature of rescues was rightly mentioned by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). Although traditional fires are fortunately decreasing, rescues of different types are on the increase—for instance, the crucial work done by fire and rescue services on our motorway network, or in more recent years the work with flooding and assisting those who have been flooded out of their homes. As well as saving individuals, those services also do important pumping work.

The changing nature of crime has also had an impact on our police forces. I was struck by the comments of the hon. Member for Batley and Spen about child sexual exploitation, and sadly we have seen increasing reports of that horrific crime. There has been not only an increase in crime, but an increase in the confidence of victims to come forward. These are incredibly complex, difficult and sensitive crimes to investigate; we must ensure that our police can respond whenever such occurrences are reported and that they have the resource and ability to investigate. I am routinely struck by the increase in cyber-crime, which a few short years ago was not even heard of. Criminals are incredibly resourceful and adaptive and they will find opportunities wherever they exist. Our police forces must be equally adaptive and able to take important preventive action.

I am sure that hon. Members will comment on what I say about funding, but the House has approved total funding for policing of up to £14 billion for 2019-20, which is an increase of up to £970 million compared with 2018-19, including the precept pensions funding and national investment. We reviewed the changing and increasingly complex demands on police; the settlement will enable them to meet the financial pressures they face next year, while continuing to recruit and fill capability gaps, such as the shortage of detectives. If all police and crime commissioners use their precept flexibility in full next year, there will be a total increase in police funding of £2 billion between 2015-16 and 2019-20.

We are increasing Government grants to police and crime commissioners by £161 million, with every police and crime commissioner's grant funding protected in real terms. They are being empowered to raise council tax contributions for local policing by up to £2 a month per household, which could raise up to £509 million. Elected PCCs have made the case for raising local tax

from their electorate, and they are accountable for delivering a return on that public investment. That additional funding of up to £970 million will enable the police to manage their additional pension costs of approximately £330 million next year, while continuing to address capability issues. The police need to use that money well, which means every force saving money on procurement and back-office functions so that it can be invested in the frontline. The Home Secretary has been clear: he will prioritise police funding at the spending review.

Turning to the issue of fire funding, fire and rescue services have the resources they need to do their work and keep people safe. Fire and rescue authorities will receive about £2.3 billion in 2019-20. Single purpose fire and rescue authorities will receive an increase in core spending power of 2.3% in cash terms in 2019-20 and an overall increase of 0.3% from 2015-16 to 2019-20. We are also providing additional pension funding in 2019-20 to fire and rescue authorities to ensure that their additional pension cost is limited to £10 million. Financial reserves held by single purpose fire and rescue authorities increased by more than 80% to £545 million between 31 March 2011 and 31 March 2018, which is equivalent to 42% of their core spending power. The sector has made efficiencies, but as by the first tranche of inspections by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services indicated, it can do more to work smarter and to reduce costs. It is important that fire services continue to receive the right level of resources, which is why we work closely with the services to build the evidence to develop a clear proposition for the spending review.

Some issues were raised about neighbourhood policing. I want to put on the record how much we value neighbourhood policing and the vital role that officers play in keeping the public safe. That is why we are enabling police and crime commissioners to increase their cash funding next year, and many PCCs have set out their plans in that regard.

On top of protecting 2019-20 general grant funding in real terms for all police forces in England and Wales, the Government have increased funding for counter-terrorism policing and to combat serious and organised crime.

There was mention of the impact of Brexit, which is not only topical but of real concern. The Government have provided additional funding to Kent police for the particular pressures that they might face with Operations Stack and Brock in their area. Rightly, as part of Brexit planning, we look closely at police resourcing and the additional pressures that might be put on the police. In common with every other Minister, I am working hard to ensure that we get a deal—that is the best way forward for the country—but it is important to plan for all eventualities, and the Government are doing that carefully.

In conclusion, the Government support policing and fire and rescue services to do their vital work by providing the resources that they need. I pay extreme tribute to their very hard work.

Alison Thewliss: Before the Minister finishes, I was paying attention to what she was saying but she does not seem to have picked up the issue of VAT in Scotland. Will she give us our money back?

Caroline Nokes: That is a question that the hon. Lady might best put to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service when she next gets the chance. I am conscious that Home Office questions are on Monday, and I am sure that she will take that opportunity. With that, I will say no more.

10.48 am

Grahame Morris: I thank all Members who participated: my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), and the hon. Members for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell). I also thank the respective Front Benchers, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), and the SNP spokesperson, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who made extremely powerful and incontrovertible contributions.

Funding cuts are putting public safety at risk. Injuries, deaths, tragedies such as Grenfell, crime and community safety are all compromised when the emergency services are not properly funded. This Government have made political choices—there were alternatives—and they have made the wrong ones. I want to know when we will return to a level of funding that will restore the numbers of police and firefighters that our communities need. The consequences of cuts can be seen in communities in every constituency in the country. I urge the Minister to reverse the cuts and to provide the funding needed properly to support our emergency services.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the effect of reductions in funding of police, fire and rescue services.

10.50 am

Sitting suspended.

UK Deep Sea Mining Industry

11 am

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK deep sea mining industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I am grateful to the Minister for coming to respond to the debate. Just a little political push from her over the next few weeks might be all that our fledgling deep sea mining industry needs to succeed and to catch up with our international competitors.

The debate is timely and important. This year, we reached a critical point in the development of the UK's deep sea mining exploration and exploitation capabilities. A small push from the Minister's Department could mean that the UK leads the world in the environmentally responsible exploitation of vital and valuable seabed minerals. We could secure supplies of the raw materials we need for a host of new technologies, including rechargeable batteries, as well as large tax revenues. On the other hand, neglect or bureaucratic inertia could mean that we squander a once-in-a-generation opportunity and lose out to more agile, forward-thinking countries, such as China and Belgium.

I will briefly outline why Parliament legislated for deep sea mining in 2014, what has changed since, the progress of other nations, the enormous benefit that the industry could bring to the UK and, finally, some things that the Government could do to help it to move forward. Deep sea mining has come a long way since I took the Deep Sea Mining Act 2014 through Parliament. Back then, we were concerned with making our law technically consistent with the United Nations convention on the law of the sea—UNCLOS. Actual exploration of the deep Pacific seabed, let alone exploitation, was uneconomic, yet Parliament recognised, even then, the enormous economic and strategic potential of deep sea minerals, as well as the environmental risks. We recognised that the UK must be at the forefront of setting global standards for operating in these untouched and sensitive marine environments.

In the last five years, technology has moved apace. Every year, seabed minerals, such as cobalt, grow in importance. Demand for seabed minerals, for example, for wind turbines, solar panels and rechargeable batteries, means that the economics of mining have totally changed. The commercial opportunity, and the environmental risks, are there right now. Other countries are well aware of that and have made good progress in building their industrial bases to seize this opportunity. The International Seabed Authority says it wants to complete its regulations on mineral exploitation by 2020, so that we are no longer concerned with the legal technicalities and theoretical licences.

This is happening right now, and the UK is falling behind. China, South Korea, Japan and the European Union all have well-developed deep seabed mining industries. China was just a side player five years ago but has since made great strides. It now sponsors four deep seabed mining contractors and has just applied for its fifth exploitation contract. That is more than any other country. During those same five years, the UK has sacrificed an enviable strong position.

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

When I took the 2014 Act through Parliament, Lockheed Martin told me that the UK was in a superb position to lead this industry, economically and environmentally, for the following reasons. First, our regulatory and legislative processes are transparent and predictable. That is crucial for industry, because it reduces the regulatory risk and allows it to plan long-term investments. Secondly, we have high environmental standards and diplomatic leadership on maritime issues. Thirdly, we have a leading and central position in the offshore oil, gas and mining industries. Fourthly, we have a world-leading financial services industry. Last but not least, we have an international reputation for innovation and engineering, and a track record of solving complex engineering challenges.

That really matters, because there are strong concerns about the security of our national supplies of cobalt and rare earth minerals. China currently has a stranglehold on the supply of those minerals. The UK is totally dependent on imports for its supply of cobalt. Cobalt is required for rechargeable batteries for electric cars, which we all know will become incredibly important very soon. Both cobalt and rare earth minerals are present in polymetallic nodules. The International Seabed Authority has granted two licences sponsored by the UK, which cover an area of 133,000 sq km—roughly the size of England. The current best estimate is that that area of seabed contains almost 1 billion tonnes of minerals. Nickel and manganese are vital for the so-called decarbonisation agenda—for electric vehicle batteries and wind farms. Unless we secure the supply of those minerals, we will have no hope of meeting the terms of the Paris agreement.

I believe that after just one deep sea mining operation, we would go from being a 100% net importer of cobalt, nickel, manganese and other rare earth minerals to being a net exporter. Deep sea mining would allow the UK to secure its own supply of those important minerals, yet through inaction we are letting China and other countries beat us to it. The frustrating thing is that the UK has incredible, world-class expertise in battery science. Two years ago, this Conservative Government launched the Faraday battery challenge, yet apparently we have not realised that if we want to be world leaders in rechargeable battery technology, we need raw materials such as cobalt. We simply do not have our own supply of the required raw materials in place.

It is important that the UK becomes a leader in this new international industry so we can ensure that high environmental standards are followed. That is especially important since the USA has not ratified UNCLOS and therefore cannot participate. We can lead not just technologically but in ensuring high environmental standards. Other nations might not have the same commitment to the environment as we have. There is a kind of gold rush under way and, just as with other gold rushes, proper environmental scrutiny could easily be neglected.

The International Seabed Authority has issued 26 different permits for mineral prospecting, of which two are British sponsored. The total area of seabed licensed by the ISA is now a massive 1.2 million sq km. The seabed is largely an unknown world, and new species are being discovered that exist nowhere else. It is one of

the last untouched ecosystems in the world. It is vital that the UK leads the world in setting standards for exploration and exploitation without ruining yet another ecosystem.

The two UK-sponsored licences were granted to UK Seabed Resources Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Lockheed Martin. Lockheed Martin drew up charts of the Pacific seabed nodules in the 1970s, when exploitation was completely impossible. Those charts, which we might think of as almost literal treasure maps, now form the basis for exploration and eventual exploitation. Needless to say, both those phases require significant investment.

Belgium benefited from EU funding. Unfortunately, the UK chose not to apply for that funding. Until now, Lockheed Martin has self-funded, but in view of the ongoing regulatory uncertainty, it has been obliged to slow its rate of investment.

It is worth noting that the other projects in the Clarion Clipperton belt have received financial investment from their respective Governments, which is a major reason why those projects are well advanced. Exploitation of those licences needs to reach the pre-feasibility stage by 2022. That will require fairly significant funding if we are not to fall behind further. Government funding would be highly desirable so that at least the UK is not disadvantaged compared with competitor nations.

It is also worth noting that the funding will not go to UK Seabed Resources, but to universities and other regional partners, which will conduct research once funded. The total investment for a seabed mining project is very significant, perhaps as much as £3 billion. That is about the same amount as for a similarly sized onshore mine, but the level of technical risk is higher, which is why some element of Government involvement is normally required.

The funding would not be required all at once, but in several smaller chunks. Furthermore, only about £400 million is required to reach the “bankable” feasibility phase. At that point, traditional debt finance becomes readily available. It is an energy security issue and an environmental issue, and it requires large investment.

Deep sea mining also presents a huge commercial and tax revenue opportunity. When David Cameron was Prime Minister, he called it a £40-billion opportunity, which was almost certainly an over-cautious estimate. If we invest in the industry and make it a commercial success, there will be benefits to the Exchequer in the form of tax and royalties. On current estimates, the Treasury will take £5.7 billion in tax plus £360 million in royalties over 25 years. That is about £2.8 billion at net present value, given the Treasury’s 3.5% discount rate. I have tried to show that the new deep sea mining industry in the UK would create huge commercial, environmental and tax revenue benefits for the country.

The Government could do some simple things that would have a huge impact on the prospects of the fledgling industry. I ask the Minister, in general, what steps the Government have taken, or plan to take, to pioneer the new and essential industry. Specifically, how does she plan for us to catch up with competitor nations and get back to where we should be—in front and leading the way in engineering and environmental standards? What assessment have the Government made of the risks of the economic reliance of the UK and our

allies on imports of minerals such as cobalt, nickel and manganese? What is our strategy to reduce or mitigate those risks? Does deep sea mining form part of that strategy? It is now more than four years since the 2014 Act received Royal Assent, but we do not have a strategy or regulatory framework.

To turn to academia and business, how can the Government support a research programme? Can we put one together through the industrial strategy challenge fund to make UK academia and small and medium-sized enterprises world leaders in deep sea mining? If so, how? As I have tried to stress, the benefits would be rapid and large, in the form of mineral supply autonomy and environmental leadership.

Can we explore avenues for international co-operation, for example with the USA, which has not signed up to UNCLOS? Other nations look to us to show leadership in the field. As we look outwards, beyond Brexit, I sincerely hope that we will rise to the challenge.

I have tried to show how the world has changed since the Deep Sea Mining Act passed into law. I have explained what an enormous opportunity we have before us. We can ensure our mineral security and our environmental leadership in this new industry, and gain massive benefits for our industry and the Exchequer.

We are falling behind, and for want of a tiny push by the Government we are in danger of squandering a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I therefore urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to look for ways to drive this fledgling industry forward. This is a new, challenging task of the kind that the UK is uniquely capable of delivering. Our capable officials need political will, determination and leadership if they are to make progress. I therefore urge the Minister to work across Government to ensure the UK does not miss this generational opportunity to pioneer a new and essential industry, which potentially has huge benefits to the environment, our energy security and the Exchequer.

11.15 am

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and to respond to the debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), who set out her extremely interesting and detailed knowledge of the current situation and the opportunities presented by new technology. She is known to many of us as one who has an almost unique perspective on these matters. Matters maritime and mining run in the blood of Cornish men and women, and she has certainly demonstrated that she is capable of talking with great knowledge about both.

My hon. Friend was responsible for delivering the Deep Sea Mining Act 2014. A private Member's Bill, it did some incredible work by amending the Deep Sea Mining (Temporary Provisions) Act 1981, which provided only powers to license applications in relation to polymetallic nodules—a rather niche area. Through her work, the 2014 Act extended that to apply to all minerals found in the deep sea, opening the way, as she rightly said, for the UK to sponsor applications to the ISA for all minerals in the future. It was striking that that Bill received cross-party support in Parliament. During its passage, my hon. Friend expressed the need to carry out economic exploitation in a sensitive environment with the utmost environmental concern and caution.

My hon. Friend also managed to steer the Marine Navigation Act 2013 successfully through Parliament. Again, that is a tribute to her commitment and her family's longstanding involvement with the sea. She does a brilliant job of representing her constituency. She pointed out how we need to move forward in maritime matters and mining.

I will start by giving some context. The UN convention on the law of the sea established that the mineral resources of the seabed are the common heritage of mankind and sit beyond national jurisdiction. As my hon. Friend well knows, reserves of terrestrial minerals are dwindling. There is a rich opportunity out there, which she rightly points out is critical to many of the new technology challenges that we are facing and rising to meet. That has led to pressure on the International Seabed Authority to set out a framework for mining the seabed. There have been 29 exploration contracts so far issued from 20 countries to bodies including state-owned enterprises and commercial organisations with a state sponsor, which has been the model that the UK has put forward. I believe that it is approaching two licences so far.

The Deep Sea Mining Act, of which my hon. Friend was the proud steward, enabled the domestic deep sea mining sector to be regulated in a modern way that has due regard for the economic opportunity and aims to prevent damage to the environment. The ISA is now working towards agreeing a mining code that contains technical, financial and environmental provisions by a deadline of March 2020. The UK delegation has been leading at those negotiations.

Given your geographic interest, Mr Hosie, you will know that we have a very profound heritage in the extraction of hydrocarbons and minerals, both onshore and offshore, with the proudest tradition of high environmental standards. We will continue that commitment to transparency, science and evidence-based policy making and environmentally sound regulation to ensure the effective protection of deep sea habitats and biodiversity. The mining code, once it is in place, will enable the ISA to issue so-called “exploitation contracts”—that sounds awful. We should perhaps find a new name for them—perhaps “exploration contracts”. Of course, the UK would need to consider whether these regulations need to be supplemented with additional domestic provisions in line with the Deep Sea Mining Act 2014.

The UK has sponsored two 15-year exploration contracts on behalf of UK Seabed Resources Ltd, which is a subsidiary of Lockheed Martin, the US corporation. The contracts are for polymetallic nodules in the Clarion Clipperton fracture zone of the Pacific. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, these activities and others may allow us to access minerals and metals and achieve safety and security of supply of those materials in the long term.

Also, my hon. Friend rightly joined up the dots to point out that when we talk about our clean growth strategy and the opportunity for the UK's economy to benefit from investment in low-carbon technologies, such as battery storage and solar energy, they require some of the self-same minerals and metals that are there to be found. If we do it carefully, this work will help us to protect our environment and meet our climate change obligations while creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.

[Claire Perry]

A MOG—machinery of government—change is a very boring term. This whole area has been subject to cross-Government movement recently, and indeed it has been moved to my Department, and I am now the responsible Minister. My hon. Friend will know that I take the issues in my portfolio seriously and try to get things done. Hopefully, it will give her some comfort to know that this subject now sits within the clean growth area of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, having been transferred recently from my excellent colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I mean no disrespect to them when I say that it may now form part of a more coherent view of the economic potential before us. As the responsible Minister for oil and gas in the UK as well, both onshore and offshore, I assure my hon. Friend that the proud commitment to high regulatory standards will of course apply. In BEIS, we are leading a cross-Whitehall working group to co-ordinate Government activities ahead of the finalisation of the mining code.

