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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 19 March 2019

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

ANSWERS TO ADDRESSES

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House a message from the Queen in reply to loyal and dutiful addresses from this House.

I have received your address about His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on the occasion of his 70th birthday. It gives me great pleasure to convey to the Prince of Wales the loyal and affectionate sentiments you express.

I have received your Humble Address praying that I should appoint Gareth Davies to the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General. I will comply with your request.

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: I would like to make a statement about security and access to the parliamentary estate. It is likely that there will be a strike of parliamentary security staff this Wednesday 20 March. Industrial action is due to begin this evening, Tuesday 19 March, and to conclude on the morning of Thursday 21 March. During this time, access to the parliamentary estate for non-passholders will be extremely limited.

Parliament's priority will be to ensure that the business of both Houses is unaffected. Priority access will be provided to Select Committee witnesses of both Houses and civil servants who are supporting business in both Chambers.

All security staff are highly valued and an essential part of the parliamentary community. Parliamentary authorities are continuing to engage constructively with the union over the issues that were on the ballot and hope to avoid the strike taking place. Should this action take place, I would like to reassure Members that security will in no way be compromised. Security is everyone's responsibility. I should remind colleagues that it is imperative that we all wear our security passes at all time when on the parliamentary estate. Anyone failing to display a security pass is liable to challenge and may be required to obtain a day pass.

Oral Answers to Questions

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Insecure Work

1. **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support people in insecure work. [909864]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The best way to support people is to make sure that they have a job. Today it was announced that more people are employed in our country than ever before. Unemployment has fallen to 3.9%, its lowest since 1975. Our pay rose in real terms over the past year by 1.3%, and over the past year 96% of those new jobs have been full time.

Judith Cummins: Too often, workers have eight or 10-hour contracts, but are then expected to work up to 60 hours when their employer demands it, with no flexibility in return. One concrete step that the Government could take to protect these insecure workers is to ensure that contracts reflect the hours that people normally work. Will the Minister commit to legislating for this?

Greg Clark: I am slightly surprised to hear that from the hon. Lady because she knows that we have taken measures to give workers the right to request that stable contract. She will know that in her own area Bradford Council is a very good exponent of that. It was advertising last night for casual commis chefs, saying that hours are offered on a "casual basis" and may be withdrawn by either party, giving a minimum of two hours' notice. If she wants those rights to be extended, I suggest that she talk to Bradford Council first.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Can the Business Secretary confirm that there are more people in our nation in secure employment than ever before in our history and that the number of people on zero-hours contracts has fallen by 100,000 in the past year alone?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Obviously, it is a great source of confidence to people that they can obtain a job. It is the case that employers across the country value the flexibility that having a flexible workforce gives. In fact, again, the Labour leader of Gateshead Council said that

"many zero-hours contracts employees"

on the council

"don't want to be full time employees and prefer to consider themselves as self-employed",

so this is a practice that is pursued right across the country.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Some 1.6 million workers are paid exactly the national living wage of £7.83 an hour, and a further 3 million people are paid within 50 pence of it. In the spring statement last week, the Chancellor said that the ultimate objective of this Government was

"ending low pay in the UK"—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 349.]

The usual definition of a national living wage is 66% of median earnings, but the remit of the Low Pay Commission is only to get to 60%. Are the Government now committing to end low pay? If so, when?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady should recognise the commitment to 60% and the progress that has been made towards that, which meant a very big pay increase for many of the lowest paid workers in the country. She will remember that the Chancellor announced a review in his statement last week to look into where we go beyond that, using international best practice to inform such a decision. I hope that the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, which the hon. Lady chairs, will want to contribute to that review.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Matthew Taylor's recent review of modern working practices indicated that a blanket ban on zero-hours contracts would create more cliff edges for employers and workers. Does my right hon. Friend agree with that analysis?

Greg Clark: I do agree with that analysis and with what my hon. Friend has said. The conclusion of the panel in that completely independent report was:

"To ban zero hours contracts...would negatively impact many more people than it helped."

It is right to ensure that there is an ability to request a stable contract and that people are not banned from working for different employers, but to remove these contracts all together would be against the practice of many employers, including councils.

16. [909880] **Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers continues to receive evidence of seafarer pay as low as £3.60 an hour, including on UK-registered vessels. Employers in the ferry sector are continuing to reflag their ships. When will the Government take action to ensure that the national minimum wage provides a basic safety net for seafarers' pay, including on international routes?

Greg Clark: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns. In the last few weeks, I have been discussing with the trade unions how any loopholes that might be being exploited should be closed. It is the intention of everyone across the House that the law should be obeyed and that workers should be paid a fair rate for their work.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is often the UK, not the EU, that has led the way on workers' rights, and does he expect this to continue?

Greg Clark: I do indeed expect this to continue. Many of the rights that we have introduced—including, for example, the right to request a stable contract—were pioneered in this country, and are only now being taken up by other European countries.

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): A couple of weeks ago, Labour colleagues and I crossed the road to Parliament Square to talk to outsourced Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy workers from the Public and Commercial Services Union and the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, who were demanding equal terms and conditions with directly employed staff. They were disappointed that no Minister from the Department came to talk to them. If anyone

had, they would have heard how people's status as contracted-out workers is a fundamental cause of their insecurity.

We have heard fine words from the Secretary of State about workers' rights recently, yet here is an example of workers being forced into precarious contracts under his very nose. Will he outline what he is doing to put his own house in order to help resolve this dispute? In the process, will he learn the lesson that outsourcing is the cause of insecurity and poverty pay?

Greg Clark: I value very highly the work of all the staff in my Department. I met some of the staff she has mentioned, who were affected. I asked my officials to review the comparable levels of pay that such staff receive, and those pay rates have been increased as a result. It was a good and constructive discussion with my much valued colleagues.

Leaving the EU: Businesses in Scotland

2. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on fiscal support for businesses based in Scotland making preparations for the UK leaving the EU. [909865]

8. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on fiscal support for businesses based in Scotland making preparations for the UK leaving the EU. [909872]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): I have regular discussions with the Chancellor about support for businesses in Scotland, as well as in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) will know, last Wednesday we announced up to £260 million for the borderlands growth deal, which is a cross-party—and clearly a cross-border—partnership that has been hailed as a game changer by all the bodies involved, including the Scottish Government. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the best way to support business in Scotland is to end the uncertainty that comes from Brexit and to join the Government in agreeing a deal.

Patrick Grady: Actually, the best support for businesses in Scotland would presumably be for Scotland to stay in the European Union, because IDA Ireland reckons that its country has gained more than 5,000 jobs as a result of Brexit-related investment, so it is a little bit perverse that it seems to be that the countries staying in the European Union are enjoying the benefits that were supposed to come from leaving.

Greg Clark: The best chance for Scotland to enjoy prosperity in the future is to stay in the United Kingdom, and I hope the hon. Gentleman would support that. I am very surprised that he would mention jobs in the Scotland when, under the SNP, jobs growth in Scotland has been far behind the good statistics that I was able to give for the whole country. Indeed, if Scotland had matched the rate of job creation in England, there would now be nearly 200,000 more Scots with a job.

Angela Crawley: An Ernst & Young survey found that only 8% of Scottish firms feel fully ready for Brexit. Does the Secretary of State regret his failure to accept the SNP's and the Institute of Directors' demands for a £750 million support service to help small and medium-sized businesses to navigate Brexit?

Greg Clark: No. Advice and support are available to every business across the United Kingdom, including, of course, businesses in Scotland. I work very closely with the Scottish Government. They are represented on the groups that are developing the contingency plans for a no-deal Brexit, and businesses are included in that.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): In Scotland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, there are grants of up to £1,050 per employee for training employees, and up to £200,000 for new IT systems for dealing with new customs arrangements. Given the importance of this, why is it not more widely advertised both in Scotland and in the United Kingdom?

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. As he knows from the industrial strategy—he was closely involved in its construction—grants and assistance for training, especially for employees whose jobs change as a result of technological change, is a very important contribution that we can make, and I am glad that he has brought it to the attention of the House.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about making sure that the UK shared prosperity fund is UK-wide and allows the UK Government to work with public and private partners across the whole of the Union?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. That is absolutely the intention. The fund will be UK-wide and continue the progress that has been made, not least through the city deals programme. All the major cities of Scotland have benefited from a city deal that embraces the UK Government, the Scottish Government, and local authorities. That is a good model that is working and is successful.

Clean Growth

3. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote clean growth. [909866]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): As my hon. Friend knows, I am very pleased to discuss our leadership position in this area. We have led the G7 in cutting emissions while growing our national income. Since 2000, we have topped the global leader board of the G20 in reducing our annual carbon intensity. I set out, a couple of years ago now, how the clean growth strategy will take that progress forward and, indeed, accelerate it. The recent offshore wind sector deal was a fantastic example of how we can work with industry to advance our decarbonisation and also create jobs right across the UK.

David Duguid: The growth of offshore wind is providing great opportunities for coastal communities around the United Kingdom, including the port of Fraserburgh in my constituency, which is set to host an operations and maintenance base for the Moray East wind farm project. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the new offshore wind sector deal will help more ports like Fraserburgh to benefit from this key aspect of our future energy sector?

Claire Perry: Most certainly. In an uncertain world, to go and stand on the docks of Lowestoft and visit Great Yarmouth and see the wind turbines and feel the wind is actually to see the future—this incredible opportunity. We have the best conditions for offshore wind generation in the world, and that will create jobs right across the UK—we estimate over 27,000 by 2030. We are world-leading in this: very few countries have even started to install. We reckon that exports of up to £2.6 billion will be available, and of course the benefits from that will flow to coastal communities right across the UK.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Will the Minister join me in congratulating Bacon Engineering in Great Grimsby on its 120th anniversary? Will she commit to working with me to assist local companies like that to become part of the supply chain of the energy estuary's burgeoning offshore wind sector?