My hon. Friend asked me about some of the activities that the Department is undertaking. We have undertaken to analyse the potential economic value to the UK of the first two licences granted in the Clarion Clipperton fracture zone. That work should be completed this summer, ahead of the UN's ratifications of the regulations this year. We have also made a commitment to the ISA that UK Seabed Resources Ltd, our commercial operator, will undertake a plan of work throughout the period of exploration, reporting back in a very detailed way on all of its exploration activities, including the considerable amount of work it has done on environmental exploration, so that we have a good dataset upon which to base any future regulations.

My hon. Friend will know that this is a long-term investment, so it is quite right to do the turf-rolling now and indeed to make sure that the regulations are fit for purpose. I think it is accepted that commercial-scale deep sea mining operations will probably not begin before the middle of the next decade. Having said that, she pointed out that other countries are starting to move faster than previous estimates suggested, so it may well be the case that these challenges are pulled forward and that we will need to move a little faster. However, understanding the environmental implications of mining some of the deepest seabed or seafloor regions, particularly in the Pacific, is a monumental task.

I pay tribute to the superb piece of work put together by the cross-party Environmental Audit Committee, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). The Committee did a really superb piece of work in looking at many of these issues, including sustainable seas in general, but very specifically the opportunities and challenges of deep sea mining. That work is really well worth a read.

My hon. Friend asked me essentially what the Government's plans are. The decision on whether or not our UK-sponsored contractor will go into production

will be a commercial one, but we will need to consider—on the evidence—whether we are prepared to sponsor an exploitation licence and on what conditions such a licence should be applied.

I have mentioned before my hon. Friend's very coherent and eloquent statements about the economic importance of deep sea mining; I suspect that she might have had something to do with persuading the former Prime Minister of the value of this activity, and she quoted some superb statistics to show why it should be examined with great interest. I emphasise, however, that we need to understand our obligations to protect the seabed as well as the water columns and the currents, because the last thing we want to do is to start treating the seas as an infinitely exploitable resource.

We will continue to ensure that effective and binding environmental standards have been adopted and adhered to before we grant any commercial exploration licences, and that the mining activity is part of a well-evidenced environmental plan. My hon. Friend knows that we will continue to use our significant global influence to promote at global level the adoption of our transparent, science-based and environmentally sound approach, and a set of principles that are based on precautionary work, rather than responsiveness.

I am pleased to report that the UK is taking a leading role in international negotiations. As my hon. Friend knows, perhaps better than many others, we have a wide range of deep sea scientific and engineering expertise, and the opportunity to onshore many of the jobs and much of the intellectual property from that is profound. The important question we need to ask ourselves is how to balance exploration in environmentally sensitive areas against the potential risks. I am confident that we can do that; we have done it in many other environments around the world and can continue to do so.

My hon. Friend asked some specific questions about funding for the proposals and about research and development investment. I am pleased to say that UK Research and Innovation would be open to accepting a deep sea mining proposal in a future industrial strategy challenge fund competition. She also asked whether we have made an economic assessment of the dependency on rare earth minerals. I do not know, but I will find out and write to her. I am sure that someone has done that analysis and I am keen to see it.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to my hon. Friend for securing such an interesting and timely debate. As the Minister responsible, I am pleased to tell her that I am committed to taking the issue forward, taking into account the opportunity and what we can do to ensure the work is done in the most environmentally sustainable manner.

Question put and agreed to.

11.27 am

Sitting suspended.

Recall of Women to Prisons

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the recall of women to prisons.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. During my time as MP for Swansea East, I have engaged with many women in the criminal justice system by visiting prisons up and down the country and mother-and-baby units in them, and it has always been made clear to me that the reasons why women are in the criminal justice system are multifaceted and complex.

The Prison Reform Trust's report "Broken Trust: The rising numbers of women recalled to prison" illustrates the fact that the reasons for that are also multifaceted and complex, and the number of women being recalled is rising quickly. Of course, it is right that women are recalled to prison in some instances—if they are at imminent risk of causing harm to the public or of reoffending, for example—but this debate is not about that; it is about the huge increase in the number of women being recalled to prison and whether that increase is helping women to break their cycle of criminality and creating safer communities and opportunities for the women themselves.

The "Broken Trust" report points to a number of reasons for the steep rise in the number of women being recalled. I will cover those in more detail later. I think that it will be useful now to make clear the current situation regarding the recall of women to prison. An individual can be recalled to prison if they have served a sentence of more than a day. A probation officer will normally initiate the recall. About 3,800 women are currently in prison in the UK—we have one of the highest female imprisonment rates in western Europe. The female offender strategy states that about nine in 10 women in prison on remand or serving 12 months or less pose a low or medium risk of serious harm to the public. In the year ending September 2018, there were 1,846 recalls of women to custody while on licence.

One significant contributory factor in the steep rise in the number of such recalls is the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014—affectionately known as the ORA. It introduced a provision whereby everyone sentenced to a day or more in prison would be supervised by probation services on their release. Before the ORA, those sentenced to a term of imprisonment of less than 12 months were not supervised on release. In 2017, 72% of women sentenced to custody were sentenced to six months or less, compared with 56% of men. That demonstrates how the change brought in under the ORA disproportionately affects women. As the "Broken Trust" report states, on page 3:

"From the moment it was announced that post-custody supervision would be extended to people sentenced to less than 12 months, two things were obvious: this would result in the imprisonment of large numbers of people; and the impact would fall disproportionately upon women."

Reforms that are meant to be supporting individuals are having the opposite effect and keeping them trapped in cycles of the criminal justice system, rather than allowing them to take positive steps in their lives. That is a direct result of the changes brought about under a previous Secretary of State for Justice. Previously, anyone

sentenced to a short period in prison served their term and on release that was it. Putting in place a year of additional supervision—in addition to the prison term—with recalls if people fail to comply, is largely responsible for the huge increase in recalls.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on the powerful case she is making. Does she agree that the lack of housing available to women after leaving prison contributes to their vulnerability?

Carolyn Harris: I most certainly do, and I am just coming on to housing, so I thank my hon. Friend for his astute intervention.

The report from the Prison Reform Trust makes it clear that there is a lack of services available to women on leaving prison, which contributes to their being recalled. A lack of secure housing for women when they leave prison is a significant factor leading to the recall of female offenders. Of the 24 women interviewed for the report, 22 said that they required help with housing on leaving prison.

If women leave prison and do not successfully secure somewhere to live, they are more likely to be recalled to prison. The female offender strategy highlights that from April to December 2017, 39% of women allocated to community rehabilitation companies and the national probation service were released into unsettled accommodation, with 18% released into homelessness. That not only puts women in a dangerous and vulnerable situation, but directly leads to them being recalled to prison. "Broken Trust" cites the example of a female offender released from prison without secure accommodation to go to, only to be recalled for breach of an antisocial behaviour order because she slept in a park. She was then released homeless for a second time.

How do we expect women to take positive steps to rebuild their lives after leaving prison if they are not given adequate support services such as secure housing? The relentless cuts made to local authorities by the Tory Government have resulted in a dangerous lack of housing for such women. Furthermore, without a secure home, women will find it more difficult to engage successfully with employment opportunities or maintain a healthy lifestyle. With 60% of female prisoners not having a home to go to on release, we know that is a real issue when they leave prison.

Data secured under a freedom of information request made by *The Guardian* demonstrates that between October 2016 and June 2018 there was a 25-fold increase in rough sleeping in England and Wales among those who have served sentences of less than six months. It is an absolute scandal that women are released homeless anyway, but even if a woman is found secure accommodation, it must be suitable and provide a safe environment in order to help her rebuild her life. Otherwise, female prisoners are likely to return to the potentially toxic settings that led to their arrest in the first place, such as environments with negative influences, including being surrounded by drugs and alcohol, which often leads them to a breach of their licence conditions and recall to prison. Using drugs is one of the six categories that the National Probation Service data present for recall of an individual to prison. In the "Broken Trust" report, an interviewee shared her experience of becoming homeless once she was released from prison:

[Carolyn Harris]

“By the third night of my release, I was street homeless. My using got worse, I fell off my script even quicker this time. My life was just chaotic. I was doing whatever I could to survive.”

Earlier this week, the Secretary of State for Justice said in a speech that, as part of the Government’s rough sleeping agenda, they will invest £6.4 million in a pilot scheme to help individuals released from three prisons—Bristol, Leeds and Pentonville—into settled accommodation. However, I want to know what the Government will invest specifically in accommodation suitable for female offenders and their complex needs. If support services in the community to help such women find secure housing continue to be inadequate, women will be less likely to be able to break the cycle of criminality.

Another contributing factor to the high recall rate among female offenders is the high rate of complex needs and problems. Women under community supervision and in custody with an assessment are twice as likely as the men to have a mental health need, and 60% of women in the criminal justice system have experienced domestic violence. “Broken Trust” found that a third of those interviewed needed help with mental health, drug misuse and domestic violence. The report also showed that the relevant probation officers were unable to support them adequately, given their complex needs. Female offenders are much more likely to be vulnerable, so we need to ensure that there are services to assist them in rebuilding their lives, not only to help them but to make the community they live in safer.

Another issue that distinctly affects women recalled to prison is that female offenders are more likely than male offenders to be carers for children or other family relatives, and their recall therefore affects not only them, but their dependants. The length of time for which a woman can be recalled to prison can be just a number of days, but it will cause huge disruption to her and her family. Therefore, what provision is being made to ensure that the lives of those family members and dependants are not thrown into chaos?

The female offender strategy is clear that short custodial sentences are less effective in reducing offending than community orders, and that early intervention is key to reducing the number of women entering the criminal justice system.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. There are too many women in prison, but does she welcome the Ministry of Justice’s move to reduce the number of shorter sentences available? To retain people’s faith in the criminal justice system, early release should be a privilege earned rather than a right automatically given. It is a two-way street.

Carolyn Harris: I am coming on to that statement now.

I welcome the proposal by the Secretary of State to abolish short sentences, which would make a huge difference to women offenders, who are overwhelmingly sentenced to short periods in prison. I urge him to follow through on the proposal as soon as possible in order to create a more effective criminal justice system.

Furthermore, there must be a greater focus on funding for early intervention services, which have been cut considerably because of constrained budgets.

It is a stark statistic that 60% of female offenders supervised in the community or in custody who have an assessment have experienced domestic abuse. It illustrates how important it is to make domestic abuse services available to women, either to stop them offending in the first place or to help them not to reoffend. In the Women’s Aid annual survey, those who run domestic abuse services reported that the largest challenge was funding for and sustainability of their services. That will obviously impact on their ability to help vulnerable women. The same report shows that one in five of all referrals to a refuge were declined owing to a lack of space. If the Government are serious about supporting women, there needs to be greater funding for those life-saving services so that refuges do not have to turn away referred women and so that they can be supported before they enter the criminal justice system.

Another report from the Prison Reform Trust showed strong links between women’s experience of domestic and sexual abuse and coercive relationships and their offending. Better funding for domestic abuse services and ensuring that the provision is consistent and joined up across the UK would provide stronger provision for women who are victims of domestic violence, moving them away from entering the criminal justice system.

Given the reports by Women’s Aid and the Prison Reform Trust of the patchy delivery of domestic abuse services for women, will the Government commit to adequate funding of early intervention services, particularly domestic abuse services, so that women are either supported not to enter the criminal justice system in the first place, or not forced to re-enter it? Early intervention services across the UK would have a positive impact on reducing the number of women in prison, thus reducing the recall rate. For example, last year the Welsh Labour Government—I am very proud that I am Welsh—introduced a framework to support positive changes for those at risk of offending, which will have a renewed focus on early intervention services to help stop individuals entering the criminal justice system and to keep people from offending. I can supply a copy of the relevant documents to the Minister should he wish to see them.

Lastly, one of the most important factors that would prevent a woman being recalled to prison is a successful working relationship between the probation officer and the individual. I want to put on the record my admiration for Napo, the union, which I know tries really hard to support the staff, as I know the staff try to support their clients. The report by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of probation into recall described the impact that a negative relationship with a probation officer can have on recall:

“Those who have a poor relationship with their responsible officer are more likely to breach, and the fairness of enforcement decisions may affect this relationship.”

The report also showed that there was limited access to appropriate, women-only provision for female offenders. Furthermore, as I said, it is widely understood that female offenders have more complex needs than male offenders. Probation officers must therefore be properly trained in how to support offenders with complex needs, and must be able to signpost them to services that have resources to help them. That will be possible only if there are adequate support services with a joined-up

approach to supporting the service user as soon as they leave prison. That, combined with positive relationships between probation officers and female offenders, would see the number of women recalled to prison fall.

Given the shocking rise in the number of women being recalled, we have to ask whether this is the most effective way of helping women to break their cycles in the criminal justice system. I welcome the Secretary of State's comments earlier this week, which echoed the view that it is particularly disruptive to women's lives for them to be recalled to prison, given that they are likely to have dependants. I want assurances that his proposal to abolish short sentences will be introduced as soon as possible. The female offender strategy is clear that women in prison are complex. The support services need to be well resourced so that, when they are released from prison, they have all the help they need to prevent them being recalled. Responses from the Prison Reform Trust show that a lack of secure and safe housing for women once they are released from prison directly leads to their recall. It is an absolute scandal that we are releasing women who are likely to be victims of domestic violence and have complex needs on to the streets.

There must be more funding for local authorities so that the right support services are in place and we can offer a joined-up approach to support women. Furthermore, there must be more of a focus on early intervention, which will steer women away from entering the criminal justice system in the first place or stop them being recalled. Services must be better resourced so that there is no longer patchy delivery for women across the UK.

Finally, a successful relationship between probation officers and service users is key. Probation officers must have adequate training to help female offenders, who have a variety of complex needs. I want assurances from the Government that they will provide that desperately needed funding. That would demonstrate that they are truly committed to the aims of the female offender strategy. They must properly resource the relevant bodies so that women are supported to break their negative cycles in the criminal justice system.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate can last until 4 pm. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench spokespeople no later than 3.27 pm, and the guideline limits are 10 minutes for the SNP, 10 minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister, and then Carolyn Harris will have three minutes at the end to sum up the debate. Until 3.27 pm, it is Back-Bench time. There is a galaxy of talent waiting to be called. We will start with Wera Hobhouse.

2.48 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this important debate.

Recall of female offenders has gone up by 131%—an odd number, but dramatic—in the last 12 months, since the Government introduced mandatory post-custody supervision. The reasons for the dramatic increase in recall rates are complex, but there is a common theme: community support services, which were once a lifeline for recently released offenders, are no longer available.

Women offenders are far more likely to be convicted for non-violent offences, which means that the majority—72%—are serving sentences of less than a year. Despite the Secretary of State's acknowledgement that short-term sentences do more harm than good, they are still being issued in their thousands. The startling figures illustrating the failure of the new post-custody system highlight the inability to join up vision and implementation. Too often, women who end up in prison come from a background of systematic violence. Current research suggests that 57% of female offenders have suffered domestic violence, and 53% have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse during childhood. Furthermore, research suggests that prison is not an effective deterrent for women, with 61% of those who are inside for less than 12 months going on to be reconvicted within a year of being released.

Recent recall numbers illustrate how our system fails female offenders with backgrounds of trauma. In the Prison Reform Trust's new research paper, 19 out of 24 women interviewed said that they received no support from support officers to address the complicated and interlocking issues they faced once they had left prison, including the struggle to find accommodation, as we have heard; to identify services to combat drug or alcohol abuse; to reunite with children who were taken into care following their mother's incarceration; or to take other steps needed to rebuild a life.

The ideas behind the extension of post-custody mandatory supervision were sound. They suggested that the Government were interested in rehabilitating offenders, not just punishing them. However, those good intentions have been smashed to pieces by the consistent and deliberate refusal to fund the services that support people transitioning from prison. Many must wait weeks after release to start receiving benefits, and universal credit claims must be made online, which is not possible for most inmates.

According to Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation, one in seven short-term inmates leaves prison without knowing where they will sleep that night, and only a small proportion find suitable accommodation on the day of release. One woman recalled to prison and interviewed for the Prison Reform Trust said:

"Being a homeless woman is so degrading. They will send me out to no housing. It's a big, 'recall me' sign on my forehead. I have no excitement about going out. I got no place to go and an ex-partner who is very violent."

It is a bleak situation, made worse when we remember that two thirds of female offenders have dependent children and one third are single parents. Some 95% of the children of single mothers who are sentenced to prison time are taken into care, further perpetuating the cycle of neglect and trauma.

Although female prisoners make up less than 5% of our prison population, the dramatic increase in recall rates proves that our system is failing them. There is something clearly wrong with a system in which female offenders who have served short sentences for non-violent crimes end up being recalled for many more months because they have missed appointments with their support officers due to homelessness.

Centrally, that issue cannot be separated from the continued use of short-term sentences, which are destructive and do not work as a deterrent to crime. There needs to be a presumption against their use and an increased use

[Wera Hobhouse]

of non-custodial punishments. If we as a society believe that our prisons should rehabilitate as well as deter, we must properly invest in support services. Leaving our ex-inmates to fend for themselves while imposing strict regulations on them greatly increases their chances of reoffending. Testimonies suggest that some ex-inmates deliberately reoffend to be readmitted to the system, where, crucially, they have a roof over their head. That cannot go on. We can solve it, but it needs political will and the right financial support.

2.53 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this important debate. With our prisons stretched to breaking point, it is important to have a mature and considered debate about penal reform in the country. From statements made by the Prisons Minister, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), and most recently the Secretary of State for Justice about the futility of short prison sentences, it seems that on this occasion the Department wants to engage in a fruitful discussion.

Two weeks ago, I had a debate on short sentences where I called for a ban on prison sentences under six months. I believe that short prison sentences should also be at the front and centre of today's debate on the recall of women to prisons and that is where I will focus my remarks.

Short prison sentences are an ineffective way to address the root causes of criminality, as they cause disruption to people's lives, as my hon. Friend so eloquently described. They are too short to help inmates to rehabilitate and serve only as a punishment, which leads to increased reoffending rates. It is important to have this debate because, more often than not, women in particular are caught in a cycle of short prison sentences; and reoffending or recall despite their being convicted of non-violent offences adds to the chaos and uncertainty in their lives.

The 2017 "Guide to Proven Reoffending Statistics" found that both men and women who receive short-term prison sentences were considerably more likely to reoffend in the future. Most women receive prison sentences of less than 12 months and are more likely to reoffend than a male who has a comparable sentence. Short sentences place greater strain on an already overcrowded prison system and do not provide inmates with adequate time to become involved with rehabilitative programmes. Not only are our prisons facing staff shortages, but cuts to prison services mean that inmates cannot access important services that prevent reoffending.

The Government can and must do a better job of bolstering social programmes that aim to reduce the rate of offending among individuals who commit petty crimes. Many who do so feel they have no other option, especially if they are affected by addiction or mental health issues.

It seems to me as well that we cannot talk about this issue without talking about the Prison Service and the real problems that people within it are facing. Over the weekend, a constituent of mine appeared in *The Daily Mirror* and talked about leaving the Prison Service after

only five days, simply because the training was not good enough; he felt intimidated and scared. How can Prison Service staff deliver rehabilitative programmes if they are leaving the service because of lack of training and because of intimidation and threats of violence? The Government need to address that.

It seems that the justice system is blind to the impacts of short prison sentences on mothers and their families. Women are more likely to be a child's primary carer, so these sentences have greater impact on their lives than on the lives of their male counterparts, who do not often have that experience of being primary carers. Children of women in prison find themselves struggling when it comes to basic necessities, including housing, health and education. In many respects, many of them have failed in the system before they have begun.

The Government can do something about that. According to a Prison Reform Trust report in 2018, every year over 17,000 children in England and Wales experience their mothers going to prison. Just imagine that: suddenly the primary carer in their life is gone; suddenly there is discord and disharmony in their life. Their education will be disrupted, whether they like it or not. The children of prisoners are more likely to be ill. Often, they are displaced from their home and their lives are uprooted. They have to enter new schools, often with the stigma of knowing that their classmates know that they are the children of prisoners. They may be separated from their siblings. All of this sounds almost like a Charles Dickens story, but it is happening in this country in the 21st century, and it is something that all of us, as Members of Parliament, should be concerned about and should do something about.

According to the 2018 female offender strategy document, roughly 60% of female inmates are victims of domestic violence. As a result of horrific abuse, these women find themselves in dire situations, with a limited pool of supportive resources. They may be coerced into a life of crime by an abusive partner, or they may turn to petty crime to provide for themselves and their children. If somebody is particularly shoplifting for food, it seems common sense to me to ask why. Are they hungry? Rather than make them criminals, is it not far better to offer them hope?

Women with abusive partners often find themselves cut off financially and unable to keep up with a variety of payments, ranging from bills to council tax payments. Women sent to prison due to non-payment become entrenched in a cycle of instability. How are they supposed to create a better life for themselves and become proactive citizens if they are imprisoned and thrown back into the exact same situation that led them into trouble? If someone is falling behind on their bills, such as council tax, the wrong place to send them is to prison, because that just criminalises them.

I firmly believe that women do not belong in prison, especially if they have not been convicted of a violent crime. They need support and should be placed in a facility that is at least designed to rehabilitate and educate them. These women require a safe space where they can learn valuable skills that allow them to live independently, thus removing their need to return to crime; instead they can become useful citizens to society.

The probation service does not facilitate support for recently released inmates. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) said, since reforms such as

the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 were made, recall numbers for women have risen by 131%—a shocking statistic when compared with the 22% recall rate among men. Something is wrong when for so many women the system is not working. Between 2017 and 2018 more than 1,700 women were recalled to prisons, which is roughly half the female prison population.

In addition to attempting to restabilise and normalise their lives, these women have the added stress of maintaining contact with their probation officers. The constant threat of being recalled creates a lack of trust between offenders and probation officers, and trust is key to ensuring that those women do not return to a life of crime. Offenders have no one to turn to if they face having to slip back into petty crime in order to survive. If a probation officer is on the lookout only for a perceived risk of offending, it seems unlikely that they will be someone to whom an at-risk offender can turn for help.

Two weeks ago, I called on the Government to abolish the practice of administering short sentences to non-violent offenders, and instead to focus their efforts on establishing rehabilitation services, residential centres, and the use of community service orders. For women who are also themselves victims, short stints in prison only cause more problems in often chaotic lives. I am impressed that the Secretary of State acknowledged that short prison sentences do not work. I urge him and other Justice Ministers to put their words into action, to abolish short prison sentences for women, and to create a system that benefits and builds trust in the whole of society.

3.2 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on her excellent opening remarks.

When the Government brought forward their proposals for transforming rehabilitation about five years ago, I was critical of the plan to separate probation into the National Probation Service for the management of high-risk offenders, and community rehabilitation companies for the management of low and medium-risk offenders. I was critical of the contracts given to community rehabilitation companies, because I did not see the justification for breaking up a successful probation service in that way. I feel that my concerns have been proven right, as shown by the failure of the Working Links contract the other day.

At the time of those proposals, I supported the introduction of post-release supervision for those released from short custodial sentences, and I thought that the Government's proposed model of through-the-gate support would help to resettle offenders in the community, help women in particular to manage complex and chaotic lifestyles, and contribute to a reduction in reoffending. In the light of experience, I now think I was wrong to believe that that model of supervision for those released from short custodial sentences would be beneficial, and that is partly because of the way in which such support has been delivered.

There has been a lack of genuine through-the-gate provision—to the gate, possibly, and possibly provision after someone is released, but it is not the genuinely,

seamless, through-the-gate offer we were promised. As we heard, that was compounded by the chronic lack of support services in the community. That resulted in deeply perverse consequences for women who are massively and disproportionately affected, as shown by Ministry of Justice figures for the proportion of women subject to recall. It is particularly concerning that, in contrast to the experience of men, women released from short custodial sentences are likely to be recalled to prison. The figures flip round the other way for male offenders subject to recall, who have usually received longer custodial sentences.

In addition to the design failures and the problems with the lack of community support, we know that there are real problems with the community rehabilitation companies that provide the specialist support that women subject to post-release supervision should receive. I have heard reports of women receiving phone contact only from their supervising officer, a lack of women-specific support and programmes designed specifically to meet the needs of women, and chopping and changing supervisory staff, which makes it difficult to build that relationship of trust between supervisor and the woman being supervised. It is also clear that most women appear to be recalled not because of further offending, but because of a failure to comply with the terms of their supervision. According to a written answer I obtained from the Minister for Prisons on 5 November last year, only a quarter of women are subjected to recall as a result of committing a new offence.

As we have heard, there are particular reasons why women might find it more difficult to comply with the terms of an order. They may have childcare obligations. If it is difficult to get childcare, they might find it hard to get to a supervision meeting. There is the difficulty of managing complex household needs, the lack of access to stable housing, difficulties accessing transport—women who are less likely to have access to a car may have particular problems with that—and women's greater range of vulnerabilities. That experience of going in and out—of short periods of custodial sentence and then of being recalled, perhaps on more than one or two occasions—represents a cat and mouse situation that does nothing to help stabilise chaotic lives and support those women away from a path of reoffending. Nor does it help the Lord Chancellor in his rightful ambition to reduce the prison population.

It is clearly time to radically rethink the policy. The Minister will be familiar with the whole-system approach we have adopted in Greater Manchester over a number of years. I firmly believe it offers a much better model of support for women. I am pleased that many of the concepts we have used in the whole-system approach have found their way into the female offender strategy, but I urge the Minister to be much more vigorous and determined in effecting those principles. He should take a “what works” approach to policy and abandon one that clearly does not work.

First, the Minister needs to consider what genuine, through-the-gate support will look like. How can that be designed and resourced for the move from prison into the community? Secondly, we need a commitment to proper investment in community provision. In particular, that should be in sustainable and adequate funding for women's centres. Thirdly, as we have heard, we need better processes for information and decision making

[Kate Green]

by supervising officers when considering recall, and that means better staff training. We urgently need legislation for a presumption against short custodial sentences coupled with building greater confidence in community alternatives, as we are seeing in Scotland. We know that short custodial sentences are particularly damaging to women and their families. They also fuel the recall problem.

Fundamentally, I ask the Minister to join me in rethinking the policy of active post-release supervision that we signed up to in 2015. It is not clear that it is doing any good, but it is quite clear that it is doing quite a lot of harm. I am persuaded that it was not the right policy to adopt. I hope the Minister will be prepared to reconsider it.

3.9 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this important and timely debate on an issue that does not receive nearly enough attention or the attention it deserves. I have long been deeply passionate about reform of our prisons system, particularly in Wales, and I have campaigned on the issue since first being elected to the House.

I preface my remarks by making it clear that nothing in what I am about to say undermines my fundamental belief that any person of any gender should be subject to the same consequence under the law if they commit a criminal act. My comments are not about watering down justice, but about looking at improving outcomes for the benefit of everyone: the offender, the victim and society more broadly. Central to that is a sincere belief that it is foolish and wrong-headed to continue with the “lock up, throw away the key and crime will reduce” attitude to criminal justice, which simply does not work.

Research published last year by the Prison Reform Trust showed that the number of women recalled to prison has more than doubled since the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 was passed. That demonstrates that the Government’s rehabilitation strategy is not working. The problem is worsening at an alarming rate. The message is clear: the 2014 reforms to recall must be reversed at the earliest opportunity.

There are no women’s prisons in Wales. I have said before—the Minister knows this—that I would never advocate for one to be opened, but that in itself makes things doubly challenging for women prisoners in Wales, who are uprooted and taken far from their communities, often after committing relatively minor offences. It is for that core reason that we should urgently address short sentences—their damaging impact demands our attention. I believe strongly that getting rid of those sentences and replacing them with other punitive measures closer to home would create better outcomes all round.

Simply put, locking women up for a few months many miles from home leads only to increased alienation, increased problems for families and carers, and, perhaps most damagingly, an increased likelihood of reoffending and recall. They should not be in prison to begin with. Indeed, the Government’s own female offender strategy underlines that shorter sentences are far less effective than non-custodial sentences such as community orders.

It also hammers home the point that early intervention is key to reducing the number of women who enter the penal system in the first place.

We know that homelessness is a big catalyst for reoffending and recall to prison. Six out of 10 women prisoners have no home to go to when they are released. Given that the nearest prison for women living in my constituency is more than 50 miles away, in England, that can force women on to the streets, far from their own communities and any support networks they may have.

I urge Members to take a second to try to put themselves in the shoes of a woman who is convicted of theft and given a prison sentence of less than six months. In that time, that woman will be unable to pay her rent and will be evicted. She will have no money to secure a new property, and little or no means of travelling back to the community she lived in and any fragile support systems she may have access to. It is no exaggeration to say that the prospect of going back to prison eventually becomes appealing compared with the terrifying alternative. In its recent report, “Broken Trust”, the Prison Reform Trust stressed that the lack of housing post-release needs to be addressed urgently.

The huge distances women are placed from home can have a terrible impact on their ties with family and friends, with bonds often shattered during their imprisonment. Children, loved ones and friends face long, expensive travel and short visiting hours, and the ensuing relationship breakdowns can easily escalate into the breakdown of formal support networks. Too often, women are left in truly hopeless situations, facing the most appalling isolation. The 2014 recall reforms mean that if a woman in a vulnerable situation commits even the most cursory transgression, she can find herself back inside, and back in the well-known cycle of institutionalisation, with all the perils that poses.

Our criminal justice system should, at its core, be about reducing crime, yet the situation as it stands is pure smoke and mirrors, with the supposed short-term win of detaining women for short periods masking the actual impact. The longer-term cost of that—namely, an ever greater number of potential victims of crime—is not only counterproductive but, frankly, shameful.

The 1997 Labour Government were famously elected on a promise to be “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”. Although that Government’s record in this area was sometimes chequered, they had at their heart an understanding that the causes matter as much as the crime. We must address the elephant in the room: why do women commit relatively low-level crimes in the first place? Lots of Members have referred to that, and I make no apology for reinforcing what they said. A six-month prison sentence will not help a woman who was forced to steal to feed her children. A short time inside will not help a woman who has a long-standing addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling. Being put behind bars will not help a victim of domestic violence who lashed out in response to years of oppression. We need to look again at the causes of crime rather than having ridiculous blanket sentencing regimes.

In 2017, the charity Women in Prison found that 84% of women entering prison had committed a non-violent offence. It is precisely for such crimes that women

receive relatively short custodial sentences. In the same year, the Ministry of Justice itself found that shorter sentences were

“consistently associated with higher rates of proven reoffending”.

I am pleased that this week the Justice Secretary mooted a move away from short prison sentences but, as with everything with this Government, we will have to wait to see whether the reality stacks up to the rhetoric—perhaps the Minister will give us some assurances about that. But—it remains a but—if what the Secretary of State said this week is true, we might at last have a real opportunity to start turning around the damaging trend among female offenders.

The Prison Reform Trust’s “Broken Trust” report is a call for action that the Government would do well to heed. I support the trust’s call for the establishment of women-specific community services, including multi-agency outreach services. The complex nature of crime and its causes demand such a multifaceted approach. We cannot blindly continue to treat prisoners as a tick-box exercise, assuming that they will integrate well into society after they leave the prison gates. Far greater attention therefore needs to be paid to work with local authorities and the devolved Administrations.

There are pressures on housing throughout the country, but until we integrate housing services with the prison system properly, we will never sever the link between women leaving prison and elevated levels of homelessness. Too many of us see the blooming numbers of rough sleepers on our streets, and that is just the tip of the iceberg. However unpalatable some might find this, women leaving prison have just as much right to council services and support networks as any other residents in need.

Justice Ministers must work much more closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that those prisoners who are eligible to claim welfare support when they are released have the right information well in advance of the day they walk out of the prison door. Given the plethora of issues with universal credit, I do not hold out much hope of the Government taking action on that—they have consistently let down the most vulnerable in society.

Time does not allow me to discuss all the Prison Reform Trust’s recommendations, but if the Minister will do one thing today, please let it be this: agree to implement each of the report’s recommendations or, if he feels that any cannot be implemented, to explain why not. Some recommendations will cost, but failing to act will have far more significant financial implications for the Treasury long into the future.

In truth, although it might not always be popular to advocate increasing funding to help released prisoners to reintegrate, it remains the right thing to do. Nine years of Tory austerity make the case even more strongly. The fact remains that investing in rehabilitation and specific support services for women who are in prison and, crucially, who are leaving prison, will reap economic rewards as well as social dividends. Reducing the rate of recall to prisons will, in the long run, slacken the strain on our Prison Service, which is reaching breaking point in many places—in some places, it is broken already.

We have heard from the Prisons Minister that he is prepared to resign should he fail on prison safety, which is a major problem. However, it is just as important for

the Government to get to grips with the issues outlined today, not least because if prisoner numbers constantly increase in the long term—increase as the Government fail to get a grip—prison safety will only worsen.

My remarks are not a counsel of despair, and the Justice Secretary’s comments this week give rise to some cautious optimism, albeit after significant pressure from the Opposition. Warm words, however, mean nothing if they do not translate into meaningful action. I hope that my message to the Minister is clear: this week’s welcome news cannot simply be about giving the Government a good news day amid the Brexit chaos; the Justice Secretary’s words must translate into real investment in support services and rehabilitation, with a nuanced focus on women and their individual needs. Only then will we truly begin to start reversing this deeply worrying trend.

3.19 pm

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this incredibly important debate. As a member of the Select Committee on Justice, I have visited a number of prisons, including Downview women’s prison. On every visit to a prison, I hear stories about punitive, arbitrary and often completely avoidable recalls to prison.

Recall appears to operate more harshly in relation to prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for public protection. Although IPP prisoners account for a small proportion of the female prison population, it is important to mention them in this debate. I acknowledge that there are prisoners who pose a genuine risk to society, but the opinion is widely held that IPP sentences are not the way to deal with them. Such sentences have now been abolished and the Parole Board has a priority target of reducing the IPP prison population significantly. Of the 440 women recalled to prison in the three months between July and September last year, four were IPP prisoners. Although there are substantially fewer women on IPP tariffs compared with men—I think there are 46 women on IPP tariffs—between 2010 and 2017, 40 women were recalled due to breach of their licence conditions.

At present, an IPP prisoner’s licence can be terminated only after they have completed 10 years in the community following their release—an extremely lengthy period. I have significant concerns that the terms by which the licence and recall system operates are set at too low a threshold, with the result that prisoners flip between detention, parole boards and release on licence once more. I urge the Minister to look at the issue of removing the last of the IPP prisoners in the prison estate with some urgency.

In the year ending September 2018, there were 1,846 recalls of women to custody while on licence—a significant number, considering that the current female prison population stands at 3,809. The first set of data since the implementation of the Offender Rehabilitation Act shows that more than three times as many women were recalled to prison since the ORA changes.

As has been said extensively in this debate and others, short sentences have huge implications for women and their families. A recent report by the Prison Reform

[Ellie Reeves]

Trust show that 17,000 children in England and Wales are affected by maternal imprisonment. Those 17,000 children might have to be cared for by somebody else, be rehomed, leave school or drop out of education altogether. Sometimes recall is necessary, but a decent justice system is also a humane one. In the current system, licence conditions are often seen as a tick-box exercise, rather than a more holistic approach being taken. It is clear that it is not working. Those 17,000 children did not commit crimes, but recall can have a catastrophic impact on them.

We must not forget that, although women can be perpetrators of crime, more often than not they are victims of crime. The Prison Reform Trust data shows that, shockingly, nearly 60% of women prisoners have previously experienced domestic abuse. If we are to solve the issue of female prisoners, this debate must go well beyond recall and prisons, and delve into the wider issue of women in society. As the Prison Reform Trust succinctly states:

“women can become trapped in a vicious cycle of victimisation and criminal activity. Their situation is often worsened by poverty, substance dependency or poor mental health.”