Claire Perry: The offshore wind sector deal was a gift that kept on giving, because the hon. Lady and I had the great pleasure of discussing that with the Prime Minister on the Friday after the launch and seeing the incredible opportunities already flowing to the wonderful port of Grimsby, which she represents very well. I would love to congratulate that local firm and work with her on this groundbreaking sector deal.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): We have known how to build houses that cost nothing to heat for 20 years, but we just do not do it. Does the Minister agree that one of the best ways to get clean growth is to support my Housing Reform Bill, which would supply serviced plots of land on which thermally efficient houses could be built?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend is a wonderful campaigner on this new and exciting area of house building, which is part of the grand challenge. I was very pleased, as I am sure he was, to see the Chancellor commit last week to phasing out fossil fuel heating in homes from 2025. We know we can decarbonise. We know we need to do more.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): All of us will support the Government in their attempts to deliver clean growth, but we need international action. Can the Minister be more specific about what the Government are doing to encourage international action to increase clean growth?

Claire Perry: I enjoyed what might be the last ever meeting of EU Energy Ministers last week, where it was clear that our leadership, which has been so important in the EU, will continue unabated. Countries look to us and want to work with us. The hon. Gentleman will know that we are in the process of bidding to host the

2020 climate change talks here in the UK. To me, that is the most seminal moment since the Paris talks, as we will have to show our national contributions and see whether we are on track. I would love to get his support for that bid.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): More than 60 of the UK's onshore wind farms are set to reach the end of their support deals in the next five years. How will the Government ensure that we do not lose our onshore wind capacity as those plants reach the end of their lives?

Claire Perry: I am sure that my hon. Friend, like me, welcomes the fact that we already have more than 13 GW of onshore wind installed. As she says, much of that is reaching the end of its life. Those plants can be repowered to generate more energy, and we expect them to be, but any application must be consistent with what local people want, so I expect developers to work closely with local communities to deliver that.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): In spite of what the Minister says, her Government's nuclear dogma is holding back Scotland's green growth. Having lost market confidence in the Moorside, Wylfa and Oldbury-on-Severn nuclear projects, will she get the message about nuclear's terminal decline and start backing Scotland's renewables growth revolution instead?

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman needs to understand that we welcome the fact that we have a diverse energy supply. As we have discussed, there are thousands of jobs to be created from renewables and also from our world-leading nuclear installations. We need a low-carbon, reliable, low-cost energy system, and thanks to the work we are doing, we think that over 70% of the UK's energy supply will be zero-carbon in just 11 years.

Drew Hendry: The facts are that, compared with offshore wind, the Tory Hinkley project will saddle consumers with a 35% tax on energy bills. Given that this Government currently have no consequences for Ministers who switch policies, is this not the right time to take advantage of that, do the right thing and scrap this nuclear obsession?

Claire Perry: I just cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. He might make good headlines, but he knows that we should pride ourselves on having a diverse, low-cost energy system. We have to deliver energy security, and those thousands of highly skilled nuclear jobs, which are increasingly going to women, are a really good thing for the UK.

SMEs in Scotland

4. **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland on support for small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland. [909867]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (**Chris Skidmore**): We have regular discussions with our ministerial colleagues on this matter, and most recently on the £260 million borderlands growth deal

announced by the Chancellor in the spring statement. Our industrial strategy sets out our ambition to make the UK the best place to start and grow a business, and central to that is our ongoing commitment to the British Business Bank, which supported £467 million of finance to more than 3,600 Scottish businesses in 2017-18.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the Minister for his response. He will be aware of the importance of banking services to small businesses, particularly in rural and more fragile areas, and the closure of banks has hit many of these small businesses hard, not least in East Neuk in my constituency. What action is he taking to look at, for example, increasing transaction remuneration to post offices, which are increasingly important to those businesses?

Chris Skidmore: I understand from the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (**Kelly Tolhurst**), that she is currently negotiating the banking framework. I also want to set out the support that the British Business Bank gives to start-up businesses: 3,200 businesses have received £22 million in funding in recent years. We have 48,000 more businesses in Scotland compared with 2010. That is good news, and we need to make sure that we continue to support businesses, particularly the rural ones the hon. Gentleman mentions.

Small Business Support

5. **Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support small businesses. [909868]

12. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support small businesses. [909876]

23. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to support small businesses. [909887]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (**Kelly Tolhurst**): We are backing young entrepreneurs by launching an independent review, led by the Prince's Trust, to understand how we can better support them to turn their business dreams into reality. We are backing small and medium-sized enterprises with our spending power, with our ambitious strategy to ensure that at least £1 in every £3 we spend as a Department is spent with smaller businesses by 2022.

Ben Bradley: I thank the Minister for bringing forward the future high streets fund, which will be really important for small businesses on Mansfield High Street, and for the meetings I have been able to have with the Government about how to make sure that Mansfield can benefit. The council is now consulting with stakeholders on its proposals. Will Ministers agree to meet me so that I can make the case for Mansfield's bid to the future high streets fund?

Kelly Tolhurst: My hon. Friend is right. High streets are changing, and the Government are committed to helping communities adapt. In the Budget, we set out our plan for high streets, with a £1.6 billion package to support the sustainable transformation of our high streets, which includes the future high streets fund. My hon. Friend is a passionate campaigner for his town,

and I would very much welcome the opportunity to hear his proposals for the regeneration of Mansfield town centre, coupled with the investment and plans already being put in place through the growth deal.

Stephen Metcalfe: Will the Minister join me in acknowledging the welcome focus the Government have put on tackling late payment to small businesses? Will she confirm that improvement in payment times could release billions of pounds back into the economy to ensure that our SME sector remains vibrant and thrives?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and he is quite right. Tackling late payments will indeed do just as he says. It is true that late payments can be extremely damaging for small businesses, and that is why we are committed to tackling it. In his first year, the Small Business Commissioner has managed to collect over £2 million owed to small businesses. In the spring statement last week, we announced a requirement on audit committees to review their payment practices. I look forward, in the very short term, to bringing forward a full package of policy measures to tackle just that.

Henry Smith: Last weekend, I was pleased to support High Street Saturday in Crawley town centre. Will my hon. Friend welcome the £900 million in business rate reductions, which is really starting to help small businesses on our high streets?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to welcome this cut in business rates. He will also be pleased to hear that, because of the updated forecasts from local authorities, the discount is now worth nearly £1 billion to retailers over two years, further bolstering this Government's plan for the high street, which is now worth £1.6 billion, and directly benefiting some of our smallest retail businesses. My hon. Friend is a great campaigner for Crawley, and I am sure he will continue to ask questions on this subject.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): With just 10 days to go to a possible no-deal Brexit, only a third of the small businesses that trade exclusively with Europe have applied for and received their so-called EORI—economic operator registration and identification—numbers that will enable them to continue to do so. Those numbers could be allocated automatically by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Will the Minister lobby HMRC to tell it to do that, and back British business?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. It is true that we are making sure, as this Department is charged to do, that small businesses are absolutely aware of their obligations in regard to a no-deal Brexit. I would point out to him that HMRC is reissuing those numbers within 24 hours of small businesses applying.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Staff working insecure hours for the Hull-based small business Grotto Hire UK, which operates Santa's grottos, have still not been paid, and many are owed thousands of pounds. The company owner offered to put the company into liquidation so that the staff could claim through the insolvency fund, but his appointed

liquidators have now pulled out, leaving the company still running. Will the Minister please meet me to discuss this appalling situation and look at how the company can be wound up in the public interest?

Kelly Tolhurst: The point that the hon. Lady raises is really important, especially for her constituents. I will be more than happy to meet with her to discuss those issues.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Small businesses and our high streets are hugely damaged by the closure of bank branches right across the country, which nets the banks, which we bailed out with taxpayers' money, a vast amount of money in savings. Will the Minister consider a windfall tax on the banks to ensure that we redistribute some of that money back into our high streets to support small businesses?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Tax is a responsibility of the Treasury, but as he will know, including after our conversations yesterday—this was also alluded to earlier in questions—post offices are still an important part of our high streets, and the Post Office is currently negotiating a new banking framework. It is absolutely right that, when banks are pulling out of our high streets, the post offices that are delivering the services are remunerated correctly for that.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The duty for large companies to report how quickly they pay their suppliers is of course welcome—80% of businesses that fail do so as a result of late payments—but to be effective, the new duty to report will need some teeth, such as binding arbitration and fines for persistent offenders. This Government's use of sanctions against the poorest has been disgraceful, so how about using sanctions against some of the most powerful and making sure that large corporations treat their small business suppliers fairly?

Kelly Tolhurst: Late payments and the way that some large businesses have behaved in the past have been an issue for decades, and it is this Government who are prepared to make changes and bring forward policies to reduce them. We know that late payments can be incredibly damaging for businesses. That is the reason for the Chancellor's announcement last week about the responsibility of committees to look at payment practices, and I look forward to making further proposals.

UK Space Industry

6. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the UK space industry. [909870]

24. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the UK space industry. [909888]

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): In the past month we have invested £18 million in the OneWeb satellite constellation to deliver global 5G communications, which I announced at the European Space Agency in the Netherlands. Last week we announced £7 million for the SMILE—Solar wind Magnetosphere Ionosphere Link Explorer—mission.

In addition, we announced £25 million for the PLATO—planetary transits and oscillations of stars—observatory mission, and last week we signed the Square Kilometre Array treaty, which will see £180 million invested in the world's largest telescope.

Steve Double: I thank the Minister for that answer, but will he confirm that the Government remain positive about the potential of a horizontal-launch spaceport at Cornwall airport Newquay? Will he continue to work to provide the support needed to move that development forward, which would be of such benefit to the Cornish economy? Will he also come to Cornwall and see for himself the potential of the site?

Chris Skidmore: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; we had a positive meeting with the spaceport team last week. I am keen to do what I can to progress the hard work that has been done to put together an exciting project. The Government are investing £50 million to kick-start operations for a UK spaceport, including a £2 million fund for spaceports planning to host air-launched rockets and sub-orbital space planes. I will come down to Cornwall next month.

John Howell: Can the Minister confirm that it remains his intention to help the UK space industry by developing an alternative to the European Union's Galileo system?

Chris Skidmore: The Government have committed £92 million to developing options for a domestic alternative to Galileo. The UK Space Agency is leading work with the full support of the Ministry of Defence. Contracts are being let with UK companies. Around 50 have made expressions of interest in the process, which will help to keep important skills and expertise in satellite navigation.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister might know that some of the finest engineering companies in Huddersfield are busy providing components for space probes, including the one that went to Mars. Our great town is really on the cutting edge, so will he visit Huddersfield and see what an enterprising, get-up-and-go town can do for small businesses and large businesses? Components come from all over Europe, so will he also come and reassure people who are terrified of what could happen with Europe?