Given that women are often the principal carers for children, it is obvious that the impact of recall and imprisonment is far-reaching.

Some 84% of sentenced women entering prison committed a non-violent offence. When I spoke to the women in Downview prison, I was struck by the fact that none of them was the ringleader in the crimes they had committed. All the women I spoke to were ancillary to the crimes and all the ringleaders were men, so the situation needs looking at holistically. At present, women are more likely than men to be given a prison sentence for a first offence, with one in four women sentenced to less than one month and 55% to less than three months. Women are also more likely to complete their community order or licence period supervision successfully, so there is a huge question about whether the vast majority of women prisoners ought to be in prison in the first place.

The 2007 Corston report called for a distinct, radically different, visibly led, strategic, proportionate, holistic and women-centred approach. Much of the report focused on community support, sentencing reform and alternatives to custody. I fear that, 12 years on, progress on women prisoners has fallen far short of Baroness Corston's original recommendations. The Secretary of State for Justice has signalled an intention to move away from the model of short sentences, but in regard to women and short sentences, Baroness Corston remarked that short sentences

“do not successfully deflect from further offending and for many women make their lives and those of their children worse.”

Why has it taken 12 years to reconsider short sentences when their effects have been known for so long?

The Select Committee on Justice found, in our recent work on transforming rehabilitation and introducing a presumption against short sentences, which we recommended, that volatile short stays in prison can exacerbate the issues in play, rather than reduce reoffending. It has been shown that offenders serving a community sentence typically have a reoffending rate 7% lower than that for similar people serving prison sentences of less than a year, so surely that is where the emphasis should be—on delivering rehabilitation and reducing reoffending.

Women are only a small percentage of the overall prison population. Their distinct issues often go unnoticed or are not focused on in the context of the significantly greater number of men in the prison estate. I therefore welcome the message from the Ministry of Justice in relation to short custodial sentences, but I want to see legislation on that issue and more robust community sentencing, so that those who are passing sentences have confidence that no non-custodial sentence—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I have been generous with the hon. Lady, but she is a minute over her time and I have to call the first Front-Bench speaker: Stuart C. McDonald for the SNP.

3.28 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on a typically thoughtful and persuasive case. Indeed, I think that every Member in the galaxy of talent here today has contributed thoughtful and persuasive arguments.

I agree absolutely that hon. Members are right to express serious concern about the huge increase in the number of women recalled to prison. As we heard, the number has tripled since the introduction of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. That is truly an extraordinary and shocking development. I understand that the latest statistics show that there are 29 recalls to custody for every 100 releases of women offenders on licence. I am not usually one to make comparisons with other jurisdictions, but I will do that today. Although there are difficulties in making direct comparisons, it is interesting to note that in the 10 years to 2015—the figure is not completely up to date—the comparable figure for Scotland is between four and five recalls per 100 releases—one sixth or less of what we are now seeing in England and Wales. We have to ask why that is.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) made a very honest speech about how she had been persuaded at the time of the 2014 reforms, but now, in the light of the numbers, she has reconsidered. I think that if I had been in this place in 2014, I would have been attracted by what the Government were apparently proposing, but the numbers in themselves do seem to make a case for repeal of the 2014 provisions relating to supervision after sentences of less than 12 months. At the very least, there must be a significant review of how those provisions are operating. Even during the passage of the Bill, prison reform organisations warned that many people serving short prison sentences have complex and multiple needs, which increase the likelihood of breach of licence conditions. As the hon. Member for Swansea East said, the Prison Reform Trust is among those who have concluded that that is exactly what has happened, referring to a “coercive response” that was brought about by the Act creating a distrust between offenders and responsible officers. The trust stated:

“The threat of recall accentuates the fault lines in relationships that are already fragile, inhibiting women from confiding in their responsible officers about difficulties that, eventually, lead to their recall.”

Accordingly, two fifths of recalls for women are apparently down to a failure to keep contact with a responsible officer, which contrasts with the figure provided by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston that suggests that only a quarter of recalls relate to further offending behaviour.

For the second and final time I will compare this system with how things operate in Scotland. In Scotland there is no automatic requirement to supervise those released after a sentence of less than four years, although judges can impose a supervised release order in certain cases where that would be necessary for public protection. That might provide a better balance and focus than the system introduced in England by the 2014 Act, and a lack of compulsory supervision does not mean that support is not available.

Chris Evans: I know this is a strange thing to say, but most people who reoffend were released on a Friday when there is no access to services such as housing, social security or whatever. What is the experience in Scotland? Has anyone considered the days on which prisoners are released?

Stuart C. McDonald: I must confess that I do not have the answer to that today, although the issue has been flagged up to me previously. I will look at it again to see whether a policy is in place to try to address that issue, as it seems significant.

There is broad agreement that women who are released on licence desperately need more support, and we are finding that supervising officers are simply not able to resolve or help with problems of unstable housing, debt, abusive relationships, mental health and the various other issues that hon. Members have highlighted. In fairness, the Government recognised that in their most recent female offender strategy, published last summer, which notes that a

“lack of access to supportive community services can contribute to recall to custody”

and that the aforementioned problem of not keeping in touch with supervising officers was driven by a lack of safe accommodation, as well as substance misuse and other issues.

Few Members present would not agree that residential support in the community that provides holistic support to turn lives around is far preferable to prison recall. The Government's strategy document gives various examples of successful residential support options, including the marvellous Turning Point 281 centre in Glasgow. Such places are not soft options; they are a serious challenge to help women turn their lives around and address the root causes of their being on the wrong side of the law, whether that is substance abuse, adult or childhood trauma, financial problems or debt, mental health issues, or domestic abuse. As hon. Members pointed out, we need a coherent, comprehensive and joined-up network of services, and that requires resourcing a whole-system approach with sustainable funding, such as that described by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston.

My most important point—here I agree with everyone who has spoken in the debate so far—is that short-term prison sentences of less than a year are, to all intents and purposes, pointless. As the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston said, the Scottish Government are moving

to a presumption against sentences of under 12 months, which hopefully will lead to a significant reduction in the number of women receiving custodial sentences. I also welcome and support the positive moves made by the UK Government. Short sentences do not allow time or space to address the root causes of offending behaviour, and as hon. Members have said, they often exacerbate existing problems, breaking up families and social networks and disrupting employment and housing.

Reform could make a significant difference and help far more women to turn their lives around than locking them up and making things worse. I encourage and support the Government in that endeavour. Again I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East on securing this debate. She is right in what she has argued for today, and I very much hope that the Government have listened.

3.34 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and to follow so many strong and passionate contributions. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for securing this important debate. She is a passionate advocate of supporting women in prisons and vulnerable women more generally.

The “Broken Trust” report found that the number of women recalled to prison has more than doubled since the end of 2014. Equally shocking is the fact that 40% of recalls were due not to breaking conditions or reoffending, but to losing contact with the offender manager—a point made by several Members today. It is not right. It is heavy-handed, disproportionate and in no one's interests but those of the probation providers.

The conditions for recall were set out by the National Offender Management Service, now Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, which put forward a test by which recall decisions must be judged. The test operates on a scale, with “threat to the public” at the top, but the test is clearly not being adhered to. Recalls should be for public safety alone, either to protect members of the public or to prevent imminent offending. Instead, it has become a box-ticking exercise for private probation companies more interested in profits and contracts.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I wanted to attend this debate, Mr Hollobone, but I had to be in the Chamber for a statutory instrument and could not be in two places at one time—although, I do try to do that sometimes. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the Prison Service must answer the question as to why the use of recall of women continues to increase when they are far less likely to commit serious offences? Why is the trend not slowing down as it did for men? That poses a question for the Minister, who must consider how the resettling process is carried out. Can it be improved and regulated better? Clearly it can.

Imran Hussain: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. That point has been made by various Members today and the questions have been posed. I will continue to explore further some of the concerns he raises.

Because of the bureaucratic approach, probation companies are not respected or trusted by the women they should work with. Instead of seeing the complex

[Imran Hussain]

needs that women face, probation companies look past them and see them as risks, so that homelessness, joblessness, poverty and childcare are not needs to be met, but risks. It is outrageous, particularly when years of austerity have resulted in closed independent support networks and therapy groups in the community and left probation as the only means of assistance. The probation companies see the women not as vulnerable but as potential reoffenders, whereas others would see them as women who needs help, and they issue them with recall orders, sending them back to prison, even though they have done nothing wrong.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East, I want to cite real examples. One woman slept rough for two weeks before signing for a flat in a new area. She contacted the probation service to say that she had settled in but that she had not heard from them and did not know whether to attend the old or the new office, the address of which she did not know. She was instead told that there was a warrant out for her arrest and then returned to prison for 14 days. That directly affected her settling into the new area and delayed her social services assessment. As if that was not bad enough, her paperwork stated that she had been recalled because

“a period of stability in custody would benefit her”.

She had a house and she had stability, but still they recalled her. It is shocking.

Probation staff are under significant pressure, with ever-growing workloads and directions from above to fulfil quotas. The culture of privatised probation means that no thought is given to the rule to consider the specific needs of female offenders. We have seen that clearly with community rehabilitation companies believing that that need is fulfilled not by funding a network of women's centres, but by making available a female offender manager. With pressure to be rid of female offenders so that CRCs no longer have to deal with their often complex needs, what is created is the disproportionate and excessive recall that many hon. Members have spoken about today.

The rapid rise of recall is worrying, and so too is the disproportionate and negative impact it has on women. By repeatedly dragging women back into our prison system, we are trapping them there. A woman might complete her short sentence, but if she does not get help she may be recalled, serve a couple more weeks and then get out. If she still cannot get help she may be recalled again, thus entering a cycle. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East was absolutely right to describe it as being trapped in the criminal justice system.

The Ministry of Justice has abolished the use of IPP sentences—imprisonment for public protection—as my hon. Friend said, but it has created problems by locking in offenders with no prospect of getting out or ever actually being free or alive and kicking. Make no mistake: prisons are in a state of emergency. Women cannot access help in them, violence has exploded and safety has plummeted. Far too many women are killing themselves, and many more are committing acts of self-harm.

That leads me to the question of the suitability of prison and short sentences for women in the first place—an issue that many hon. Members have spoken about. The women we are locking up have committed crimes of

poverty such as petty theft. More than 80% are inside for non-violent offences, and they are often troubled and vulnerable. More than half have mental health issues, have suffered child abuse or domestic abuse, or are struggling with substance misuse. There is no way we can deal with the problems that drive them to offend in the first place in prison because there are not enough experienced officers or the support services to aid them. We are clear that we must end super-short sentences, which cause too many women to be in prison for petty crimes. That is the only way women will be able to access the support they need to tackle their offending. That is the only way we can keep the public safe.

The Justice Secretary spoke about this matter on Monday, and the Prisons Minister has done so on previous occasions. I sincerely hope that we do not see another plan that comes to nothing in reality. We are having this debate because of a plan that has come to nothing. At the heart of the rise in recall is the Government's failure to address female offenders' needs and reduce their reoffending. If we do not have women offending or serving short sentences in prison, there will be no one to recall.

The Government set out a strategy and goals nine months ago, but they are yet to set out how they will achieve them. They offer warm words but no way forward. They propose residential women's centres, which are a revised policy of the previous Labour Government, but they have promised only five and there are no signs of where they will be, how they will be funded and who they will be for. Will they house homeless women or those with housing? Will it be judges or the probation service and the Prison Service that send them there? Months later, we still do not have those answers. Perhaps the Minister will start by answering some of those pertinent questions about the female offender strategy.

Kate Green: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be very helpful if the Minister could show us, either today or in due course, the evidence about the efficacy of residential women's centres? An even better solution might be simply to support them in their own homes and in the community.

Imran Hussain: My hon. Friend makes a very pertinent point. She is right, and I hope the Minister will address that issue.

The Government also delivered a huge funding cut to the female offender strategy. They promised £50 million but reduced it to £5 million over two years. How they intend to achieve any of the strategy's goals with such insufficient funding, particularly given that it is double-counted and has already been announced elsewhere, is a mystery. I do not want to alarm the Minister, but there is just one year of the strategy and £5 million left, with no sign of progress or more funding next year. Again, can the Minister provide answers about where the money for the five residential centres will come from? What progress has been made? Those are important questions that he and others have not yet answered.

The excessive use of recall for troubled women who have done nothing wrong after release, and whose recall is the result not of their failings but of those of CRCs, is an absolute scandal. The Government were warned that the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 would force women through needless hardship, but they neglected to listen.

As well as providing answers to the questions that have been asked, the Minister must use his response today to announce a review of the impact that the extension of recall for short sentences has had on women. He must set out plans that will ensure that people are detained only on the orders of judges, not probation officers. Ultimately, he must set out a coherent plan for ending short sentences, which trap many vulnerable and troubled female offenders in the criminal justice system, and for ending the involvement of private companies in our probation system, which has left it target-driven, not people-driven.

3.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, which I seem to be doing quite frequently. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who is a doughty and effective champion for her constituency and for women in the criminal justice system—the House is lucky to have her among its Members. I also thank all hon. Members who have spoken today and recognise the work of many organisations in this space, including charities and others, such as the Prison Reform Trust, whose report has been frequently cited. I reassure hon. Members that I will consider the contents of the report carefully.

Hon. Members have understandably highlighted their concerns about the rise in the number of women recalled to prison since the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. The hon. Members for Swansea East and for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) clearly and effectively set out the context and complexity of the cohort of female offenders we are talking about. Quite rightly, they highlighted that many women who offend are not only offenders and perpetrators, but victims.

Many hon. Members cited the powerful statistic that about 60% of women in custody have suffered some form of domestic abuse or domestic violence. In the context of those multiple and complex needs, it has also been highlighted that the crimes for which many of those women received custodial sentences were non-violent crimes that did not appear to present any physical threat to broader society.

As hon. Members have highlighted, the female offender strategy—one of my first ministerial decisions on my appointment last summer—set out our future ambition in this area. The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) highlighted the whole-system approach at work in Manchester, which we have looked at in that context. I look forward to meeting the deputy Mayor in the coming months to talk to her about her work in that area and the Manchester experience.

Considerable progress has been made. I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) and I have updated his fellow shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), who is well aware of our progress in spending that money, which I will touch on, and the longer term plans. I do not take his comments in an unpleasant way; I taken them in the spirit in which they are intended. He is keen to see progress, as are we, and as a diligent shadow Minister he is rightly prodding and pushing me to make sure that we continue to make progress.

Although serious crimes will still justify a custodial sentence in some cases, we were clear in our vision, which was set out in the strategy, for fewer women to get custodial sentences, especially short custodial sentences, and for women to serve custodial sentences in better conditions when they are imposed. The evidence suggests that short sentences simply do not reduce the risk of reoffending among women who have such sentences imposed on them. Our aim must be to protect society from crime and to reduce the number of victims. We must therefore look at what reduces the risk of reoffending, future offences and victims. That runs through the heart of our strategy.

In the shorter term, as we deliver on that strategy and vision, we must ensure that we support women under supervision in the community, so that they are not recalled to prison, with all the disruption and distress that causes. Hon. Members have rightly highlighted the impact on family life—often a short sentence or recall is not enough to make a difference to the life of that woman or reduce the risk of her reoffending, but more often it is enough to make matters worse, causing huge disruption to accommodation, family life and home life.

The hon. Members for Swansea East and for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) highlighted that the best point at which to intervene is not when a woman is in the criminal justice system or in custody, but before getting to that point. It is better for such women, for society and for their children to maintain their family life, reducing the risk of their falling into offending. The hon. Member for Swansea East is right to draw attention to work in Wales in that respect. Within the Ministry of Justice, I am the Minister responsible for relationships with the devolved Administrations, and I look forward to working with Jane Hutt—I have met her already—on that and with the Welsh Government on the blueprints for female offenders, to ensure that we have a joined-up approach.

It is also important that such support is gender and trauma informed and helps a woman as a person, rather than taking place in a silo. Hon. Members have touched on a number of factors that play a part in recall—multiple needs, housing, substance misuse, trauma—and on what the statistics say about why most women have been recalled to prison. The main reason comes down to the particular challenge of an offender being out of touch with the supervising officer.

In 57% of cases of women offenders being recalled, the offender had failed to keep in touch with the supervising officer; where the sentence was for less than 12 months, in 71% of cases of female offenders being recalled to custody, again the offender had failed to keep in touch with the supervising officer. I do not mean that they had simply missed an appointment with the probation officer and therefore needed to be punished. Indeed, the power to recall any offender to custody is not to be used punitively. Rather, the probation officer had felt that all reasonable efforts to trace an offender had been exhausted and that there was no other way to bring the offender back in touch.

We must recognise that in some circumstance there is something inherently risky in a situation in which a probation officer is unable to assess an offender's risk because contact cannot be made. Recalling such an offender might sometimes be unavoidable. The hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge highlighted

[Edward Argar]

those female prisoners serving IPP sentences, and I will reflect carefully on the points she made. However, there can be a number of underlying reasons for an offender to be out of touch, particularly female offenders, given their complex needs, which in many cases form the context of their offending. The HMPPS guidance therefore encourages probation officers to identify alternatives to recall wherever possible, while upholding the integrity of the conditions imposed in the licence.

Earlier this month I had the privilege of visiting Brighton Women's Centre, which I am pleased to say we recently awarded funding as part of the female offender strategy. That centre, like many across the country, is an excellent example of how women's centres can play an important role in supporting female offenders to turn their life around. The proposals for five residential women's centres, which Jean Corston would argue she originated back in 2007, have attracted a lot of attention and form an important part of our approach. Clearly, the foundation of the support services for women will always be in those women's centres, working in and with the community.