Chris Skidmore: I can confirm that I will visit Huddersfield on 10 May. I am going to the university there, and I will ensure that I speak to the hon. Gentleman and arrange to meet the companies as part of my visit.

Mr Speaker: I say to the Minister, who is a serious academic, that I have had the great joy of giving a lecture at the university. It is an admirable institution and they are very hospitable, so I think they will very much look forward to seeing and hearing the Minister.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Not every region of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland can be part of the UK space industry, but every region deserves the opportunity for employment. Will the Minister indicate what has been done to ensure that all regions have those employment opportunities?

Chris Skidmore: When we look at our space industry, we see that it is truly part of the United Kingdom, right across every place. I went to Northern Ireland to see Thales and the work that it is doing on some of the satellite applications. Up in Sutherland in Scotland, we have a £31.5 million investment in vertical space launch. We want to ensure that our space industry—one of the fastest-growing industries in all of business—covers the whole of the UK.

Marine Renewable Electricity Generation

7. Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What steps the Government are taking to support the development of marine renewable electricity generation. [909871]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): It was a pleasure to meet the right hon. Gentleman and a cross-party group of colleagues only last month to discuss this matter. I commend the Marine Energy Council for the work that it has done, and indeed I see that it has published some interesting analysis today. We have provided £175 million of innovation funding to the sector. We all want it to succeed. We have the first pre-commercial array deployed off Caithness and, of course, we have the European Marine Energy Centre in his constituency.

Mr Carmichael: I thank the Minister for the meeting last month. We are now engaging with the Treasury in respect of revenue support for the sector, and any support that she can give it will be very welcome. In the meantime, however, we have the prospect of the energy White Paper. Will she use her offices to ensure that the potential for marine renewable energy generation is fully recognised when that White Paper comes to publication?

Claire Perry: I do not want to pre-empt the White Paper, but I think that one thing we will show in it is how the ongoing attempts to be technology-neutral can work across the piece to generate low-cost, low-carbon energy, and highly competitive technologies will be part of that. We remain interested in marine and tidal, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. Of course, we need to discuss with the Treasury any revenue support mechanisms, but I want to continue to engage with the sector on a long-term basis.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The Minister will be aware that the proposed Swansea Bay city deal would include a strong marine energy component centred on Pembroke Dock. She will also be aware that the growth deal is beset with concerns and questions about its progress, so will the Minister, along with Welsh Ministers, please look into the marine renewables part of the project to ensure that progress is made and opportunities are not lost?

Claire Perry: Of course, it is striking that we had the very interesting Swansea tidal bid, which would have been the most expensive power station in the UK had we built it, and that that project has now come forward in a different form not requiring Government subsidy. There is huge potential to continue to work with the communities of Swansea and across Wales, and I will be delighted to keep working with them.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Fifty per cent. of Europe's tidal and 35% of its wave energy resource are in UK waters, but the Government have still not provided the marine renewables industry with a secure route from experimental phase through to demonstrator phase through to full commercial development. Recent research from the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult shows that revenue support could enable marine renewables to create up to 50,000 new jobs and dominate more than 30% of a global market estimated at £76 billion by 2050. Does the Minister accept that the contract for difference auctions are not an adequate mechanism to support emerging technologies such as marine renewables at this stage in their development, and will she take action to provide a competitive funding pool in the energy White Paper to support the UK's innovative marine technologies and enable the UK to gain its rightful share of this exciting global market?

Mr Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman's thesis will be peer-reviewed.

Claire Perry: I will attempt to do that, Mr Speaker. The hon. Gentleman will know, of course, that all these technologies basically started off in the same place. Arguably, marine and tidal have received more innovation funding. They have not been able to demonstrate a cost reduction pathway commensurate with, for example, offshore wind, but he is right to say that we need to look at ways to try to bring these technologies forward and we will continue to do so.

Industrial Strategy: High-quality Jobs

9. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What recent steps he has taken through the industrial strategy to increase the number of high-quality and well-paid jobs.
[909873]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): The industrial strategy is based on increasing the number of high-quality and well-paid jobs because it invests in skills, infrastructure and innovation, as well as building long-term strategic partnerships with businesses through sector deals between the Government and industry.

James Cartlidge: As my hon. Friend will be aware, we often talk about our being the fifth largest economy, but by GDP per head we are ranked about 23rd or 24th, according to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Does he agree that greater export penetration into growing markets overseas will help to raise that GDP per head and that an independent trade policy could boost that endeavour?

Richard Harrington: I agree with my hon. Friend. In his own constituency, six companies have received the Queen's award for international trade. He understands the importance of exports. I agree that the UK needs to deploy all the tools at its disposal to support UK exporters, and a key part of that is tailoring our trade policy to the strengths and requirements of our economy and supporting the delivery of the industrial strategy.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Today's Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee report singles out the steel industry as having been particularly failed by the Government's industrial strategy. On behalf of

the steel sector in my constituency, can I ask the Minister when the Government will get back around the table to take action on issues such as energy prices?

Richard Harrington: I discussed this issue yesterday through the good offices of the all-party group on steel and metal related industries—several hon. Members were there—and agreed to hold a roundtable with all parties, including, I hope, the hon. Lady, to discuss how we can progress the sector deal.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): General Electric in Stafford—and indeed in Rugby—provides excellent, high-quality and well-paid jobs through its investment in energy, particularly good energy. Can I invite the Minister or his colleague the Energy Minister to come and see what world-leading technology is being developed in Stafford?

Richard Harrington: I cannot answer for my right hon. Friend, who is capable of visiting wherever she likes—in fact, she is omnipresent all over the country with her visits—but I would be delighted to visit GE and anywhere else in Stafford my hon. Friend thinks suitable.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the Minister spell out yet again the extent of his support in the industrial strategy for the likes of Bombardier and related industries in Northern Ireland?

Richard Harrington: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I meet regularly with Bombardier, as does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It is a regular visitor to my office and is always welcome. I am interested to hear its views on anything.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): It is more than a year since the Government committed to putting as much emphasis on the quality of jobs as on the quantity. In their response to the Taylor review last February, they said:

“We will...report annually on the quality of work in the UK economy...and...hold ourselves to account”.

How much longer do we have to wait for the first assessment of job quality in the UK?

Richard Harrington: We gave our answer in our response to the Taylor review, but the Government have also published a good work plan, in which we commit to ways of delivering better jobs for everyone in the British economy.

Carbon Emissions

10. **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the reasons for recent trends in the rate at which the UK's carbon emissions are falling.
[909874]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): The right measure is to look at carbon dioxide reduction as a unit of national income—the carbon intensity measure—and BEIS will publish its own numbers at the end of May and then make the assessment. I am sure that, like me, the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that we have been decarbonising faster than any other G7 or G20 economy and that in the last year for

which we have data our decarbonisation rate—on the intensity measure—was minus 4.7%. We know we have to do more, but I hope he welcomes the measures on hard-to-reach sectors, such as decarbonising the heating grid. We should be proud of what we have achieved.

Bambos Charalambous: The UN says that we have less than 12 years to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, and on Friday thousands of schoolchildren marched for their futures. Given that emissions fell last year by only 1.5%—less than half the 3.2% fall recorded the year before—does the Minister agree with the Environmental Audit Committee that the Government are “coasting” on climate change?

Claire Perry: Far from it. I do not recognise those numbers. I have got into trouble before for saying I probably would have been out there with those kids several years ago—I recognise the admirable passion and urgency with which they have raised this matter, although we need their skills to solve this problem. The best way to solve the climate problem is to create a generation of geo-engineers, climate scientists and technologists, and they have to learn those skills in the classroom.

We are absolutely not coasting, but we need strong cross-party support to deliver this change. It is striking that when we debate our relationship with the earth's climate for the next 40 years, this place is half empty, but when we debate our relationship with the EU for the next three years, it is jam-crammed. We need to get beyond Brexit and start focusing on the future.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The Minister is rightly encouraging the use of electric vehicles, but, as she will appreciate, in the commercial sector there is, on occasion, inadequate supply in the grid. Will she recognise the valuable role played by Off Grid Energy in my constituency, which has storage technology, and whose latest project for the Oxford Bus Company involves capturing energy from solar panels and storing it so that the buses can be charged up overnight?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend—whose constituency is known for its engineering excellence—is absolutely right. As is clear from the smart systems plan for the future and the smart export guarantee, decentralised energy generation storage is one of the ways in which we can maximise the value of electric vehicle roll-out and its contribution to solving the generation and storage problem.

Skilled Green Jobs

11. **Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to promote the creation of skilled green jobs. [909875]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): As the hon. Lady will know, nearly 400,000 people—more than the number employed in aerospace—are working in the low-carbon economy. As last week's offshore wind sector deal made clear, the focus on job creation is paramount, but we must also focus more on diversity in the sector, and I am very proud of the commitment by the industry and the Government to ensuring that at least a third of the 27,000 jobs that will be created are going to women by 2030.

Vicky Foxcroft: Lewisham Council recently declared a climate emergency, and called for urgent action on the environment. Tackling climate change will require a radical transformation of the economy and society, including investment in green industries. Will the Minister match Labour's commitment to a green industrial revolution creating 400,000 jobs across the country?

Claire Perry: I always admire the hon. Lady's enthusiasm, but committing themselves to a target that we have already achieved is perhaps not the most stretching thing that the Opposition could do. However, I welcome Lewisham Council's declaration of a climate emergency. My local authority, Wiltshire County Council, has done the same.

I am struck by the sense of urgency in schools and local authorities, and among people throughout the United Kingdom, but we must ensure that the plans we come up with are deliverable and not pie in the sky. Many people have criticised the Opposition's rather fanciful projections, which they say will never be delivered. I am in the business of delivering policies that add up, can be delivered, and stand the test of time.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Jaguar Land Rover is moving to the production of electric cars, but one of the issues that holds back purchasing is range and the time that it takes to recharge their batteries. What can the Government do to improve battery technology?

Claire Perry: Range anxiety is diminishing as battery technology improves. My hon. Friend will know of the Faraday challenge, a cross-Government and industry commitment to not only improving battery manufacturing and technology, but creating some of that value here in the UK.

Energy Mix

13. **Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the potential composition of the UK's energy mix in 2030. [909877]

22. **Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con):** What steps he is taking to ensure that renewable technologies form part of the energy mix. [909886]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The UK is leading the world in decarbonising our energy supplies while driving down the cost of clean power. The proportion of our electricity coming from renewables has increased fourfold since 2010, and the cost of clean power is falling fast. The price of offshore wind has fallen by 50% in the last couple of years.

Ruth George: The Secretary of State has just recognised that there is considerable support for renewable energy throughout the country. My local community in High Peak have always been committed to that. “Archie”, the Archimedes' screw in New Mills, is the first community-owned hydroelectric project. However, the Government are preventing people from becoming involved in renewable energy projects by removing the feed-in tariff and refusing to remove planning blocks on onshore wind, while forcing councils to plan positively for fracking. Will the

Secretary of State recommend the scrapping of that policy, and instead require councils to plan positively for renewables?

Greg Clark: I think the hon. Lady should recognise the huge progress that has been made, which is beyond what anyone would have expected 10 years ago when the Climate Change Act 2008 was passed. I commend her constituents for their contribution in respect of renewable power. However, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth has said, the right mechanism must be applied to the right technology. It is better to finance technologies in the early stages of development through innovation funding than to pretend that they can make a significant contribution to the grid.

Kirstene Hair: A renewables mix is hugely important in securing our long-term energy supply, so will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss some of the contradictory barriers in place for solar power, for example, because there are limited technologies that are able to bid for support through the contracts for difference scheme?

Greg Clark: I will indeed meet my hon. Friend, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth will join that conversation. We have a good record in bringing on a range of new technologies and I am very happy to make sure there are no barriers to that.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): There will now be a 9 GW cut in future installed capacity by 2030 as a result of Toshiba and Hitachi ending their plans to build three new nuclear power stations. The Secretary of State has also cancelled plans to build tidal lagoons possibly providing about that amount of additional capacity, has banned onshore wind and has run down new solar installations. He has severely limited the auction for new offshore wind to only £60 million of a possible £557 million. Does the Secretary of State agree that on present policies it looks like there will be a substantial capacity gap in power production against likely 2030 demand? Does he have any plan to deal with that? Does he have any plans to revive the lost nuclear power proposals? Does he share the Opposition's view that, among other things, we will need at least 50 GW of installed offshore wind to help close the gap and meet our climate change commitments?

Greg Clark: Quite the opposite is true. One of the reasons why it has proved impossible to finance privately some of these nuclear power stations is that the cost of renewables was falling and the availability was increasing so rapidly that they are being muscled out of the system. The forecast electricity margin for this year is now over 11%, the highest for five years. To put this into context for the hon. Gentleman, the contribution that the Wylfa nuclear power station—3 GW—would have made was procured in a single contract for difference auction for offshore wind. That shows the abundance that we have, rather than the shortage.

Feed-in Tariffs and Power Generation

14. **Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to support small and medium-sized renewable power generators after the scheduled closure of the feed-in tariffs scheme. [909878]

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): Solar is a UK success story: 99% of the solar capacity in the UK has been installed since 2010 when I became an MP. The feed-in tariff, however, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is a very expensive way of delivering small-scale generation. It has cost us almost £6 billion to date, and as the price of solar panels has fallen by 80%—I can see the hon. Gentleman sighing but numbers and value for money tend to matter on the Government Benches—I decided to bring forward the smart export guarantee, which opens up the market for small-scale generations and ensures that everybody is paid for power they export to the grid.

Clive Lewis: From listening to the Government's rhetoric on climate change, we could be forgiven for thinking that the school strikers are coming out in support of them; they are coming out against them, and if we cut through the greenwash we see the feed-in tariff axed, the solar energy sector decimated, and now the exports payments framework about to be ended and no replacement put in place. So let me ask this: will the Government ever announce a cut to the lavish support they dole out to their friends in the fossil fuel industry?

Claire Perry: It is news to me that the Labour party's policy is to be anti the oil and gas industry that employs so many hundreds of thousands of people. And when it comes to rhetoric, the hon. Gentleman should just go and practise in front of the bathroom mirror. I am happy to share the facts with him again—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps he is going to ask me to get on my knees next, Mr Speaker. [Interruption.] What we do on the Government side of the House is focus on facts—[Interruption.] You know, Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman was very clear that he was not a misogynist bully boy; I think his activities and behaviour today suggests quite the opposite. If he would like me to answer the question—[Interruption.] The answer to the question is this: we have not slashed support for renewable energy. We are now moving to a point where renewable energy no longer requires subsidy to deploy. If the hon. Gentleman could just stop equating Government spending with success and look at the results, he will see that we do not subsidise things that we do not have to, which means we can focus on bringing other technologies to market.

Industrial Strategy: New Hospitals

15. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential role of new hospital projects in the industrial strategy. [909879]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): On the question of whether hospital projects should be part of the industrial strategy, I absolutely agree. They are part of an industry in an area—health campuses, science, research and development, and, not least, modular construction and everything in our construction sector deal.

Robert Halfon: Together with the £400 million move of Public Health England to Harlow by 2024, a brand-new healthcare hospital campus would make Harlow the health science capital of the UK. Will my hon. Friend work with the Treasury to support capital funding for the desperately needed new hospital in Harlow?

Richard Harrington: My right hon. Friend could not be a greater champion for the Harlow hospital and health campus; in fact, I would honourably suggest that it should be named after him. However, he is absolutely right: the Treasury has to consider this and other bids, including the wonderful Watford General Hospital health campus, which I support. I am sure it will reach the right conclusion that these bids are fantastic for local areas—not just for the hospital but for industrial development for the future in those areas.

Topical Questions

T1. [909889] **Mr Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): One of the frustrations about the dominance of our Brexit debates over the last two years is that insufficient attention is given to the fact that this is one of the most exciting times for British industry and commerce since the first industrial revolution, which was forged in this country. We are in the vanguard of so many of the industries of the future. Earlier this month, my right hon. Friend the Energy Minister was in Lowestoft and, again, in Grimsby to launch the offshore wind sector deal—the 10th sector deal in our industrial strategy. It is helping Britain to procure a third of its electricity through offshore power by 2020, to provide a lead right around the world and to export good technology.

Mr Dunne: I share my right hon. Friend's optimism and enthusiasm for the opportunities that lie ahead for this country. Following the Chancellor's statement last week, when specific measures were announced, which I welcome, could he elaborate on how he expects the UK to take a lead in science and innovation to develop new technologies for renewables, which he touched on, and new materials?

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend is correct that our reputation for science and innovation, and the standing of our universities, are among the best in the world. At a time when every country around the world is investing in the technologies of the future, we need to emphasise the abilities and talents we have. Through the industrial strategy, we have the biggest increase in public and private sector spending and innovation that we have ever had in this country. It is already making a difference, but we have more to do.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Our automotive sector is facing significant challenges. To quote the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, "There is a perfect storm of a hostile global trading environment, the imminent threat of significant tariffs on cars exported to the US, rising costs, technological revolution and the already damaging impact of Brexit on the UK industry".

This perfect storm has already claimed some victims: Honda in Swindon, the loss of the production of the X-Trail and Infiniti models in Sunderland, and the loss of thousands of jobs at Jaguar Land Rover and Ford. The sector needs immediate and substantial support. Does the Secretary of State think the Government are doing enough?

Greg Clark: I am glad the hon. Lady recognises the importance and effectiveness of our automotive sector. She is absolutely right that the acceleration of the shift to new technologies is affecting the sector in every country around the world. Through our industrial strategy, agreed with the automotive sector through the sector deal, and the Faraday challenge, we are advancing our position in battery technology. That makes sure that, when the new generation of batteries are produced, they are produced in Britain, guaranteeing our future.

Rebecca Long Bailey: Those are warm words from the Secretary of State, but actions speak louder. On Brexit, his Government have threatened a catastrophic no deal and run down the clock. On rising costs, the Government have allowed costs such as industrial electricity prices and business rates to disadvantage UK manufacturers. On electrification, the Government have allowed us to fall behind. The planned charging infrastructure investment fund is still not in operation 16 months after it was announced, and subsidies for electric vehicles have been cut. Is not the truth that this Government are failing to provide the automotive sector with the support it needs to weather this perfect storm?

Greg Clark: We are the leading country in Europe when it comes to the production of electric vehicles, and as the hon. Lady is well aware, we have, through the industrial strategy, advanced our leadership position. However, if she listens to the leaders of the automotive sector, they say one thing time and again very clearly: we need to conclude a deal with the European Union. They have endorsed comprehensively the deal the Prime Minister has negotiated. If the hon. Lady is concerned for the future of this important sector, she would compromise and recognise the importance of bringing to an end this uncertainty and passing the deal.

T4. [909892] **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): A couple of weeks ago, I attended a business briefing in Tendring where I met some of the wonderful entrepreneurs in my area. They just want certainty. They just want us to get the job done. What is the Department doing to protect those businesses as we leave the European Union?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): Our business environment is among the best in the world. By reducing corporation tax and investing in skills, innovation and productivity-boosting schemes, we are supporting businesses to compete in an ever-changing market. Ensuring that businesses can access finance is key, and the British Business Bank has the tools to make that happen, including its enterprise finance guarantee scheme, start-up loans and our export strategy.

T2. [909890] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Just days after hundreds of children in Glasgow joined the thousands around the world campaigning for action to tackle climate change, a massive cyclone and devastating floods have hit Mozambique, Malawi and other parts of central Africa. What steps is the Department taking, working with the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to help developing countries to mitigate and tackle the causes and effects of climate change?

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): The hon. Gentleman is right that CO₂ molecules do not care where they are emitted or where they have an impact. I am delighted to tell him that we are one of the world's largest donors of climate-facing aid, with £5.8 billion over this Parliament, about half of which is spent on adaptation and half on mitigation. There is clearly more to do, but we should be proud of that record.