I was grateful that the Brighton service users were willing—incredibly courageously—to share with me, a stranger, their stories and backgrounds. I was particularly interested to hear about the excellent work that Brighton Women's Centre is doing in partnership with its local CRC. It has begun to use the centre as the location for probation appointments—a trusted space with trusted people—and it means that women who are already using the centre to address other needs can meet their probation officer in an environment that is already familiar to them.

I was told that this co-location model has already seen a 15 percentage point improvement in attendance for reporting appointments for female service users at the Brighton Women's Centre premises between July 2018 and December 2018. That provides me with optimism. There are models out there that can help to drive down the number of women being recalled to prison because they do not keep in contact with their probation officer. Of course, they can also address other factors that might be problematic in those women's lives.

We are also working hard to meet the needs of those women who are newly released on licence. CRCs introduced through-the-gate services in 2015 to support offenders in their transition from prison to the community, by providing resettlement support for accommodation—rightly

highlighted by many Members today as a hugely important challenge for those leaving prison—and support with employment, finance, mental health and substance misuse.

We know that these services are not currently meeting the standard required. That is why we are investing an additional £22 million a year over the duration of the current CRC contracts, to improve the support given to all offenders on release from custody, with new and enhanced arrangements from April this year. They will include sustained support to find proper accommodation and employment on discharge from prison, and there will be approximately 500 more staff working with offenders after April 2019.

The important role that women-specific services, such as women's centres, can play in helping a woman to turn around her life is clear. We have announced and awarded the £5 million of investment, alongside our female offender strategy, to support community provision. That is allocated to a range of organisations to support and enhance existing provision, and to develop new services.

In conclusion, we are clear that we wish to see fewer women being recalled to prison for breach of licence and fewer women serving short custodial sentences, and we believe that we are adopting the right approach to achieve that.

3.57 pm

Carolyn Harris: I thank everyone who has spoken today for their contributions, because we have had a really grown-up debate. If colleagues will indulge me and my emotions slightly, I spend a lot of time when I am in my constituency, and when I am visiting other parts of the country, meeting women who are in this situation, where they are in prison or have been recalled to prison. Unfortunately, because of the nature of their lives, they will not have heard what we have said today; they will not know that we are interested in them and care about them. All they feel is that the whole system is meant to set them up to fail. They do not really care that we are having these discussions; they are more interested in what we are going to do to help them. So I ask the Minister please to bear in mind that most of these women are victims, all of them have experienced trauma, and it is our moral duty to make sure we do not continue to set them up to fail. If I could hug them all better, I would, but unfortunately I have only one pair of arms. I thank everyone again for coming today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the recall of women to prisons.

3.58 pm

Sitting suspended.

Aberystwyth to Carmarthen Railway Reopening

[IAN PAISLEY *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered reopening the railway between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen.

Diolch yn fawr iawn, Mr Paisley. It is a pleasure and an honour to serve under your chairmanship.

The Carmarthen to Aberystwyth rail line fell victim to the infamous Beeching axe in 1965. Together with the closure of the Afon Wen to Bangor line, this closure has meant that for more than 50 years, people in Wales have had to cross the border into England to travel between the north and south of their country by rail.

That is precisely what happens when a country allows another country to determine its transport policy. To this day, decisions over rail infrastructure remain the preserve of Westminster, with Wales left to deal with the far-reaching financial and economic consequences. What appears reasonable on Whitehall spreadsheets and maps has far-reaching and always overlooked consequences in Welsh communities. The people of my country face the indignity of a dilapidated transport system, with no line linking the north and the south, while having to pay, via their taxes, for England to get an incalculably expensive vanity project that links the north and south of that country. At the same time, the British Government refuse to provide full Barnett consequential for Wales.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I have full sympathy with the hon. Gentleman, having spent three happy years in Carmarthen, which, as he knows, is home to the successful University of Wales Trinity Saint David. How are we to attract students to that world-class institution when it is really difficult to travel between Carmarthen, Lampeter and Aberystwyth? I am told there is a great university in Aberystwyth, too, which the hon. Gentleman may have attended at one point.

Jonathan Edwards: I was fully aware of the hon. Gentleman's history in Carmarthen. He will realise the importance of a north-south link in the context of the west of our country. I will deal with his point about universities later, but he is absolutely right to highlight the importance of linking those higher education institutions to enable us to develop the economy of the west of our country.

Let us knock on the head the British Government's fake truth about the Barnett consequential from HS2. Unlike Northern Ireland and Scotland, Wales does not receive its full share of spending from HS2. In the latest statement of funding policy, which accompanied the last comprehensive spending review, Wales had a 0% rating for HS2 whereas Scotland and Northern Ireland had 100% ratings, showing once again that the British Government regard my country as nothing more than the west of England. This week, the boss of HS2 essentially said he has no idea how much the project will cost and no way of calculating it. Mr Paisley, I am sure you can appreciate our concern in Wales about the current arrangements.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): My hon. Friend mentioned north-south links and talked about HS2. There is actually a north-south rail link on the west coast of Wales, but if someone wants to go by train from Aberystwyth to Porthmadog to Llandudno Junction, a critical part of their journey will be on the delightful but steam-powered Ffestiniog railway.

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful for that intervention by my party's parliamentary leader. I have long had an ambition to go on that rail line, but that shows the lack of serious investment in Welsh rail infrastructure over the years.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the most peculiar things about the current devolution settlement for rail infrastructure is that the Secretary of State for Wales makes bold statements about looking to expand lines and open new lines but Wales, which has 11% of the track, has had only 2% of the infrastructure investment in the nine years for which the Conservative party has been in government? That simply is not sustainable if the British Government are going to continue to hold all the economic levers for railway infrastructure investment. They must invest—they must step up to the plate and do their job.

Jonathan Edwards: I have a very simple answer to that problem: devolve responsibility for rail infrastructure to Wales, as is the case in Scotland and Northern Ireland. That would give us the key consequential.

I will return to that point, but I want to continue concentrating on HS2 for a minute. If we consider that the Infrastructure and Projects Authority estimates that it will cost £80 billion, Wales would get about £4 billion if we received our full share. This is not just about HS2, of course; there will also be HS3 and Crossrail 2. The former Mayor of London, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), calculated that London will need more than £1 trillion of investment to cope with the extra demand of planned investments by 2050.

Just to be clear, I am not calling for a high-speed line between north and south Wales. I am not even calling for an electrified line. What I am here to ask for is a line, so that the people of my country can travel by rail between the north and south of their own country without having to leave it.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am more sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's arguments on this subject than he might expect. He refers, not unreasonably, to the people of our country, but this does not affect just the people of our country; it affects the people of any country who happen to visit Wales and might bring wealth and investment to our aid. They do not have to be from Wales.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly right. I will go on to talk about the development of the Borders line in Scotland, which has been an incredible success. I have no doubt that a north-south railway would be a huge attraction to the tourists who come to Wales and to that sector of our economy.

[Jonathan Edwards]

The facts on rail spending in Wales are sobering. According to the Welsh Government's Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, Wales has 11% of the British state's rail network, but has received only 1% of the investment—that is 11% of the network and 1% of the spend. There is no such thing as a Union dividend for Wales, and it is a record that shames every single Unionist politician based in my country—I do not mean to upset my near neighbours.

The economic consequences of that imbalance should send a shiver down anyone's spine, let alone those who aspire to see the British state as a vaguely cohesive unit. Of the British state's 12 nations and regions, only three are in surplus. It will not come as a surprise to anyone to hear that those areas are none other than London, the south-east of England, and the east of England. The wealth per head in inner London, based on the latest figures, is an incredible 614% of the European Union average. To put that into perspective, in the communities that I represent in the industrial valleys and the west of my country, that figure is only 68%. That disgraceful record is no accident. It is the direct result of British Government policy, based on a philosophy that the role of Westminster is to throw all the resources at London, with the nations and regions left to share out the crumbs. In Wales, we are no longer dealing with crumbs, but with the dust the crumbs leave behind.

The excellent researchers at the Wales Governance Centre have calculated that, had transport infrastructure in Wales kept pace with spending in London since 1999, an extra £5.6 billion would have been invested in Welsh transport. In such a case we would not be having this debate today, because the Carmarthen to Aberystwyth rail line would already have been built. Indeed, we would have not only that line, but the Swansea Bay metro, the Cardiff Bay metro, and full electrification on both north and south main lines. Imagine the economic productivity gains for Wales and the far-reaching consequences for the wellbeing and opportunities of my fellow countrymen and women if that were the case. Wales is relatively poor because Westminster decides to keep us poor.

The British state is broken beyond repair. Brexit was largely driven by those disgraceful imbalances, and the great tragedy of this moment in history is that Brexit will more than likely exacerbate those imbalances, rather than offer a remedy. Had the British state remained in the EU, communities in its poorest parts were likely to have received £13 billion in convergence funding in the next spending round—a 22% increase from the 2014-20 spending cycle, according to the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions. West Wales and the valleys is a convergence area and therefore a direct recipient of EU regional aid. Here we are almost three years after the referendum, and only a year from the end of the current European convergence period, and the British Government have yet to provide a single detail about their shared prosperity fund.

We all know that Wales is about to be done over once again, despite the clear promises that we would not lose a single penny—promises that were made by the Secretary of State for Transport. If Brexit Britannia is not to turn out to be a 21st-century Tartarus, there must be a major rethink of policy priority, with a long-term view of

economic planning based on dealing with the gross geographical wealth inequalities within the British state. Central to that will be the need to ensure an equitable share of infrastructure investment.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. He makes a valid point about the need to reconnect our communities and bring about economic regeneration in the western part of Wales. Does he agree that other benefits will come with connecting Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, not least for our local health services, and particularly for individuals in Aberystwyth who find the trek down to Glangwili and Carmarthen by bus or car far too onerous?

Jonathan Edwards: My hon. Friend is right, and I congratulate him on his work since he was elected as the Member of Parliament for Ceredigion in pushing forward this whole project. He is absolutely right, and that is one of the benefits that I will mention later, because for health and other public services, having a spine rail line linking the two largest towns in the west of our country will be hugely beneficial.

Unless the British Government can be unhooked from their obsession with high finance and London, the structural imbalances of the British state economy of low productivity, low wages, and high personal debt will continue unabated—indeed they will get worse. The economist Grace Blakeley writes forcefully in the *New Statesman* this week about the need for an economic green new deal. The Carmarthen to Aberystwyth line fits into that sort of stimulus to a T. It is not just about the rail line itself, but how it would act as a literal economic spine. It would provide a much-needed north-south economic focus, which is a far more natural focus for those of us living in the west of Wales, as opposed to the obsession with east-west links. The communities are ideal for any economic strategy based on environmental investment because of our abundance of natural resources.

Too often, the missing link is physical connectivity. The line would open up significant opportunities for bulk freight movement, linking the western ports of Holyhead, Fishguard and Pembroke Dock with the southern ports of Swansea, Cardiff and Newport. If the west of my country was linked from top to bottom, it would link three universities—Bangor, Aberystwyth and the University of Wales's campuses in Lampeter, Carmarthen and now in Swansea. The line would promote greater collaboration between two university health boards, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) said, and a range of other public services. It would make the hospital in Aberystwyth far more viable. We have a threat at the moment of services being restructured in the west of Wales.

Aberystwyth and Carmarthen are two of the largest towns in the west of my country, yet anyone who wishes to make that journey by train today would face an average journey time of seven hours and five minutes. The fastest possible route is five hours and 52 minutes. The old rail line closed to freight in 1973. Since 2000, calls to reopen the line have intensified. I pay tribute to the dedicated work of the campaign group, Traws Link Cymru. We were lucky enough to meet it a few weeks ago in the office of my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion, and it has done incredible work in developing the case. Its proposed route would use much of the

existing line, with a new section from Alltwalis to Carmarthen, in the constituency of my friend, the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart). Stations along the route would include Pencader or Llandysul and Llanybydder in my constituency, and Lampeter, Tregaron and Llanilar in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion. The expected journey would be one hour thirty minutes, compared with the more than two hours 20 minutes that the bus service takes. Despite the slow march of the bus route, it provides a service for more than a quarter of a million people per annum. The link would have a huge impact on Welsh connectivity, providing for a figure-of-eight system for Wales and reducing the rail journey between Aberystwyth and the capital city of Cardiff by more than two hours.

Opponents of the project will throw back the cost-benefit analysis. However, more than 55,000 people live on the proposed route, compared with the 50,000 who live on the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury line. The mid Wales line thankfully survived Beeching's axe, and its passenger numbers are increasing, providing a vital link between Welshpool, Newtown, Machynlleth and Aberystwyth.

As a result of the Budget deal between Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Labour Government, Mott MacDonald was commissioned to undertake a feasibility study on the project. It calculated that if the rail line was up and running by 2024, it would generate 370,000 trips. That would rise to 425,000 by 2027 and 489,000 by 2037. Public appetite for rail is growing and the Minister will be more than familiar with the incredible success of the Scottish Borders line since it was reopened.

In the case of Carmarthen to Aberystwyth and the link to journeys further north, we are talking about, in the words of "Lonely Planet",

"one of the most beautiful countries in the world".

What better way to appreciate the splendour of Wales than on a pan-nation rail journey, especially considering that 85% of all visitors into the catchment area of the rail line are day tourists. The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire made that point eloquently.

The report puts the approximate cost at £775 million. For the British Government, that is not a lot of money, and they have shown they can find the money when they need to, whether that is £1 billion to bribe 10 MPs from across the Irish sea or £5 billion to prop up this place for privileged politicians. The cost of refurbishing this place will go up considerably, I have no doubt. The report calculates that the project would create 2,584 gross jobs along the line, with only 144 of them directly attributable to the railway. It calculates that £170.1 million per annum will be created in gross GVA. I am confident that those figures could be magnified if a proper detailed economic strategy was put in place to increase the impact of the line.

Liz Saville Roberts: I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning the old line between Afon Wen and Bangor. We talk about advantages for south-west Wales, but moving ahead with that line would replicate those same advantages in north-west Wales, which has just as much need of them and just as much need of improved transport links.

Jonathan Edwards: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. Wylfa Newydd, which is now viewed as a white elephant and is in grave danger, was seen as the saviour of the

economy of the north of our country. The reality is that we need a major project in Wales; we need a major project in the west of our country.

Ben Lake: My hon. Friend is generous with his time. To elaborate on his point about the railway's potentially being a spine of the economy, it could also be the spine of a more integrated transport network, allowing bus services that currently service the main towns to be redirected to the smaller villages, thus bringing a lot more connectivity to the more rural areas of west Wales.

Jonathan Edwards: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I was born and raised in the Amman valley in Carmarthenshire and he was born and raised in Ceredigion. We understand the challenges of travelling very small distances within the communities that we represent. This project could integrate public transport and get people out of their cars. It could actually make public transport viable.

Our horizons should be broader. Why not do something really innovative and exciting as part of this project and operate battery or hydrogen-powered passenger trains on the line? I am not an engineering expert, but why not design the line with inclines leading up to stations and declines leaving them, to allow a battery-powered train to regenerate? I am led to believe that Network Rail has trialled a battery-operated train, the Class 379 Electrostar, between Harwich International and Manningtree. Bombardier is a world leader in producing battery-powered trains, so there are opportunities to create manufacturing jobs within the British state on the back of the project.

With the new nuclear power station, Wylfa Newydd, in difficulty, the west of my country needs a new big idea, as I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). This rail line would cost considerably less than the exposure of the British Treasury to a new nuclear power station.

In a recent meeting with Traws Link Cymru, I was supplied with a letter dated April 2017 to the former Member for Lincoln, Mr Karl McCartney, from the then Transport Minister, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). Mr McCartney had a great interest in the project because he used to be a student at Lampeter University. In the letter, the former Minister said that

"if the Welsh Government progress positively with the studies conducted and subsequently decide that the reopening of this line is a transport priority for Wales, I would have no objection to fund and deliver the scheme."

Will the Minister to confirm that the British Government have no objection to funding and delivering this scheme if the Welsh Government make the appropriate request? If not, will he finally give Wales the tools to do it ourselves?

4.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) on securing the debate.

I share the hon. Gentleman's interest in ensuring that the corridor between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen in which this former rail line is located has the transport

[*Andrew Jones*]

infrastructure that it needs to flourish and grow, and I agree that the potential role of reopening that line needs to be carefully considered by regional partners alongside potential improvements to existing transport links. He thinks that that area of Wales is one of the most beautiful in the world. I entirely agree. My name might be Jones, but I have to say that I am a Yorkshire Jones, rather than a Welsh Jones.

The hon. Gentleman says that the Government are not investing anywhere outside London and have ignored Wales. I do not accept that. The Government have committed to investing in Wales. We delivered the Wales Act 2017, which places the Welsh devolution settlement on a firm footing and builds further powers in areas such as transport, elections and energy. We are providing a boost of more than £550 million to the Welsh Government's budget, including more than £25 million from a 5% uplift in the Barnett consequential. By 2020, the Welsh Government's block grant will have grown to more than £16 billion before tax devolution adjustments, which is a real-terms increase over the spending review period.

The Williams review is looking at the structure of our rail industry and includes a review of devolutionary arrangements. I hope that we will see more devolution in our services, but let us see where that goes. We do not yet know what Mr Williams will recommend.

The UK Government recognise that improving transport connections is an important part of helping people to access job opportunities, supporting business growth and access to education in Wales. Throughout control period 5, which covered the period from 2014 to now, Network Rail invested £900 million in the Welsh rail network. That includes a £50 million project to upgrade the north Wales railway, including new signalling on the north Wales coast mainline from Shotton to Colwyn Bay, which was completed only last year.

Network Rail's proposed investment for the rail network during CP6, which starts in April and runs to 2024, is £1.34 billion. The Welsh Government now have responsibility for franchising rail services in Wales, and franchises bring investment. The new Transport for Wales franchise will recruit an additional 600 members of staff and invest £194 million in station improvements.