T5. [909893] **Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): What is BEIS doing to ensure that the oil and gas industry, which is the largest employer in my constituency, is the most innovative oil and gas sector in the world?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend speaks proudly of the hundreds of high-skilled jobs in his constituency, and there are hundreds of thousands such jobs across the UK. We are increasing R&D spend across the piece, but innovation in the oil and gas sector is driven through the almost £200 million investment in the oil and gas technology centre, which I have been pleased to visit, including £90 million from the Government.

T3. [909891] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders told us in big, bold type in its briefing note this morning that the vehicle excise duty diesel supplement must be removed immediately if we are to encourage the sale of the most advanced and cleanest diesel engines, such as those in which JLR is investing heavily. If that change is needed immediately, can manufacturers be expected to wait until the October Budget for an answer?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have been in discussion with the industry. The sector has participated in the development of the path to the decarbonisation of vehicles, and it is important that we are consistent with that. However, part of that process is about recognising that buying a diesel car is a perfectly reasonable choice for many people, but some people have got the wrong impression from the announcement.

T7. [909895] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking and finance is dealing with several cases, including those of Keith Elliott and Julia Davey, that raise serious questions about inappropriate links between insolvency practitioners and banks, specifically KPMG, PwC and Lloyds Bank. What action is the Minister taking to remove such conflicts of interest?

Kelly Tolhurst: My hon. Friend is a passionate campaigner in this area and for his constituents, and he knows that I would particularly like to tackle this matter. Insolvency practitioners must adhere to the insolvency code of ethics and must not allow conflicts of interest to override the fundamental principles of objectivity. Breaching the code may result in regulatory action, such as a fine, reprimand or, in the most serious of circumstances, the removal of a licence. The code is currently being updated by the recognised professional bodies that license insolvency practitioners, but I will continue the dialogue with my hon. Friend on this matter.

T6. [909894] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): As a result of IR35, small contractors who provide services to the public sector are paying more tax

than regular employees but without benefits such as holiday pay or sick pay. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Chancellor on revising IR35?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Lady raises an important point, but she knows we are doing a lot in this area to strengthen employment rights for people in the workplace. We have the good work plan, we are looking at flexibility, we are increasing holiday pay and we are always looking at how we can improve the situation for workers, whether the self-employed or general workers.

T10. [909898] **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Last week the Chancellor announced investments in genomics, photonics, quantum computing and nuclear fusion. Does my right hon. Friend agree that investments in world-class innovation bring economic benefits for all?

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): The spring statement was indeed a statement for research, innovation and science. Looking at just one of those investments, there is £60 million to keep the Joint European Torus facility going, and there are hundreds of jobs and tens of PhDs at that facility. I am delighted that the Chancellor made that commitment as we move forward to 2.4% of GDP being spent on research and development by 2027.

T8. [909896] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Can the Secretary of State explain whether he personally thinks the Prime Minister's exit deal will make the UK better off than remaining in the EU would?

Greg Clark: Substantial analysis has shown that, of all the options available, the Prime Minister's deal is the one that provides the best economic future, and I hope the hon. Lady will support it.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Post offices are at the heart of our communities, so does the Minister welcome the news that Newick post office in my constituency, after being closed for months following the sad death of the postmaster, Terry, is set to reopen? Does she agree that we must do all we can to keep post offices open in our rural communities?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for the work she has done with her constituents, the Post Office and the community to make sure that the post office in Newick is reopened. Post offices play an important role in our communities, and we are committed to maintaining the network of 11,500 post offices with the support of MPs like her.

T9. [909897] **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): In my constituency, the Crown post office in Middleton is to be closed and franchised into WHSmith, the consultation on which has just finished. As if that were not enough for one constituency, a consultation has just begun on moving the Heywood post office into an empty shop with an as yet unidentified retailer. Does the Minister agree that that consultation is a sham and that our post offices are both national institutions and part of our communities?

Kelly Tolhurst: As the hon. Lady knows after our meeting yesterday afternoon to discuss this issue, we are committed to delivering and maintaining the post office network, which did not happen under the last Labour Government, when there was a reduction. As I have already outlined and made very clear, where there are concerns about specific branches, practices and consultations, I will personally raise them directly with the Post Office.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give an update on the next phase of the Greater Grimsby town deal?

Greg Clark: I am delighted that the Prime Minister was able to join my hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) and me to celebrate the success of the beginning of that deal. The next phase is about investment in skills, and I look forward to visiting Cleethorpes and Grimsby to inaugurate that important set of investments in the skills of the population.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. We are running very late. One sentence questions.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): At the last general election, Labour promised to introduce a “Post Bank” to combat financial exclusion and ensure that everyone has access to banking services in their community. Does the Secretary of State agree that introducing a Post Bank to provide banking services in post offices would do wonders for the high street, as well as reducing financial exclusion?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Gentleman gives me an opportunity to talk about the fact that we already offer banking services in our post offices. As I outlined earlier, we are doing the most we can to make sure that post offices and sub-postmasters are remunerated for the work they do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the questions and answers are just too long. I am trying to help the House, but what we want is a brief question and a brief answer, not a speech.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Barclays has just announced another swathe of branch closures that affect my constituency, as the banks continue their flight from small towns and rural areas. Where does the Minister think all this will end? Does she agree that banks have a wider social obligation?

Kelly Tolhurst: I agree with my right hon. Friend that banks have a wider social responsibility. That is why I am committed to working with the Post Office to make sure that under the new banking framework post offices are remunerated correctly for the service they are providing for communities that the banks have moved away from.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Fracking is bad for the environment, our health, our democracy, our landscape and even the courts. Does the Minister recognise that the Government are on shaky ground, quite literally, and will they ditch their support for this failing industry?

Claire Perry: We have said repeatedly that the opportunity to create a home-grown energy source that provides thousands of jobs in parts of the country that economic policies have not been able to help, with the toughest regulations for oil and gas exploration in the world, is something that we should soberly and sensibly explore. That continues to be the case.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): What progress is being made to upgrade SMETS 1 smart meters to allow them to function interoperably?

Claire Perry: The switchover has already started. The priority is smart meters that have gone dumb through customers switching, because we do not want there to be an impediment to switching. The commitment is unchanged: it will be rolled out completely by the end of 2020.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): A common feature of all patient safety scandals is that whistleblowers were ignored, intimidated or lost their careers, and were not protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. Will the Secretary of State bring forward legislation for all sectors to ensure that that concern is investigated and that whistleblowers are protected?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Lady addresses a very important area that I am extremely concerned about. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care on how we can best strengthen the protection for whistleblowers within the NHS to support families and staff who raise concerns. This is a key area for us and I will continue to communicate with her on it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to disappoint the large number of colleagues remaining, but on the principle that one should encourage an up and coming young Member at the conclusion of proceedings, I call Mr Dennis Skinner.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Why should Jim Ratcliffe make millions creating misery for all the people affected by fracking? Coincidentally, there are not many jobs either.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman, as a proud representative of a former coalfield community, knows that, to the contrary, many people, including the GMB, support the fracking policy because of its potential—

Mr Skinner: They're wrong.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman says the unions are wrong—that is probably a first. People support fracking because of its potential to create jobs. *[Interruption.]* Crikey, if he would stop yelling. I must say that I feel desperately sorry for female Members on the Opposition Benches if this is how their colleagues treat them: being howled down, winked at—the other hon. Gentleman is not in his place—and having kisses blown after a question. The brocialists are in full control of the Labour party. I know that the hon. Member for

Bolsover (Mr Skinner) will accept that we need to explore the science sensibly and see whether there is a natural resource there, because when he was digging up coal, energy security used to matter.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am genuinely sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues, but demand has exceeded supply, as is so often the case at Question Time.

Child Sexual Exploitation Victims: Criminal Records

12.43 pm

Mr Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) to ask her urgent question and the Minister to respond, I must advise right hon. and hon. Members that under the terms of the House's resolution on matters sub judice, they should not refer to specific cases that are currently before the courts. It should not be beyond the ingenuity of right hon. and hon. Members to find ways of airing the issue without mentioning the specifics in a way that could threaten the legal process.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to make a statement on criminal records disclosure for victims of child sexual exploitation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I am conscious that, as you outlined, Mr Speaker, this question relates to an ongoing legal case, and that as such it would not be appropriate to comment on the specific case or cases. I assure you that the Government want all victims and survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation to feel that they can come forward to report abuse, and get the support they need when they do so. We are committed to working across Government to ensure that victims can move on from the abuse they have suffered, and that professionals, including the police, who come into contact with a victim recognise exploitation when they see it and respond appropriately.

The Government are committed to acting to protect the public and help employers make safe recruitment decisions. The disclosure and barring regime plays an important part in supporting employers to make informed recruitment decisions about roles that involve working with children or vulnerable adults, and in a limited range of other circumstances. The criminal record disclosure regime seeks to strike a balance between safeguarding children and enabling individuals to put their offending behind them.

The House will be aware that the Supreme Court recently handed down a judgment in the case of P and others that affects certain rules governing the disclosure regime. We are still waiting for the order from the Supreme Court, but we are considering the implications of the judgment and will respond in due course. It is important to note, however, that the Supreme Court recognises that the regime balances public protection with individuals' right to a private life. It applies only to certain protected jobs, and it is for employers to decide someone's suitability for a role once they are armed with the facts.

Louise Haigh: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. Just before Christmas, you welcomed Sammy Woodhouse to this Parliament. You, the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister and the leader of the SNP all praised her bravery in speaking out and waiving her anonymity in order to protect other victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation. In that instance, we discussed CSE survivors' experience in the family courts. It is good to see the Justice Minister in his place. I hope we can make progress on that issue.

Everyone in this House owes it to Sammy and all victims of child sexual exploitation to do everything in our power to reward her bravery and ensure that no one has to endure the appalling, unimaginable abuse that she experienced. We must all ensure that the state in all its forms no longer fails CSE survivors. They are forced to confront their past every day of their lives through the painful trauma that never leaves them, which many simply cannot escape. Their bravery in the face of all that has happened to them is humbling.

The victims are forced to live not only with their trauma but with convictions linked to their sexual exploitation in childhood. They are blighted by an obligation to disclose criminal convictions linked to past abuse. They are forced to tell employers and even local parent teacher associations about their past convictions. That punitive rule means that they simply cannot escape a past in which they were victims.