We have committed £125 million to the upgrade of the Valley lines as part of a wider contribution of £500 million to the Cardiff capital region investment fund, which will help to drive the growth and employment increase in the Cardiff region that we all want. Through our investment, Wales is benefiting directly from a range of projects.

HS2 was mentioned as a white elephant. I do not accept that. HS2 will deliver the capacity and connectivity that our United Kingdom needs. It will benefit the people of Wales, most obviously by bringing forward by six years the delivery of HS2 to Crewe to give access to north Wales. The idea that the Government are focused only on London is simply not correct.

In addition to the spending I mentioned earlier, Bow Street station near Aberystwyth was announced as one of the five successful new station fund 2 stations in July 2017. The scheme received close to £4 million from that fund in addition to £2.4 million from the Welsh Government.

The station will increase accessibility to the rail network, improve transport integration and provide an alternative to car journeys. It is on schedule for completion by April next year.

The line from Aberystwyth to Carmarthen was closed to passenger traffic in 1965, although a section remained open to freight until 1973, as the hon. Gentleman said. I am aware of the local group, Traws Link Cymru, which campaigns to reopen the line. The group was established in 2013 and calls for the reinstatement of rail links across west Wales. I pay tribute to its work. It has raised the profile of the case for reinstating that 55-mile link. The scheme has been discussed here on several occasions, including a debate in November 2017.

Our rail strategy, "Connecting people", includes exploring opportunities to restore capacity lost under Beeching where it unlocks growth for housing or commercial development, eases crowded routes or offers value for money. The strategy makes it clear that any potential line reopening would need to demonstrate a strong business case if Government funding were sought. If we are to invest in reopening routes, they have to unlock economic or housing opportunities, or break up a point of congestion.

The Government have, however, consistently explained throughout the years that local authorities and local leadership are best placed to decide on and take forward transport schemes that will most directly benefit their local areas. We work closely with individual authorities to help them to take forward schemes that they are interested in progressing.

The rail planning process is led by Network Rail with input from a wide range of stakeholders and funders. In March 2016, Network Rail published its Welsh route study, which sets out its strategic vision for the network in Wales over the next 10 to 30 years. That route strategy will inform decisions by funders for the period up to 2024, and the reopening of the route between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen is identified as a stakeholder aspiration. It has not, however, been identified as a potential priority for funders during that period.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Welsh Government and local authorities have commissioned useful reports over the years. A scoping study commissioned by the Welsh Government, which reported in October 2015, set out all the issues to be considered in a full feasibility study into reopening the line. The report identified a large section of former track bed that remains in place, but there are other engineering challenges. It discussed the potential routes to obtaining consent, along with the operational and environmental considerations.

In November 2016 a strategic case jointly commissioned by Ceredigion/Cardigan County Council appraised potential options for improving strategic connections between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen. It recommended that road-based options were taken forward and a rail link not pursued further. That was followed by a Welsh Government-funded £300,000 feasibility study completed only last year that estimated the cost of reinstatement at £775 million.

The study identified numerous challenges, including the continued need to accommodate the Gwili Railway Preservation Society, which runs on part of the former track bed. It considered the environmental impact: ground conditions, property impacts and the need for environmental

protection of peat bogs. Subject to the satisfactory resolution of the issues, the report states that initial operational assessments have determined that the reinstated route could provide a regular hourly train service between Aberystwyth, Llanilar, Tregaron, Lampeter, Llanybydder, Pencader and Carmarthen—I am not sure I got the pronunciations absolutely correct—with an end-to-end journey time of around 85 minutes. It really comes down to how we can best serve the transport connections in that area to deliver the connections that the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) articulated very clearly.

The route can include bus services as well. The hon. Gentleman mentioned there was a bus service. There is a road-based transport link in the TrawsCymru bus service, funded by the Welsh Government. It has operated since 2014, seven days a week, between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen. It has an hourly service on weekdays and Saturdays. I recognise the journey takes more than two hours, but it does connect Aberystwyth and Carmarthen rail stations and offers free weekend travel. TrawsCymru is an important part of the integrated transport network in Wales. The route between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen connects with Bwcabus and is a fully accessible bus service.

I will finish by congratulating the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr on the commitment that he and his local groups have shown to the issue. I recognise entirely the case he makes for broader devolution with transport budgets, but I also have to highlight that the Government look to local leaders, local authorities and the Welsh Government to determine their priorities for connectivity in his region and in Wales. On this particular proposal they think the transport need can be met through other solutions, but of course that may change over time. I look forward to seeing how the Welsh Government determine their transport priorities in the future.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Congratulations on the pronunciations, Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Small Modular Reactors

4.30 pm

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered small modular reactors.

It is an honour and privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. This debate is so important for my constituency, the nuclear industry, the country and—if we are going to slow down the rate of climate change—our planet. The three parts of the energy trilemma are reducing carbon emissions, securing the supply of power and ensuring affordability. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change reports that, if we are to slow down the rise in global temperatures this century, nuclear will feature as a hearty part of the energy mix.

Government have recognised that. It is this Government who are investing in nuclear new build. It is this Government who have begun investing in the technology advances of small modular, advanced modular and nuclear fusion innovation, in partnership with industry. And it is this Government who have ensured, as we leave the European Union, that the necessary non-proliferation nuclear safeguard regimes are in place and that we will be able to operate internationally, under the roof of the Office for Nuclear Regulation, which also has responsibility for safety and security. The industrial strategy and the nuclear sector deal are great policy advances, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to tell us, in his response to the debate, what is being done to promote policy to progress.

More wind farms—on and offshore—and the abundance of solar panels mean that, in addition to much more, intermittent renewable energy, reliable low-carbon nuclear is needed to make the UK energy system secure and affordable. During the long dark hours without any sun, or when the wind is not blowing and the blades do not turn, we can all depend on fission—on the splitting of atoms—to heat water, to create steam, to turn the turbine that generates electricity, which is then transmitted on our national grid, and to provide baseload power and the potential for district heating—24 hours a day and 365 days a year, for up to 60 years.

There is a demonstrable need for clean, low-carbon electricity now and long into the future. The anticipated requirement for electric vehicles alone could reach additional capacity of 18 GW by 2040. And in Copeland we have an indisputable capability. Nowhere else in Europe could there be found such a concentration of knowledge and skills, yet we face an uncertain future. First it was Moorside, and then Wylfa: the headlines have not been positive for new nuclear, despite significant Government efforts and financial incentives.

Economies of scale, based on the size of a reactor, have been, at least until very recently, widely regarded as the most cost-effective method of development, but the “bigger is better” argument may well be contested by small modular reactors. Calder Hall, which began construction in 1953 in my constituency, generated electricity from 1956. It was officially opened by the Queen in 1957 and consisted of four 50 MW Magnox reactors, which transmitted electricity on to the national grid for 47 years, until 2003. Today, we are desperately fighting to get a whopping 3.4 GW power station over the line. Moorside—the proposed new generation III nuclear

[Trudy Harrison]

power station, which is to be built adjacent to the Sellafield site—has been beset by a range of ongoing problems over many years.

Following what happened at Fukushima, the increased cost of engineering means that nuclear is getting more expensive. The return on investment is becoming prohibitively difficult to predict, and the availability of companies capable of constructing large-scale gigawatt-plus reactors is limited. Sadly, there are no large-scale British civil nuclear companies operating today.

Let me be clear: the development of small modular reactors is not in competition with large gigawatt reactors. Small reactors have a complementary role in contributing to the energy mix. Because of the economies of scale that could be achieved by building multiple reactors, having many more small modular reactors could be the key to our energy future.

The Government's nuclear sector deal aims for a 30% reduction in the cost of new build and advocates the merits of a fleet-build approach. The reduced-cost, repetitive-formula, standardised, modular method of construction has yet to be rolled out in the civil nuclear industry, but it has transformed the car and aerospace industries. As we look for ways to secure the necessary resurgence of nuclear power, I ask the Minister whether it is time to do what we have done in those industries in our energy sector.

Small modular reactors of up to 440 MW in size, with a diverse range of technologies, are currently being researched and developed across the UK, thanks, in part, to Government funding. Of course, small nuclear reactors are nothing new; for 50 years, our Royal Navy's continuous at-sea deterrent has reliably been dependent on a mini light water reactor to keep it powered for years at a time without the need for refuelling—a fact that the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) celebrates well and often in this place.

Rolls-Royce has mastered the art of small-space engineering, and is now one of many companies developing its technology on a slightly larger scale.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does she agree that companies such as Goodwin International, which the Minister has visited in my constituency, could help? It has already been working in the defence industry, which she touched on, and could really help to commercialise SMRs in this country.

Trudy Harrison: I absolutely agree. It will be no surprise that I commend Goodwin International for the work it does in the defence industry. This is all about ensuring that British companies can contribute and can benefit companies in the supply chain, which provide components and, most importantly, jobs and apprenticeships. I understand that 125 new apprenticeships are coming from Goodwin, and there will be many more in the future.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, which is important for not just our country but our county. She talks about the private sector. Does she agree that there is a role for

the Government, who should make a real commitment to supporting the SMR sector? That may include a financial contribution.

Trudy Harrison: I thank my hon. Friend for that important reminder that we cannot do this without Government support. We have the capability and the demonstrable need. The industry is desperate to be part of the solution, but we must have the Government's financial policy and industrial support to take this forward.

From light water reactors to heavy water reactors, and molten salt to sodium cooled, the innovation in fission technology is most certainly alive and kicking. Some of our greatest, most innovative companies are now interested in building small reactors in the UK. Moltex, Atkins, NuScale, EDF, DBD, U-Battery Developments, Westinghouse, Sheffield Forgemasters and Rolls-Royce—these companies and hundreds of others involved with their supply chains, such as Goodwin, need our political, financial and industrial support.

Today, there are about 50 civil small modular reactors at various stages of research and development across the world. Fleet build is widely anticipated to bring a swifter return on investment, with lower barriers to entry and standardisation. As politicians, it is surely our job to ensure that policy takes possibility towards probability. Constructing single or incremental small modular reactors on nuclear-licensed sites, where the existing industrial power requirement is currently dependent on fossil fuel, is surely a credible, sensible and more sustainable way to power the UK and beyond.

There is one such location on the outskirts of the Sellafield site in Copeland. Fellside is a combined heat and power plant with a capability of about 170 MW, but it is due to come out of service later this year. It is outwith the nuclear licensed site boundary, but it has the benefit of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary for security, and obviously has a huge adjacent industrial power requirement, which is currently dependent on gas. Will the Minister consider Fellside a suitable, if not perfect, site for a future small modular reactor, and value the huge potential for further advanced manufacturing facilities in Copeland?

This is not just about being the first, although we do have an impressive track record of firsts: the first civil nuclear reactor, the first Magnox reprocessing plant and the first thermal oxide reprocessing plant. In the words of my Prospect union rep:

“With the most experienced workforce in the nuclear industry, West Cumbrians do it best”—

and we want to keep doing it.

I hope the Minister will tell me and the other Members in this debate who share my passion for nuclear how his Department will create the right market conditions to enable developers to bring new reactors to market and to create national and international markets. Grasping the opportunity to meet our domestic power requirements and capitalising on the early-adopter benefits of a multi-billion-pound, global export market while tackling the energy trilemma of security, affordability and environmental sustainability will mean that Cumbria continues to be the centre of nuclear excellence.

This is not rocket science—although we do a bit of that at the National Nuclear Laboratory—but a case of multiples: the more we build, the cheaper things get.

Many of the UK's 15 nuclear reactors will come to the end of their long-serving lives by 2030, leaving us perilously vulnerable and dependent on fossil fuels. We must get serious about meeting the world need for affordable and reliable electricity, while slowing down global warming before it is too late.

Thank you, Mr Paisley, for listening most intently. I look forward to a robust debate and to the Minister's considered response to the points that I have made and that other Members will no doubt make as well.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. Before I call Mr Shannon, I advise Members that each speaker will have three minutes. I intend to call the SNP spokesman just after 5.5 pm, then the Labour party spokesman—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): Three minutes for him!

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): No, the hon. Gentleman will get more—otherwise, the Minister might only get three minutes. I will call the Minister at 5.20 pm.

4.42 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Paisley. It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing it and on arguing the case for her constituency so passionately. She mentioned that you were listening intently, but you always do—that was never in doubt.

Like the hon. Lady, I see nuclear energy and our ability to produce it as essential. I have always supported it, even on my local council many years ago and in the Northern Ireland Assembly. We must have that ability until, if ever, we have the capacity to produce energy wholly through renewable energy in a reliable and consistent manner. We must have the ability to secure our energy supply until that stage comes. I also wish to plug Harland & Wolff and its engineering in Belfast. It has the capacity to be involved in forwarding some of these projects with its engineering expertise.

I agree with colleagues who have stated clearly that nuclear power is clean, producing fewer greenhouse gases and thus contributing to the fight against the danger of climate change. It is accepted that nuclear production does not directly produce sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, mercury or other pollutants associated with the combustion of fossil fuels, which is why it is so important that we use that form of energy.

With that as my beginning point—in this race to the end of my speech—it is not difficult to see where I am going with my brief comments. The UK has 15 existing reactors, generating about 21% of our electricity, and 13 others are at various stages of planning. I am thankful that the Government have announced initiatives and funding for advanced reactors, including £250 million for development, and that there is support for nuclear power in the industrial strategy, as well as specific funding elsewhere.

I would certainly be supportive of a Government strategy regarding the regulated asset base model, which regulates a rate of return for investors during a power

plant's construction. An interesting article that I read through the Royal Society of Chemistry highlighted that the RAB model

"is more attractive to a greater pool of investors...The cost of capital associated with it is lower".

That

"reduces the financial risk for investors and has an added benefit for the government. Such a package could allow the state to negotiate a lower electricity strike price as the investor will take on less capital risk."

That is positive, and I look to the Minister to respond to that. It also raises the question as to why the form is limited to nuclear energy, when it could be used to keep all industry prices down, but I understand that that is a debate for another day.

I support small nuclear modular reactors; we need that form of energy for the foreseeable future. We need to secure it and find a way forward, and I support the Government's attempts to do that. Again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland on securing the debate and thereby giving us a chance to contribute.

4.45 pm

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): I declare an interest because my eldest son is part of the Rolls-Royce team that looks after the reactors in the Astute class submarines that have been so reliable and that keep us safe. As we have heard, large nuclear reactors over 1 GW are proving hard to deliver, not only in this country but worldwide, so small modular reactors may be part of the answer.

It is true that nuclear is the safest and greenest way to generate electricity. It delivers for the environment, which is why I am astounded that green parties around the world campaign against nuclear energy. In Germany, the green coalition forced the Government of the time to abandon nuclear generation. Indeed, it tried to prevent the Czechs, with their Temelin plant, from generating there.

I saw an interesting interview on YouTube the other day with President Putin, who was complaining that the Germans were angry that they were so reliant on Russian gas. He said, "Well, what do they expect? They've abandoned their nuclear stations. They're abandoning their brown coal stations. What do they expect to burn—firewood?" Then he turned, in a rather sinister way, and said, "We have a lot of firewood in Siberia."

Coal is a dangerous fuel to burn. Statistics from China indicate that, in 2014, there were 931 fatalities in its coalmining industry—the first time in history that the figure had been below 1,000. In fact, between 1996 and 2000, there were an average of 7,619 deaths in the Chinese coal industry, which is 20 deaths per day. When coal is burned, it has an effect on air quality, and statistics I have seen say that nuclear generates 440 fewer deaths per unit than brown coal. In terms of climate change, nuclear is 83 times less likely to produce carbon dioxide than coal. Nuclear is the answer to air quality and to climate change.

Other renewables are not in the clear either. Deaths from photovoltaic solar panels on rooftops make them 16 times more dangerous than nuclear—people fall off roofs—and wind generation, particularly out at sea, is four times more dangerous. Of course, when that issue is raised, people trot out Chernobyl. We need to make it

[Mr Robert Goodwill]

clear that we have learned lessons from Chernobyl. I have been to the Chernobyl plant, and it is not the same sort of plant. I had a Lada car once, and it was not the same as a Rolls-Royce.

We have seen 17,000 cumulative reactor years in 33 countries in the nuclear industry. If we can build in some passive features as well, we will have a great future and the UK will once again be a world leader in nuclear technology.

4.48 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing the debate.

Nuclear remains the most dependable low-carbon energy source to deploy in the energy mix alongside large-scale renewable projects. We must be open to all research and development of low-carbon and environmentally friendly technologies, just as Finland's Green party endorses. Nuclear and renewables have a symbiotic relationship. That may change, but from where we stand, it is likely that the greatest advances in technology, such as advanced modular reactors and fusion, will arise from nuclear origins.

My constituency is among the lowest waged in the United Kingdom. The median full-time earnings for 2018 were £21,840—almost £8,000 less than the UK average, and £5,000 lower than the Welsh average. With the rural economy of Wales greatly dependent on ever dwindling public sector jobs and minimum wage leisure and hospitality employment, the development of the future economy of my constituency and county cries out for a range of employment.

Rural Wales suffers generational depopulation as our young people move away to seek job opportunities elsewhere. In Welsh-speaking areas such as Dwyfor Meirionnydd, that is a double loss. It is therefore imperative that the Government recognise the potential of Trawsfynydd, M-SParc and Bangor University to not only grow the economy of north-west Wales but act as catalysts to stimulate supply chains across a region stretching from Caergybi to Cumbria.

I also call on the Government to support their own industrial policy. A small modular reactor or an advanced modular reactor at Trawsfynydd will help to transform not only the economy of Trawsfynydd but the wider supply chain across north Wales and north England. In view of the accepted need to develop an SMR or AMR, coupled with the nuclear sector deal's proposal to site a thermal hydraulic facility at Menai Science Park in Ynys Môn, it is now surely urgent that the Government publicly recognise that Trawsfynydd is an ideal site for a first-of-a-kind development.