I understand your ruling that we are unable to refer to sub judice cases, Mr Speaker, but Sammy will not mind me referring to her record, which includes possession of an offensive weapon and affray. Both are explicitly linked to her grooming. When she was 15, the police raided the property of now-convicted serial rapist Arshid Hussain. Sammy was half-naked and hiding under his bed. Hussain was not detained, but Sammy was arrested and charged. She was a victim of exploitation and is now forced to disclose her criminal convictions—crimes she committed only through her exploitation.

Judges in the High Court have already ruled that forcing victims of CSE to disclose past convictions linked to CSE is unjust. They argued that

"any link between the past offending, and the assessment of present risk in a particular employment, is either non-existent or at best extremely tenuous."

I ask the Minister, what is the Government's position on record disclosure of CSE survivors?

One of the single biggest tasks of this Parliament and society is to create an environment in which victims of child sexual exploitation are given the best possible chance not to allow their past abuse to define them. Will the Minister consider bringing forward what is known as Sammy's law, which would give CSE victims the right to have their criminal records automatically reviewed, and crimes associated with their grooming removed? At present, anyone has the right to apply to the chief constable of their force area to have their records reviewed, but it is little known. Surely there must be a specific case in those circumstances.

Child sexual exploitation is fundamentally about an imbalance of power that is used to coerce, manipulate and deceive. It leads many victims to commit crimes relating to their exploitation. I know the Minister will agree that it cannot be right that victims are forced to live with the consequences of their exploitation for the rest of their lives.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for her urgent question. She knows, because we have discussed the issue behind the scenes on many occasions, the concerns, feelings and sympathy that the Home Secretary and I have for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse, and that this Government have done more than any other to tackle it. By setting up institutions such as the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, the Prime Minister, when she was Home Secretary, sought to uncover these terrible hidden crimes. We know of the

experience in Rotherham, of course, and I note that the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) is in her place. I have seen for myself the vital local work to support victims and bring the perpetrators of these terrible crimes to justice.

I am afraid that I am not able to comment on individual cases at this moment—it is a matter of timing—but the Government are considering the Supreme Court judgment very carefully. Sadly, I am not in a position to comment on other aspects of the urgent question, but we have, I think, acknowledged as a society that when children initially present as suspects, the police and others must ask questions to see whether there is more to the picture. I am sure that we all agree on that, and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to reiterate it.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): This case, the details of which we are very carefully not discussing today, is particularly horrific. Does the Minister agree that the issue with child criminal records goes much wider than CSE? I urge her to read, if she has not already, the Justice Committee's excellent report on the subject, and to meet me and a group of cross-party colleagues, as well as the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), in the near future to discuss how we can deal with these issues as a matter of urgency.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend feels—and, in fairness, has campaigned—strongly on this subject. I have read the report. She will appreciate that given the timing, I am constrained in what I can say, but I would be very happy to meet her. I should have said in my initial answer that I had the privilege of meeting Ms Woodhouse last year; she described to me in great detail her experiences as a child, and their impact on her as an adult. I very much valued the time she gave for that meeting. I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend and others to discuss their views on the disclosure regime, and any submissions that they wish to make to Ministers.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Sammy Woodhouse is to be commended for her courage and fortitude. Her campaign reminds us of the complex nature of child sexual abuse and its long-lasting consequences. She makes a very important point when she says that fear of being prosecuted may prevent victims from coming forward, and that criminal records may prevent survivors from moving on with their life.

Conscious of your warning, Mr Speaker, I will not say anything about the case in hand, but I point out that my colleagues in the Scottish Government are committed to preventing and tackling child sex abuse through a range of actions. Of course, grooming is a major issue; Police Scotland has emphasised that it is important that children should not be deterred from coming forward by a fear of having broken the law, and I know that the Minister will agree. In Scotland yesterday, Police Scotland launched the Stop it Now! campaign, which aims to drive home the message that the online grooming of children and young people is illegal and causes huge harm. This is one of the many areas where we really need to drive home the message that it is illegal for adults to have sexual conversations, online or offline, with young people. Does the Minister agree with the aims of the campaign to stop online and offline grooming in Scotland, and will she pledge her support for it?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her question. As she knows, we are very keen to work with colleagues across the United Kingdom, and to learn from best practice. I am pleased to hear of that campaign. With the help of the Mayor of London, we recently invested in a child house in London. I visited it recently; it is an amazing facility. Anyone who has worked with child victims—I know that several colleagues in the House have—will agree that the child house is a real step forward in making children feel comfortable in giving evidence, and in achieving the best evidence on behalf of those children. I am keen to see what more can be done in that area.

I am conscious that what is illegal online is just as important as what is illegal offline. The hon. and learned Lady will know the Home Secretary's personal commitment to ensuring that industry's response matches our expectations. That response should include a range of actions, such as stopping child grooming from taking place on companies' platforms, building artificial intelligence to stop this material getting on to the web, and having much greater openness and transparency about how they are clearing out their backyard. Of course, the online harms White Paper is coming up as well, and I am sure that many colleagues will take a great interest in it.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Huge progress has been made since the Government's CSE action plan, introduced back in 2011—even before the Savile revelations. It was based on encouraging victims to come forward and not regard CSE as being in some way their fault, and also on making sure that agencies did not try to sweep it under the carpet and were not in denial about cultural sensitivities—and even on making sure that they did not feel that children had brought this on themselves. What ongoing links does the Department have with survivors and victims of CSE? Are there facilities for those victims to meet and help educate judges, so that we can make sure that victims continue to be recognised as such, and not as being perpetrators in some way, and get the ongoing recognition and support that they desperately need?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend. I note the work that he did as children's Minister to bring about justice for these victims. The Home Office and I personally meet victims of historical and more recent child sexual abuse; I see it as an absolute privilege, and it is an essential part of my role. He is absolutely right that this is about not just law enforcement, but multi-agency working. There have been steps forward in improving that. For example, one of the reasons why we amended the Data Protection Act 1998 last year was to include a clause making it clear that professionals can share data to safeguard vulnerable people, including children, so that if they are worried about a child or vulnerable person, they can be confident that they absolutely must share data with other agencies that may have a role to play.

As for our ongoing work, we continue to fund targeted support for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse. The police transformation fund, which helped to fund the child house, is another source of support for innovative projects that can help improve our response to this terrible crime.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Can the Minister tell the House what analysis has been done on the impact that police cuts have had on bringing the perpetrators of CSE to justice?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady may be aware that we have set up the centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, which is undertaking groundbreaking work on the various typologies of child sexual offending—online, as much as offline, offending. We anticipate that that work will help police forces to address the many challenges that they face in investigating recent and historical examples of child sexual exploitation. We know that the criminal justice system has faced a particular challenge in bringing historical offenders to justice. I am very proud of the work that the police do to investigate historical child sexual abuse, and of the work that the criminal justice system does as a whole to give justice to those victims, but of course I accept that there is always more that can be done.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): There should be no place for child sexual exploitation in our society. Will the Minister give us an update on how the police transformation fund is effecting real change in the way that police investigate crimes involving vulnerable young people?

Victoria Atkins: The police transformation fund helps to fund innovative projects such as the child house, but also wider work across policing. The College of Policing has updated its guidance to make the point that children who, at first glance, appear to be suspects must be looked into to ensure that they themselves are not in fact victims.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): With children's services having faced a 49% cut in their early intervention funding, will the Minister explain how she thinks we will be able to intervene at an early stage to spot and rescue young people at risk?

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. As I have said, we are investing in innovative projects through the police transformation fund, which will help. The point of the child house is that it brings together all the agencies that may be able to help to look after a child. There is also a great deal of work going on in policing to ensure that children are intervened on before harm happens, and this includes helping to fund regional organised crime units to increase the undercover online capability, which we know is being used to target the online grooming of children.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The victims of child sexual exploitation have the ability to choose taken away from them in so many aspects of their lives, including with regard to behaviour that can potentially lead to them picking up offences. Does the Minister agree that it is important to promote the ways in which such situations can currently be reviewed, pending the introduction of a system that could help take away the lifetime legacy of offences that those victims did not really have freedom of choice about committing?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend puts it most eloquently. This is, of course, something that we will be very much taking into account as we look at the judgment of the Supreme Court and any other ongoing judgments as well.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Unfortunately, once again, the Minister's response is the same as the one that we get from the Home Office, which is that it is for the employer to decide, and frankly that is just not good enough. It shows a failure in the Home Office to recognise the fundamental flaws both in the policy and implementation of the disclosure and barring scheme. We must allow people, particularly victims of CSE, to rebuild their lives. Why will she not dump the dogma and sort out the faulty DBS before it blights even more lives?

Victoria Atkins: I know that the right hon. Gentleman has a long history of campaigning on this matter, and he asked me about the system recently in Home Office questions. I remind him gently that the Supreme Court found that it was a coherent scheme of legislation. We are considering that judgment very carefully, because, of course, we must balance the rights of the individual against the rights of wider society in safeguarding the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is clearly evident that, as part of their grooming, children are coerced into getting criminal records, whether through child sexual exploitation or drugs and gangs. That has the desired effect in that it prevents the children from going to the police, but it also damages for life their employment and, most perversely, their likelihood of getting compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. Will the Minister please give guidance to the police, the judges and the Crown Prosecution Service to consider holistically that, when a child is presented with a criminal activity, it could be part of grooming?

Victoria Atkins: I remember being incredibly moved, but also impressed, by the work of the hon. Lady's local police and safeguarding teams when I visited her constituency last year. The fact that the College of Policing guidance has been updated and improved to reflect the situation that she has described will have an impact on law enforcement, but of course, yet again, we ask all agencies to work together to ensure that these children are intervened on before real harm is committed.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Given that the High Court judges have already ruled that CSE victims' convictions are unjust, and that any link between past offending and current risk is either non-existent or tenuous, does the Minister think that we should ask some form of independent commission to advise the House on whether there needs to be a change in the law or regulations?