Let us speak plainly: the Government must sense the appetite for co-operation that leads cross-party representatives to spell out that the future of an indigenous nuclear industry in serving the economic and energy needs of Wales, England and beyond is dependent on the SMR or AMR programme going ahead. I am proud to work alongside trade union representative Rory Trappe of Blaenau Ffestiniog, who campaigns doggedly for the UK Government to specify Trawsfynydd as an SMR

site because he recognises the potential for a range of jobs over a 60-year lifespan. This is an opportunity for well-paid work for up to three generations of local families and for families across wider north Wales and the north of England. I close by repeating that: well-paid work for three generations of families in rural, Welsh-speaking Wales.

4.51 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing this timely debate.

As I see it, continued instability in the middle east, coupled with an increasingly hostile Russian state, means that it is now vital that we once again establish our own independent source of clean, affordable, low-carbon domestic energy, to achieve our energy security. Since the first nuclear power station was connected to the national grid in 1956, nuclear has become a major contributor to the UK's energy market, with 21% of all electricity now generated in that way. However, with seven stations due to be decommissioned in the next 10 to 15 years, the stark reality is that the UK faces a potential energy gap before new conventional nuclear stations can be brought online. To bridge that gap, we must look towards innovation. In small modular reactors, which take a relatively short period of time to construct—estimated to be between two and five years—I believe we have a ready-made solution.

It is estimated by a UK small modular reactor consortium led by Rolls-Royce that the design, development and production of a fleet of small modular reactors has the potential to create up to 40,000 skilled jobs in the nuclear supply chain and to add more than £100 billion to our economy. Translated to a local level, with Derby being the centre of Rolls-Royce's nuclear operation in the UK, a sustained programme of SMR production in the city would see significant new job opportunities open up for my constituents, as well as in the supply chain.

It is clear that the Government have made a degree of progress in fostering this new technology in partnership with the UK's civil nuclear sector. The small modular reactor competition was launched in 2016, followed by £56 million to develop and regulate designs in 2017, but with the clock ticking we need to accelerate the UK's efforts to develop this technology. I therefore urge the Minister to review the Government's energy strategy and to put a renewed emphasis on supporting the nuclear industry.

We have a golden opportunity to become a world leader in new nuclear technology and at the same time to secure an independent supply of domestic energy. I once again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland on bringing this important debate to the House. I look forward to the Minister's response.

4.54 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I thank the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) for bringing forward this important debate. I begin with a message to the Minister: Hartlepool has the best and most skilled workforce in the industry, and we already have a licence for our site. The Civil Nuclear Constabulary, which has been mentioned, keeps our nuclear facilities

and workers safe right around the clock. I know that we all support its federation in its attempt to resolve pension and retirement inequality issues. I hope and trust that that matter will be resolved soon.

One of the big positives about the new technology is that it shows that the nuclear industry remains a major asset for meeting our future energy needs. Our world needs more low-carbon power. The nuclear sector deal sets out pledges from the Government and the industry itself to make cost reductions in nuclear, and initiatives to support the sector. Arguably, SMRs are central to that vision. They meet the increased demand for low-carbon solutions and produce clean, affordable energy; they are much smaller than traditional nuclear reactors, and over their lifecycle they could deliver £62 billion into the economy and create up to 40,000 jobs, as the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) highlighted.

Our friends at EDF Energy successfully operate the advanced gas-cooled reactor in Hartlepool, which provides electricity for more than 3% of the UK, with a net electrical output of 1,190 MW—enough to power 1.5 million homes—but that reactor is coming to the end of its lifecycle, and decisions need to be made about the future provision of nuclear on the site. EDF has lots of good ideas and is keen to develop alternatives. If necessary, that may include further extending the life of the current plant or developing next-generation technology, like at Hinkley Point C.

Sadly, as we have seen with projects at Anglesey and Moorside, we cannot rely 100% on foreign investment to build our fleet of next-generation nuclear. That is why SMRs—developed and driven by a British consortium, based on tried and tested technology, offering the same output as traditional larger reactors with a lower carbon footprint—are important. The UK's nuclear sector is among the most varied in the world, but its future needs to be secured by direct Government investment in projects such as the development of SMRs. Either way, given the circumstances the industry faces, we need to know whether the future of nuclear energy in Hartlepool is secure. I seek the Minister's assurance that it is.

4.57 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I reiterate my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing the debate and, more importantly, on being a real advocate for Copeland and the nuclear industry. I have played a secondary role to her and have held a couple of nuclear conferences in my constituency. I am grateful to the Minister for attending the one I held last year.

I am disappointed that the original development at Moorside did not go ahead. NuGen did a huge amount of work and it is to be congratulated on that effort. I pay tribute to Tom Samson and his team for the work they did. It is a disappointment that the development did not go ahead. The investment would have helped to transform Cumbria—not just west Cumbria but the whole county—and brought tremendous economic benefits. In addition, it would have provided 7% of our national energy needs and made a significant contribution to the low-carbon economy.

I believe the Government could and should take a proactive interest in the nuclear industry, including by investing directly in it. None the less, Moorside did not

happen, so I look to how Cumbria's strengths can be used in the future, particularly with regard to the possibilities of SMRs. Cumbria has two unique selling points: tourism and the nuclear industry, which employs a huge number of people. Some 10,000-plus are employed at Sellafield, we have the National Nuclear Laboratory and the Low Level Waste Repository, and there is a highly skilled supply chain. The industry's impact on the area is significant in terms of employment, apprentices, graduates, research and skills. We must use the opportunities and skills we have to ensure that Cumbria exploits the alternatives that are available in the nuclear industry.

I have talked about the local interest but, as I say, there is also a national interest. We are moving to a low-carbon world. How will we achieve that? Renewables undoubtedly will be a significant element, and I am a big supporter of solar, but nuclear clearly has its place in the energy mix. I have supported large nuclear plants, but clearly we need to get behind the development of SMRs, which may well be the future for our country. They offer greater flexibility, many commercial opportunities and a real chance for the UK to rediscover its nuclear development expertise.

I believe that if we do that, Cumbria will play a central part. As I have already said, we have the skills and the expertise, the research facilities and the land, but probably most importantly, we have a population that supports the nuclear industry. Our people want to get behind the industry, in the interests of Cumbria and our national economy.

4.59 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing this debate. I welcome the Minister back to his place. I know he has been a strong supporter of nuclear. He has been helpful to me and others in this difficult time after the suspension of the Wylfa project, which has been a huge blow to the whole of north Wales and the nuclear sector deal.

I want to be positive in my speech today. I am a pro-nuclear, pro-renewables and pro-energy efficiency Member of Parliament, and I think we need all those things in the energy mix. I want us to go forward. I share the frustration of the hon. Member for Copeland about turning policy into action. My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) and I were on the old Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change arguing for SMRs some eight years ago. We wanted to see that work moving forward and we visited many places in the United Kingdom where we have the resources, the skills base and the technology that can make SMRs a reality.

The Wylfa site is, according to objective people, the best development site in the United Kingdom. I want the project with Hitachi to go forward, but I want nuclear skills to be developed in the interim period, too. As hon. Members from Cumbria will know, consortiums are being set up between Cumbria and north Wales. They are working together as the North West Nuclear Arc to bring together skilled providers, the nuclear industry and host communities to develop the skills base.

In the short time I have, I want to ask the Minister whether the energy White Paper will help SMRs as well as large-scale nuclear, as the large projects have failed

[Albert Owen]

when they are private sector-led. We need a proper funding formula to ensure that our energy projects are developed here in this country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) said, the advantage of having the SMRs developed in this country is that the domestic supply base can be in this country and we can rely on British innovation to make it happen, rather than being totally reliant on foreign countries investing in our nuclear sector.

I volunteer to be on the Committee that scrutinises the energy Bill when it is introduced, because I want it to work. I want the new regulated asset base formula that the Minister is proposing to be flexible enough that all technologies can benefit from it. I want success in this country. As the hon. Member for Copeland said, Britain has a proud record of pioneering nuclear technology. This is the next generation. We have to get the formula right. We have to get Government support. I am in favour of more Government support, because that is long-termism. If we are to meet our low-carbon emissions goals for the future, we have to invest now, and Government have to take a lead.

5.3 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): It is great to see you in the Chair, Mr Paisley. I congratulate my neighbour, the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), on securing this debate and on continuing to be a champion for the industry. It is great to work with her on that. It is good to see the Minister in his place. There were some doubts about that this time last week, and it is probably a good job the debate is happening this week, given everything else that is happening.

I endorse everything that has been said about small modular reactors. Fellside should be right up there at the forefront as a pathfinder for SMRs in this country. However I will use my brief time to say that while SMRs are absolutely necessary, they can never on their own be sufficient to solve the huge energy gap now opening up in our future.

The Minister and his boss are probably doing God's work in trying to wrench the Government from total madness on the Brexit deal, but that illustrates the lack of focus across Government on our wider energy future at a critical time. We have the crisis derailing the Moorside deal, and Wylfa is in a very difficult patch. Where will our energy come from? We do not know what our relationships will be with other energy-producing nations in 10, 20 or 30 months' time, never mind 10, 20 or 30 years. We have got to secure Britain's future by securing our energy, and the only reliable way to do that is through UK nuclear energy.

I am sick of us going and pleading with other nations and things not quite going well. We see that everyone is working really hard but it does not quite get results. We need to get back into UK nuclear—not simply taking a stake, but taking the lead. Let us show the world that we, who created the fabulous nuclear energy in the 1950s in Cumbria, can do that again with a new nuclear revolution, led by Government and backed—I would imagine—by many Members here.

5.5 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I shall be very brief, partly because I have to be very brief, but also because it would be useful to hear what the Front Benchers have to say in response to the debate.

I have been in correspondence with one of my constituents, Ron George, and I have copied that to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), who is on the Front Bench. Mr George is a great supporter of molten salts reactors; he has looked at the three different reactor models that are possible. When the Minister replies to the debate, will he consider some of the issues that Mr George has raised with me? They largely relate to a letter that Mr George received from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in August 2017, which was about the process of deciding what is an appropriate reactor design to take forward.

In March 2017, the Government launched the small modular reactor competition to see what was out there in the marketplace. There were more than 30 entrants and last year the Government gave eligible participants the opportunity to make presentations and so on. My question is: where has that process got to? It was supposedly going to result in a

“Techno-Economic Assessment of SMRs”.

Have the Government now published the protocol for that, and if they have, are they now at a stage where they can at least begin to distil the number of interesting designs, to see which ones they are potentially prepared to support and which ones they are not? I hope the Minister will be able to bring us up to date with what is happening in that process. Is it now yielding some definite outcomes, and is there a preferred SMR design that the Government are looking at?

5.8 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Paisley; I believe that this is the first time that I have served under your chairmanship.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing this debate. Normally, I would look around Westminster Hall and see all these friendly faces and think, “Great, it's going to be a very consensual debate,” but a debate needs a dissenting voice and this afternoon's debate will certainly hear one from me. Before I do that, however, I congratulate right hon. and hon. Members on the passionate case that they have made. I have been looking for words and points that I can agree with, and I do agree about the need to tackle the trilemma, particularly the issue of climate change and affordability. However, I cannot say that new nuclear is the way to do that and the small modular reactor development is not going to change that.

There has been a common theme among some hon. Members today that renewable energy is not reliable. In October last year, 98% of Scotland's electricity was generated by wind power and we are on track to produce all of our electricity from renewables by 2020. That is possible through the Scottish National party's environmental policy support.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has always been a passionate champion of nuclear; I understand that although, again, I cannot agree. The right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) said that the safest and greenest power is nuclear. Actually, the safest and greenest power is renewables. There is no half-life and nothing to clean up. If he wants to come up and speak to some of the people who saw the clean-up at Dounreay to hear about the eye-watering cost and the danger to the public from that British nuclear project, he is welcome to do so. The fact that he once purchased a Lada car tells us everything about his choices. I will leave it at that.

The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) talked about generational depopulation. I absolutely agree that that must be tackled and there must be ways to do that, but nuclear does not fix it. We need a challenge on well-paid work.

Albert Owen: I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). In peripheral areas, the nuclear industry has been a saviour in many ways. It ensures longevity and skills. People who left school at the same time as me are still working in it. The hon. Lady highlighted that. We want renewables and nuclear, not either/or.

Drew Hendry: I understand that. The one thing I was agreeing with is that there must be more solutions on offer. There must be a mix, but I respectfully disagree about nuclear. I was going to highlight the hon. Gentleman's support for renewable projects, which a couple of people have mentioned.

I will not use my time to go through every Member's speech, but the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) made a powerful case. He incidentally made the Minister something of a deity and said that he was doing the Lord's work. I am not sure which Lord, but we will come back to that.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) talked about the SMR competition. A warning about competitions from the UK Government can be found in Peterhead, where the carbon capture and storage competition was launched, and £100 million was spent before the £1 billion—[*Interruption.*] The Minister is trying to wave me away from that bit. The people of Peterhead will not forget the UK Government's betrayal and the cancellation of that carbon capture project, which could have given the UK a five-year lead on carbon capture and storage. That is all gone.

Trudy Harrison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: I will not give way, because the other Front Benchers have to get in and I have to restrict my comments.

The first SMR is not due for 10 years. The costs are uncertain. There will probably be limited access to sites, planning delays and rising costs. The UK Government have pursued costly, dangerous nuclear energy over cheap renewables out of misplaced ideology. We have heard about the delays at Wylfa and the collapse of Woodside. That is the pursuit of ideology over pragmatism, and it does not work. The Government are letting people down.

The UK Government are already spending vast amounts on nuclear schemes about which there are safety concerns. They were about to lend £15 billion to Hitachi in Wales for Wylfa before the project collapsed because even that was not enough money. At Hinkley Point C, there is a £30 billion cost to the public sector. The Minister will argue that that is not the case, but the strike price amounts to what the public will be paying over that period to cover the cost of delays, complications, overspends and up-front costs. That is from the National Audit Office, not from me.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Will the Member draw his remarks to a conclusion?

Drew Hendry: The fact is that there is a very good future in renewable energy. If the Government set down their ideological opposition, particularly to wind and solar, they would be able to do a lot better in providing the mix that is required.

5.13 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) once again on securing this important debate. I want to concentrate on the wording of the motion, because we are talking about small modular reactors. A number of hon. Members have concentrated not only on the potential for small modular nuclear reactors, but on the wider issues relating to the nuclear programme. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) and the hon. Members for Carlisle (John Stevenson) and for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) all talked, in one way or another, about the disappointments that have followed the closure or suspension of the existing nuclear programmes, which have featured large nuclear plants. Of course that has been a dreadful disappointment, and a potentially serious problem, for those parts of the country.

It is tempting to say that small modular nuclear reactors are the solution to the problem of size for the future. They are certainly capable of being replicated by modular construction in a way that large plants generally cannot be; they can be deployable locally; they can be deployable on a large number of sites, rather than just the big nuclear sites that recent developments have concentrated on; and they may be able to fit into the future energy market in a way that large power, whatever its origin, might find increasingly difficult. There are a lot of potential positives to small modular nuclear reactors, provided that they can do better, cost-wise, than the nuclear reactors in front of us at the moment.

What concerns me about some of the early information about small modular nuclear reactors is that they do not appear likely to be any cheaper than existing nuclear reactors. I refer to a 2016 report that the Government commissioned about their likely cost. The initial cost is projected to be 30% higher than for existing nuclear plants. As that research projects, the learning curve that would go with the modularisation of those reactors—I am talking about first-of-a-kind—would probably mean that, if several such plants were deployed, the costs could be level with present nuclear plants within 10 years. However, as we have seen recently with Wylfa, one of the issues was the apparent cost of the nuclear plant coming forward, in relation to the power going out to

[Dr Alan Whitehead]

the public, and the unwillingness of Hitachi to go ahead with it, despite substantial assistance from the Government of up to about £75 per MWh for production.

First, it is clear that small modular nuclear reactors have to get their costs down to be viable. The Minister needs to be apprised of that. The Government claim to have invested substantial amounts of money over a period of time in the development of small modular nuclear reactors. There was a competition in 2016 and the then Chancellor—

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to bring his remarks to a close.

Dr Whitehead: I think I may have a bit of time, but I will make sure that the Minister can get his comments in.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): You have been speaking for five minutes and 50 seconds.

Dr Whitehead: I will try to draw my remarks to a close as rapidly as I can and make only this point on the funding of small modular nuclear reactors, because it is important. The Government initially said that £250 million was available for research, development and a competition. That competition did not take place. That figure was recently replaced by £58 million of funding, which was subsequently reduced to £44 million. Only £4 million of that has been spent, on developing initial feasibility studies for those who want to develop small modular nuclear reactors—

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. I really have to ask you to conclude.

Dr Whitehead: Will the Minister clarify what is being spent at the moment on supporting small modular nuclear reactors, and how that will support the development of cheaper and more effective small modular nuclear reactors in future? That is the imperative.

5.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): I will try to deal with this briefly. However, before that, in answer to the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), we all have great moments in our political careers. I am sure that the Prime Minister's will be securing a deal next week. Mine is appearing before you in a Westminster Hall debate, Mr Paisley.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Quite right.

Richard Harrington: I very much regret that I do not have time to go through all the points raised by hon. Members. I am happy to go through them later with any of those Members, except of course the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry)—for the sake of *Hansard*, I am joking. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing this excellent debate. The term “Trudy-isation” is beginning to enter our parliamentary language, and she has Trudy-ised the whole debate on small modular reactors.

The development of small modular reactors is very much at the core—excuse the pun—of the Government's strategy for the development of nuclear power, which we know is an important part of the mix. I would like to answer in detail the shadow Minister's questions about money, but I do not have the time. Suffice it to say that we are considering a consortium bid. Rolls-Royce is at the centre of that, but many other companies are involved. I obviously cannot go into detail, but this is of the magnitude of money that the shadow Minister mentioned, and it is very close to fruition. We worked closely with all members of the consortium to develop it.