Victoria Atkins: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman was in his seat when Mr Speaker said that this case is sub judice, so I cannot comment at this point. On the wider point about an inquiry, he will know that the independent inquiry on child sexual abuse was set up precisely to lift the stones on this terrifying and terrible subset of crime. There are all sorts of strands of work going on through that inquiry at the moment. We are considering with great care the reports that have been submitted already, with a view to not just Government but the whole of society looking at where these problems exist.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Only a month ago, 55 men were arrested in Batley and Spen for historical child sexual exploitation. The women who came forward are, of course, absolutely amazing. They are spectacular people with great courage. My concern is that this case is in the papers and in the House. Will that be a block to other young women in Kirklees and more widely across the country coming forward, as they will be scared about being treated like criminals? They are scared that, when they have their own children and want to contribute to society and join charities, parent-teachers associations or whatever, they will be treated like criminals. That cannot be fair.

Victoria Atkins: I cannot comment on the specific case that the hon. Lady has raised. She makes an important general point about the way that we treat victims as they come forward. The criminal justice system has improved in the way that it looks after victims in the course of giving their evidence. Special measures can also be put in place, but, as always, if colleagues are aware of cases where the court system is not applying the rules as carefully as it should, they should please let me or Justice Ministers know. We are very keen that when victims are giving evidence, we do right by them and treat them fairly in the court process.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Girls and vulnerable young women in Newcastle suffered horrendous sexual abuse, rape and exploitation and yet found the courage to work with the police and social services to bring perpetrators to justice. As we have heard, the consequences can last a lifetime, and the support that we offer them should last a lifetime, too—I am talking about the kind of support that is provided by the sexual exploitation hub in Newcastle, for example. I know that the Minister recognises that and knows that we are talking about decades, not simply months, of support. What funding is available to provide support so that these victims can rebuild their lives and have the futures that they deserve?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady has raised this with me, and the project that she mentions is doing great work in the north-east. We do have a stream of funding mechanisms, which I am very happy to discuss with her afterwards, but she is right to say that historic child sexual abuse has not just an impact in the immediate term, but emotional, mental and physical consequences for many, many years afterwards. We must find a way of supporting victims in the longer term as well as in the short term.

Mr Speaker: Last, but not least, and never forgotten, Mr John Mann.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): There is a handful of people whose views should be forgotten, and that is that increasing number of commentators and politicians who suggest that this is a waste of money. I have dealt pretty much every week, and certainly every month over the past five years, with those who have survived this abuse, and that includes this week. I can tell the Minister that this question of criminality, with its impact in respect of custody, housing and employment, but also in respect of ongoing reputation for those who have managed to move on in their lives, is fundamental to why the vast majority of people affected have not come forward, despite the fact that I represented more than 30 during the three weeks of the Nottinghamshire inquiry. As all these issues have been aired during the inquiry in huge detail, will the Minister give a guarantee that the recommendations, when they come forward from this inquiry, will be implemented lock, stock and barrel by the Government?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on the fact that what is important is not only how the criminal justice system and other agencies react to this issue, but how we in this place react to it. The choice of language that we use is vital, and I want to make it absolutely clear that it is the policy of this Government that we will always be on the side of the victims of child sexual abuse, and we will always seek to secure justice for them.

Clydesdale Bank and SMEs

1.10 pm

Mr Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) to ask her urgent question and the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to respond, I must again advise Members that, under the terms of the House's resolution on matters sub judice, they should not refer to specific cases that are currently subject to legal proceedings; Members may of course speak to the general issues.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Economic Secretary to the Treasury if he will make a statement on Clydesdale Bank's treatment of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The Government are committed to ensuring a strong, diverse and dynamic economy, where small businesses can access the credit they require in order to prosper and grow. As such, we expect the highest standards of behaviour across the financial sector, which is why a number of necessary changes have been introduced to restore public trust in financial services, such as the senior managers and certification regime. Although it would be inappropriate for me to intervene in individual cases, particularly when they are subject to ongoing legal proceedings, we must always remember the human element to each case. That is why the Government have been consistently clear that, where there has been inappropriate treatment of SMEs by their bank, it is vital that those businesses can resolve their disputes and obtain fair redress.

At the Budget last autumn, the Government set out their support for the Financial Conduct Authority's plans to expand eligibility to complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service to small businesses and micro-enterprises. This will ensure that, from 1 April 2019, well over 99% of all UK businesses will have access to fast, free and fair dispute resolution. The Government have also been clear that banks need to work hard to restore businesses' trust in their institutions, and have welcomed the banking industry's commitment to establish two independent voluntary ombudsman schemes to resolve SME disputes.

I am extremely pleased that last week my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) agreed to sit on the steering group responsible for implementing these schemes, alongside Nikki Turner from the SME Alliance. That follows several months of intense engagement with the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking. Although eligibility for the scheme to address historical complaints will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis, I encourage all SMEs that believe that they are eligible to apply once the scheme is up and running in September.

I am pleased that the sale of loan portfolios to third parties is now covered by the standards of lending practice—overseen by the Lending Standards Board—to which Clydesdale is a signatory. That means that it is now committed to ensuring that third parties that buy loans have demonstrated that customers will be treated fairly, and to allowing customers to complain to the original lender if there is a dispute that cannot be resolved. I can also confirm that Andrew Bailey of the FCA has spoken to Clydesdale about the case in question.

The Government are not complacent about this serious matter. We will monitor the implementation of these new or expanded dispute resolution schemes, and we will continue to remind banks of the importance of restoring SMEs' trust in them.

Angela Crawley: I asked for this statement on Clydesdale Bank's treatment of SMEs in the light of my constituent John Guidi's hunger strike in protest at his treatment by Clydesdale Bank and Cerberus Capital Management. I am aware that aspects of Mr Guidi's case are sub judice, so I do not intend to refer to the specifics in any way that would prejudice the case.

In 1998, John Guidi built a business in the west of Scotland with a portfolio of almost 150 properties. Clydesdale Bank backed that business from the very beginning. Mr Guidi has told me that he was treated by bank chiefs as "a model customer", and in only 15 years he built a property business worth £16 million. He never missed a payment, was in regular communication with bank bosses and appeared to have a great relationship with the organisation.

My constituent informed me that Clydesdale Bank changed the structure of his loans in 2002, introducing him to the tailored business loan. In 2014, Clydesdale Bank sold its tailored business loans to Cerberus Capital Management—an American private equity business. Mr Guidi says that this organisation aggressively pursued the debt and subsequently put his company into receivership a few months after purchase. As a result of my constituent signing a guarantee, he has personally been made bankrupt, and the company is pursuing his family home. He only has a few weeks before he is evicted and has taken the decision to start a hunger strike in protest.

This tragic case brings attention to the vulnerability of UK businesses to abusive treatment by lenders and vulture funds, and the inadequacy of current regulation in preventing it. Sadly, John is not alone. There are hundreds of people across the UK whose tailored business loans were sold by Clydesdale Bank to Cerberus Capital Management. Since 2010, Cerberus has acquired more than 1.2 million distressed or non-performing loans, worth more than \$80 billion. Simply put, Cerberus is the world's largest debt collector.

As we all know, so-called distressed loans are often anything but. Since the banking crisis of 2008, we have seen a sorry catalogue of thousands of instances in which banks have forced legitimate borrowers into distress through no fault of their own, and because loans to SMEs are not regulated properly, the customers have little or no redress. John now finds himself in that category. All he wants is a fair say before he loses his family home. He has requested that his case go to an independent arbitrator for a review.

Will the Minister join me in calling on both Clydesdale Bank and Cerberus to engage with my constituent urgently, and will he meet John to discuss how the lack of regulation in the banking industry has destroyed his business? Finally, is now not the time to pursue an independent financial tribunal to ensure that my constituent can receive adequate remedy from the dispute resolution of his case?

John Glen: I thank the hon. Lady for her points, and I will try to address them all. The decision to develop the dispute resolution service was taken carefully, after a lot of engagement with the industry. I am obviously aware

of the press coverage around the case and of the extremely difficult circumstances faced by her constituent. I understand that enforcement action is currently on hold as legal proceedings have been brought against Clydesdale and Cerberus. I also understand that Clydesdale and Cerberus have offered to meet Mr Guidi.

The hon. Lady raises a number of points about a preferred alternative mechanism for resolving such situations. It is common across all jurisdictions for banks to sell off parts of their portfolio of debt at times. The question becomes what the appropriate mechanisms and safeguards are in those cases. The sale of debts to third parties is covered under the standards of lending practice, to which Clydesdale is a signatory. That means that it is committed to ensuring that third parties that buy loans have demonstrated that customers will be treated fairly, and to allowing customers to complain to the original lender if there is a dispute between the business and the third party that cannot be resolved.

I am very happy to meet the hon. Lady to go through the full extent of her outstanding concerns on the matter. I take the issue and this case very seriously.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) on raising this urgent question. As somebody who was involved with the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking back in 2012 and 2013, the fact that we are still talking about businesses that were sold TBLs which have not received redress is somewhat shameful. I appreciate the very constructive comments made by the Minister. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on his work as chairman of the all-party group. Is it not the case that these issues could have been resolved much earlier if, for example, the FCA had included TBLs in its original redress scheme, and would that not have resolved some of the issues now being faced by constituents of Members across this House?

John Glen: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's long-standing efforts in this area. Before I was a Minister, I was a member of that APPG. The whole range of dispute resolution mechanisms that have taken place over the past 10 years all seem to have a very different story. As the Minister responsible, I was keen to ensure that we had a meaningful historical redress mechanism that would give discretion for the banks to examine these individual cases. I was also very keen that this House should be represented on that group. That is why having my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton, with representatives from the SME Alliance, involved will allow full scrutiny of all the cases that have not been resolved adequately.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for securing this urgent question and for being a firm advocate on behalf of her constituent.

All people and all businesses in the UK deserve a mechanism that provides them with access to justice in the event that they end up in dispute with their financial services provider. Under your guidance, Mr Speaker, I will not comment on the specifics of the Guidi case. However, as many Members are aware, the issue of redress for SMEs against banks and other financial

services providers is one that we have discussed in this place many times. At present, too many businesses are caught between the threshold for using the Financial Ombudsman Service and the cost and difficulty of using the full legal process to pursue a claim. So this issue is about more than just one case.