The good thing about this debate is that every Member bar one was very much in favour of the development of nuclear energy, our sector deal and everything we are trying to do to make sure that nuclear remains an important part of our mix, for several reasons. There are security reasons. The point was made about the excellence of offshore and onshore wind and all sorts of wind, but the wind does not blow all the time. There is the green energy point of view, because this will develop a significant amount of carbon-free power. My right hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) quoted President Putin, who made the point that countries that have tried basically to have no nuclear or coal energy do not know what to do. We will not put ourselves in that position. Modular reactors are an important part of our future.

Times are changing and costs are going down. The shadow Minister made the point that we have to be very careful about the costs of small modular reactors. Those are very well known, which means that we have to look at scale. Building one was the original problem, particularly for the two sites at Moorside, which were mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Carlisle (John Stevenson) and for Copeland. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) spoke so well about Anglesey. The hon. Lady who is the spokesperson for Plaid Cymru—

Drew Hendry: The Westminster leader.

Richard Harrington: And she is the Westminster leader. I beg the pardon of the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), but I was trying to avoid making a mess of her constituency name, which I have done before—I will not fall for that one again. I will, however, have a good go at saying Trawsfynydd, because I have been there. It is an excellent site for small modular reactors, as are Anglesey, Moorside and many others. The good thing about them is the support of the local community for nuclear, because many have seen the benefits that nuclear has brought in the past, such as prosperity and good-quality, highly paid employment.

In the time that I have left—I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland should be left a couple of minutes at the end—I will talk briefly about the financing models. Clearly, one of the big problems about nuclear generally has been financing. Everyone knows that, and that the large chunk for current nuclear power stations is about £15 billion-plus, and could be £20 billion. That is a significant sum of money. The two projects we have talked about—Moorside and Wylfa in Anglesey—are not to take place in the timescale we had hoped for because of the financing.

However, I believe that the efforts we are putting into the regulated asset base model will open up nuclear again—a modern way to fund it. Institutions are very

interested. On the small modular reactor side, my Department organised a very successful conference for the first time—in a high-tech area of the midlands, rather than one of the traditional sites—and quite a few financial institutions attended. We are in talks with the Treasury and inside the Department about developing that finance model. Logically, I believe it will work for smaller nuclear developments as well as large ones, because institutions obviously like to invest in smaller chunks.

The Government are very committed. We are helping small modular reactors. Apart from dealing with the consortium that I mentioned, we are providing funds to give the regulators the kinds of facilities necessary for the regulatory process. Quite a lot is going on, and I had wanted to speak for about 20 minutes on this subject. Earlier I was waving my hands at the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey not out of disrespect for him personally or because of anything he said, but because I wanted more time to go through my speech. However, I have galloped through the major points. I would just like formally to put on the record that the Government's policy is firmly behind nuclear and very much behind—

Albert Owen: Will the Minister give way?

Richard Harrington: The hon. Gentleman will have to be very brief.

Albert Owen: Will the Minister give us timescales for the publication of the possible energy White Paper and for the models being tested by the House? That is important.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): You have time, Minister.

Richard Harrington: Thank you, Mr Paisley. The answer is that that will happen in the next few months—in early summer, I hope. Since the hon. Gentleman brings the question up, I confirm that our intention is that nuclear, and the small modular reactors side of it, will

be developed in the White Paper. I noted—I am sure the House authorities will, too—his offer to serve on the Bill Committee. That is a little presumptuous, but I hope he may do so. I will conclude my remarks there, because my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland deserves the last word in this important debate.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Thank you, Minister. I call Trudy Harrison to wind up.

5.28 pm

Trudy Harrison: I thank the Minister for his remarks and for his ongoing support for our nuclear industry. That is absolutely clear and welcome to me and the overwhelming majority of Members in the Chamber. I thank them all, although I do not have time to list them all. Their contributions have been absolutely fabulous. However, I cannot let the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) get away with the strike price comparison. The comparison of £57.50 is not fair, because it does not build in the cost of storage. If we look at any potential for more renewable energy, the cost of storage must be built in. My understanding is that it would be 600 times what we have today.

I should declare an interest, as my second daughter is a degree apprentice with an electrical design company, Athena PTS, which works across nuclear and wind, and with solar panels. She tells me that the strike price would be about eight times the cost of a diverse energy mix including nuclear. It is very unfair to compare the current strike price of £57.50 against the nuclear strike price.

Aside from that, I thank all Members. The support for nuclear is incredibly strong, and we can look forward to a prosperous future for the nuclear industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered small modular reactors.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 20 February 2019

CABINET OFFICE

Government Outsourcing

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): Following Carillion's liquidation in January 2018, the Government response ensured continuity of key public services. However, there has been increased scrutiny on the benefits and risks associated with the use of the private sector to deliver public services. In the light of this, we have been reviewing our outsourcing processes and considering lessons learned.

The review concluded that outsourcing, done well, can deliver significant benefits. It delivers economies of scale that mean services can be provided more efficiently, at lower cost and at better value for the taxpayer. Open and fair competition within free markets encourages creativity and innovation, meaning fresh perspectives and new solutions can be applied to existing policy challenges.

However, it also highlighted that we need to take steps to improve public service outcomes from outsourcing, increase our resilience to supplier failure and rebuild public trust in outsourcing. Today, I am pleased to announce that we have published new guidance for officials that will help Government to work smarter with industry, set up contracts for success and build a more diverse supplier base. These are:

Outsourcing playbook and associated guidance—This will allow Departments to make good outsourcing decisions, achieve value for money when outsourcing, and is aimed at everyone involved in the outsourcing of a public service.

Supplier code of conduct—We have reviewed and updated the supplier code of conduct to ensure that it not only set out the behaviours taxpayers expect of central Government's suppliers but includes what suppliers should expect of Government.

Guidance on corporate financial distress which suggests practical steps to take where contract managers have concerns over a supplier's financial health.

The principles of the outsourcing playbook will apply to all Government outsourcing with a particular focus on complex first generation projects and subsequent generations where the service is being delivered in a different or novel way. The 11 key policies published today in the playbook will ensure that the Government get more projects right from the start. It will promote a diverse and healthy marketplace—and we will have “living wills” in the unlikely event of things going wrong.

In order to ensure that we take into account the wider social benefits to be derived from Government contracts, we are extending the requirements of the social value Act in central Government so that all major procurements will explicitly evaluate social value, where appropriate, rather than just consider it.

The Public Accounts Committee recommended that we review our approach to managing current strategic supplier risk. The revised approach will see the introduction of a new memorandum of understanding between the Cabinet Office and strategic suppliers that reflects a more mature relationship with industry, and provides greater flexibility in how government manages situations.

In order to build the capability within Departments to outsource effectively and manage outsourced contracts, we are undertaking a programme to accredit and train 30,000 contract managers across the civil service by the end of 2021.

Taken together, the measures in this reform package is key to delivering value for money for taxpayers when services are outsourced, strengthening our resilience to supplier failure and rebuilding public trust in outsourcing.

A copy of the outsourcing playbook, financial distress guidance and supplier code of conduct have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1345]

TREASURY

Public Service Pension Indexation and Revaluation

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): Legislation governing public service pensions requires them to be increased annually by the same percentage as additional pensions (state earnings related pension and state second pension). Public service pensions will therefore be increased from 8 April 2019 by 2.4%, in line with the annual increase in the consumer prices index up to September 2018, except for those public service pensions which have been in payment for less than a year, which will receive a pro rata increase.

Separately, in the new career average public service pension schemes, pensions in accrual are revalued annually in relation to either prices or earnings depending on the terms specified in their scheme regulations. The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 requires HMT to specify a measure of prices and of earnings to be used for revaluation by these schemes.

The prices measure is the consumer prices index up to September 2018. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of prices, therefore, will use the figure of 2.4% for the prices element of revaluation.

The earnings measure is the whole economy average weekly earnings (non-seasonally adjusted and including bonuses and arrears) up to September 2018. Public service schemes which rely on a measure of earnings, therefore, will use the figure of 2.8% for the earnings element of revaluation.

Revaluation is one part of the amount of pension that members earn in a year and needs to be considered in conjunction with the amount of in-year accrual. Typically, schemes with lower revaluation will have faster accrual and therefore members will earn more pension per year. The following list shows how the main public service schemes will be affected by revaluation:

<i>Scheme</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Fire</i>	<i>Civil Service</i>	<i>NHS</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>LGPS</i>	<i>Armed Forces</i>	<i>Judicial</i>
Revaluation for active member	3.65%	2.8%	2.4%	3.9%	4.0%	2.4%	2.8%	2.4%

[HCWS1347]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Powers: Stop and Search

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Today I am announcing new stop and search powers for police to tackle acid attacks and the misuse of drones.

These new powers are being announced in response to the recent public consultation on extending stop and search to address the criminal misuse of unmanned aircraft (drones), laser pointers and corrosive substances.

Stop and search is an important tool for the police to prevent, detect and investigate offences, including some of the most violent and devastating, thereby helping the police to protect and safeguard the public. The use of stop and search, when proportionate, lawful, and intelligence-led, is an integral part of the policing response in tackling serious violence, and in preventing and deterring people from carrying weapons. However, it is also important that when stop and search is used it is done effectively, professionally, and, as far as possible, with community consent.

The Offensive Weapons Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will introduce the offence of possession of a corrosive substance in a public place and provisions to extend stop and search powers to cover this offence. The use of corrosive substances as a weapon can cause significant harm and injury to individuals, families and communities and we are determined to take strong action in order to prevent these horrendous attacks.

Following the incident at Gatwick airport, the Government have been working closely with the police to examine whether they have the necessary powers to respond should the misuse of a drone cause widespread disruption to the operation of an aerodrome. The police have been clear that in certain circumstances, a power to stop and search a person in relation to offences concerning flying a drone within the restriction zone of a licensed aerodrome would enhance their ability to respond should a similar situation arise in the future. We consider such a power to be proportionate and beneficial in enabling the police to tackle incidents causing widespread disruption to the operation of aerodromes and the Government will continue to work with the police to define the detailed scope of this power.

In addition, the Government are working closely with the police to examine whether they have the appropriate powers to respond effectively to other offences, including around prisons, that might be committed using a drone. If this work reveals further meaningful operational gaps, the Government will take further legislative action.

The Government will also keep under review the adequacy of the existing powers to tackle offences related to the misuse of laser pointers.

I am grateful to the 223 individuals and organisations that responded to the consultation, including members of the public, the police service and other interested parties.

I am placing a copy of the Government response to the consultation in the Libraries of both Houses and on gov.uk.

[HCWS1343]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government Brexit Funding: Local Ports

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): On 28 January, I announced £56.5 million of new funding to help councils prepare for Brexit as set out in a written ministerial statement on local government Brexit funding, *Official Report*, column 31WS. Part of that funding was £1.5 million in 2018-19 to local authorities facing immediate impacts from local ports.

I am today able to announce an increase of this funding from £1.5 million to £3.14 million. Its distribution to local authorities is set out in table 1 below. This additional funding will support those authorities to plan and better mitigate against potential disruptions once we have exited the EU.

The funding will be divided between 19 district and unitary councils. These allocations are based on recent analysis and engagement and reflect a range of issues including the amount of EU goods managed and the wider, strategic importance of these ports.

As part of the 28 January announcement, I retained £10 million for allocation during 2019-20 to respond to specific local costs that may only become evident in the months after we exit the EU. I will look carefully at any pressures that should be funded, including any emerging pressures relating to port functions or wider impacts on port areas.

Table 1: Allocation of funding to authorities

<i>Port</i>	<i>Authority</i>	<i>Allocation (£)</i>
1. Port of Dover	1. Dover	136,362
	2. Folkestone and Hythe	136,362
2. Eurotunnel	Dover	136,362
	Folkestone and Hythe	136,362
3. Ramsgate	3. Thanet	136,362
4. Goole	4. East Riding of Yorkshire	136,362
5. Hull	5. Hull City	136,362

Table 1: Allocation of funding to authorities

Port	Authority	Allocation (£)
6. Grimsby	6. North East Lincolnshire	136,362
7. Immingham (DBP, DfDS and C. Ro)	North East Lincolnshire	136,362
8. Portsmouth	7. Portsmouth City	136,362
9. Southampton General	8. Southampton City	136,362
10. Southampton Container	Southampton City	136,362
11. Ashford	9. Ashford	136,362
12. Ebbsfleet	10. Gravesend	136,362
	11. Dartford	136,362
13. St Pancras	12. Camden	136,362
14. Manchester Airport	13. Manchester City	136,362
15. East Midlands Airport	14. North West Leicestershire	136,362
16. Stansted Airport	15. Uttlesford	136,362
17. Heathrow Airport	16. Hillingdon	136,362
18. Gatwick Airport	17. Crawley	136,362
19. Harwich	18. Tendring	136,362
20. Felixstowe	19. Suffolk Coastal	136,362
Total funding of £3,136,326.		

[HCWS1346]

TRANSPORT

Drones

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Baroness Sugg) has made the following written statement.

Today I am setting out the Government's recent action on drones, including legislative amendments to the Air Navigation Order 2016 that will be laid before Parliament today.

Last year, the Government legislated to make flying drones above 400 feet or within 1 km of an airport boundary illegal. This 1 km restriction measure was a first step in protecting our airports and aircraft while the Department gathered further evidence and engaged with stakeholders through our recent consultation.

The highly irresponsible and dangerous disruption caused by drones to flights at Gatwick and Heathrow airports recently highlighted the risks. While the use of drones at

Gatwick and Heathrow was already illegal, it is extremely important that regulation provides protection which reduces, as much as possible, the airspace where drones and manned aircraft can come into close proximity with each other. Therefore, the Government have decided to extend the restriction zone around airports, as announced to Parliament in January.

The amendment laid today will put into law the extension of the restriction zone around protected aerodromes where drones cannot be flown without permission. The new restriction zone will include an airport's aerodrome traffic zone (ATZ) as well as 5 km by 1 km extensions from the end of runways to protect take-off and landing paths. All drones will be restricted from flying within this zone unless appropriate permission is granted.

The extended restriction zone will come into force on 13 March this year.

In addition to legislation, it is crucial that the public are aware of the rules on the use of drones, so today we are expanding our national campaign, in partnership with the Civil Aviation Authority, to boost public awareness.

The Department for Transport has today written to airports and local authorities asking them to publicise the new rules and to help to educate passengers and the public about responsible drone use. To help with this, the Department is providing a digital tool kit to explain the rules simply and clearly and to promote the Civil Aviation Authority's drone safe campaign and drone code guidance. This includes maps detailing the new restriction zones at each individual airport.

The Government are preparing a new drones Bill, which will give police powers to clamp down on those misusing drones and other small unmanned aircraft, including a power to access electronic data stored on drones with a warrant. In addition, the Home Office is also today announcing new stop and search powers for drones around aerodromes, which will also be included in the Bill.

These enforcement powers will complement legislation introduced last year which will require the mandatory registration of operators and the online competency testing of remote pilots for drones over 250 grams. These requirements will become a legal obligation in November this year and work with the new police powers to increase accountability and clamp down on irresponsible and dangerous behaviour.

The Home Office is further reviewing the UK's response to the malicious use of drones, and will consider how best to protect the full range of the UK's critical national infrastructure, as well as testing and evaluating technology to counter drones.

The Government will continue to work closely with industry and other partners on regulation, anticipating future innovations wherever possible in order to keep our airports secure and our airspace safe.

These actions will help to combat the misuse of drones, so that small unmanned aircraft can be used safely and securely, and continue to support the development and growth of this rapidly expanding new industry.

[HCWS1344]

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 20 February 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
PRIME MINISTER	1456	SCOTLAND—continued	
Engagements	1456	Immigration Bill	1450
SCOTLAND	1447	Leaving the EU	1447
Borderlands Growth Deal	1453	Rural NHS Hospitals: Public Transport	1453
Foreign Direct Investment	1453	Santander Branch Closures	1455
		Scottish Veterans	1454

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 20 February 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CABINET OFFICE	55WS	TRANSPORT	59WS
Government Outsourcing	55WS	Drones	59WS
HOME DEPARTMENT	57WS		
Police Powers: Stop and Search	57WS		
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL		TREASURY	56WS
GOVERNMENT	58WS	Public Service Pension Indexation and	
Local Government Brexit Funding: Local Ports	58WS	Revaluation	56WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Wednesday 27 February 2019**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 20 February 2019

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1447] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Scotland
Prime Minister

Leaving the EU: Economic Impact of Proposed Deal [Col. 1471]

Answer to urgent question—(Mel Stride)

Deprivation of Citizenship Status [Col. 1485]

Answer to urgent question—(Sajid Javid)

Asylum Seekers (Permission to Work) (No. 2) [Col. 1502]

Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Catherine West)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

Exiting the European Union (Aquaculture) [Col. 1505]

Motion—(George Eustice)—agreed to

Exiting the European Union (Agriculture) [Col. 1514]

Motion—(George Eustice)—agreed to

Antisemitism in Modern Society [Col. 1524]

Motion—(James Brokenshire)—agreed to

Exiting the European Union (Financial Services and Markets) [Col. 1568]

Motion—(Rebecca Harris); Division deferred till Wednesday 27 February

Exiting the European Union (Terms and Conditions of Employment) [Col. 1568]

Motion—(Rebecca Harris); Division deferred till Wednesday 27 February

Exiting the European Union (Financial Services and Markets) [Col. 1569]

Motion—(Rebecca Harris); Division deferred till Wednesday 27 February

Petition [Col. 1570]

Horse Tethering [Col. 1571]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Police, Fire and Rescue Services: Funding Reductions [Col. 549WH]

UK Deep Sea Mining Industry [Col. 570WH]

Recall of Women to Prisons [Col. 577WH]

Aberystwyth to Carmarthen Railway Reopening [Col. 601WH]

Small Modular Reactors [Col. 610WH]

General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 55WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