We must take decisive action to draw a line under historical cases like these, as well as ensuring that we have an adequate system of redress going forward. If we do not, then we have no hope of restoring the trust and confidence in business banking that this country so desperately needs. The debates that we have held so far have revealed a substantial coalition across the House for a full tribunal system, alongside a historical case review, that would look again at cases that have been settled by internal bank review processes. The Labour party, the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats, the Democratic Unionist party and many individual Conservative MPs certainly hold that view; it is only the Government who do not.

I therefore have some questions for the Minister. First, do the Government agree with the Opposition that where there is evidence from complainants, the historical review process should be willing to consider cases going back to 2000? At present, only those going back to 2008 would be eligible. Secondly, are the Government willing to reconsider their view on the establishment of an independent tribunal system for dispute resolution in order to level the playing field between businesses and their banks? Thirdly, have the Government listened to those people arguing that the expansion of the ombudsman service alone will not solve the problem, as it does not have sufficient resource and capacity to get to the root of the problem, and the mooted compensation cap by the Government looks far too low?

Most of all, do the Government acknowledge that MPs want to see some real action and progress on this? It is disappointing that despite many hours of parliamentary debate and consensus on what must happen next, with agreement stretching across the Treasury Committee, the Opposition, the Financial Conduct Authority, the major banks themselves, such as TSB and Metro, and the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking, the Government are still reluctant to join this consensus. We all want to be able to tell our constituents that these issues are resolved and simply will not be allowed to happen again.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I always listen very carefully to the constructive way that he presents his case.

Let me address the hon. Gentleman's three core questions. First, the historical review process has been as set out, but there is discretion within that. I know that there will be a lively discussion at the first board meeting about how the handling of past cases will be considered. In terms of the disputes over how to resolve this, the role of the Financial Ombudsman Service is being expanded. Its representatives were in Parliament last week offering access to colleagues across the House, and I have visited them to examine what they are doing to recruit the extra resources needed to deal with this extra category. I think that this will work; I would not have made the decision otherwise. The other key consideration I have to balance is about the rapidity and efficiency with

[John Glen]

which the vast majority of cases—we are talking about 99% of businesses with a turnover of up to £6.5 million—will be able to get a resolution. That is why I think that the ombudsman service is the right way to go forward.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I thank the Minister for all the work he has done in this area. I do feel that we are making progress, but, understandably, the jury is out until we get to the place we need to be. I also thank the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for tabling such an important question today. There are many issues with this. The case concerned follows a typical pattern. Over 10,000 of these tailored business loans were sold to businesses. It may be impossible for these businesses to refinance because of the exit fees. Personal guarantees were then required, and finance was withdrawn despite the fact that the businesses had never missed a payment. The FCA has looked at this and has said that these cases should be considered by the new dispute resolution scheme, which is good news for many people. I ask the Minister to impress on UK Finance that it makes sure that it suspends any proceedings in any of these cases until they have been reviewed.

John Glen: Again, I thank my hon. Friend for the work he has done in this area. I met representatives of UK Finance just a few hours ago, and I am aware of his correspondence overnight on this issue as he joins the board imminently. The key concern I would have is the extrapolation of one case, or a few celebrated cases—tragic cases—to say that they are normative of practices across the sector as a whole. He smiles because he knows that is a conversation we have had frequently. This historical dispute resolution mechanism is not designed as some sop, but as a meaningful mechanism to interrogate wrongdoing in the past and seek resolution for those individuals who remain dissatisfied.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) on securing this urgent question.

The issue of transferring funds to an organisation such as Cerberus is far from the only one. The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) mentioned businesses that did not have any debt issues whose loans were restructured and who were offered incredibly high and arbitrary repayment terms with incredibly high interest rates. That was completely inappropriate. The restructuring of debt should be tackled in the first place, and not just the transferring over. Nobody should be in the situation in which my hon. Friend's constituent found himself.

The Minister said that these cases are not necessarily indicative of how everybody has been treated, but we have seen enough of them coming forward, and enough people losing their homes, losing their families, and, in some cases, losing their lives as a result. We know as parliamentarians that we see only the tip of the iceberg in the cases that come into our offices, and that there are probably many, many more that we have not seen and have not raised here.

It is clear from cases like the one that my hon. Friend describes that any system of voluntary redress is not working, and is probably not working in many of the

cases that we see coming into our offices. I am concerned that the issue with voluntary redress schemes will also happen with the ombudsman scheme given that it is voluntary and not as all-encompassing as it could be. The Government can still take action and save face. What the Minister has said about the ombudsman system is interesting, but it is not the independent tribunal that we on the fair business banking APPG have been calling for. It does not go far enough on that basis.

The other thing that the Government have failed to do so far is to bring forward a massive, comprehensive review of banking culture to ensure that nothing like this happens again in future so we know that SMEs will not be treated in the same way as they were previously. It is incredibly important for our economy that SMEs can borrow, and they will not be able to do so if they do not trust the banking sector to treat them fairly. If the Government have to step in and ensure that this happens, then that is what needs to happen.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. There are two things there, and one is the adequacy of the voluntary mechanism. To be fair, it is unclear how it will play out, because it has only just been established. I see from my engagement with the chief executives and chairmen of the banks a massive desire to ensure that this has teeth and can deliver. This is not about the Government saving face. It is about ensuring that this process is effective. I will have deep engagement with and take a close interest in this process, because it must be effective and thorough in its examination of these cases.

I take the wider point that the hon. Lady makes about banking culture. A lot has changed in the last 10 years, and many of these cases arose before that. We now have a very different regulatory environment, with the Prudential Regulation Authority and the FCA, which has changed things considerably, but I will reflect carefully on her comments.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) on securing this urgent question. I had the opportunity recently to meet her constituent John Guidi, and I express my strongest concern for his welfare. Does the Minister accept that just one such example makes the case for introducing a financial services tribunal, to allow business owners to challenge financial institutions and have confidence that they will always be treated on the basis of fair play and justice?

John Glen: I have extreme sympathy for everyone who has had the sort of experience that this constituent has had, but I do not think it is right for any Government to make policy on the basis of one case. It is incumbent on Government to set out a framework and a policy that will deliver real answers to complex questions. I do not accept that the regulation of bank lending would be a good step forward. I understand the argument that it would give certainty to small businesses, but my view is that it would discourage a lot of lending, because there would not be the same appetite for lending if that regulation was as onerous as it would likely be.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) on securing this important

urgent question. We license and regulate banks to protect customers and because our economy requires SMEs to work as well as they do, but we also need to level the playing field of power between banks, SMEs and individual customers. There is overwhelming evidence that the banks have abused their position of power in the past. If I was at my most sympathetic, I would say that trust in the banking system is at breaking point. I actually fear we have gone beyond that. Is the Financial Conduct Authority really the answer to this, or has the time not come to have a financial services tribunal that SMEs, individual customers and banks can trust to resolve these problems, so that we can move forward?

John Glen: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman a number of times. As I have said to him previously, we need an effective mechanism that small businesses can get reliable and efficient access to and answers from. I have seen the investment that has gone into the expanded provisions of the ombudsman service. I know that he is not convinced, but this matter is not set in stone forever. Obviously the service needs to deliver. In my conversations with the chief executive of the ombudsman service, as in my conversations with UK Finance and the chief executive of every bank, I have said that this is the top priority in this area of my portfolio.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I have met too many individuals in my constituency who ran serious, sensible businesses and were a model in their borrowing but whose lives have been ruined by the behaviour of unscrupulous banks. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to air this on the Floor of the House.

I understand from my constituent Ian Lightbody that, despite the tireless efforts of him and his CYBG Remediation Support Group, they have not had the courtesy of a response from the CEO and chairman of CYBG, which sums up the complete contempt and disregard of Clydesdale Bank's senior management for small business owners. Will the Minister join me in demanding that the bank, as a first step, shows some courtesy to these individuals and at least engages with them?

John Glen: Yes. I am happy to take up the case of Mr Lightbody and ensure that he gets a conversation with the right people.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is not just in calling for a financial services tribunal that the Treasury Committee has joined the consensus. We have also echoed the concern, based on widespread evidence we received, that the regulatory perimeter needs to be looked at in respect of commercial lending. We urged the Government not to adopt a "wait and see" approach. Having looked at the Government's response to our inquiry into SME lending and listened to the Minister this afternoon, I think the Government do indeed appear to be taking a "wait and see" approach. When will we see more concrete action to give all business owners the confidence they need that whenever malpractice occurs—it does occur, and it is too widespread—they will see justice and accountability?

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I have set out the expanded remit and role of the ombudsman service and the extension of the money

that can be provided. I have also set out the engagement I have had with UK Finance on historical cases. I respectfully say to him that these are very early days—it is only two months since this decision was made, and I look forward to seeing urgent progress.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) on asking this important question. Along with effective dispute resolution, a properly functioning banking and financial services sector that commands the trust of the British people relies on brave individuals who are prepared to blow the whistle on wrongdoing within the institutions where they work. Does the Minister agree that it has become increasingly clear that we need enhanced protection so that people feel able to speak out and a regulator that is prepared to stand up for, support and protect whistleblowers when the going gets tough?

John Glen: I recognise that we need in the Financial Conduct Authority and the PRA regulators that are able to take appropriate action in a timely way to deal with disputes where they have responsibility. I have regular conversations with the FCA and encourage it to look at different matters. I will obviously be concerned about how the expanded ombudsman service and the redress mechanism work, and nothing is ruled out in the future.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) on securing this important urgent question. Like many Members, I have constituents whose businesses were successful and would not have gone under had the banks not mistreated them. Does the Minister agree that the FCA should issue strict guidance that the banks should not destroy any documentation relative to ongoing disputes before the historical compensation scheme is established, and if they do so, they should be sanctioned?

John Glen: The hon. and learned Lady makes a reasonable point. It would be perverse to shred relevant materials in the context of a provision that they have entered into freely, showing a lot of good will, to try to find resolution and get to a better point of trust between the public and themselves.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): This is not just about one case. The description that the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) gave of the sale of tailored business loans is identical to the case of my constituent. Furthermore, that constituent has clear, documented and contemporaneous evidence of deliberate false representation by the bank to the Treasury Committee, the Financial Ombudsman Service and the FCA. I venture to say to the Minister, for whom I have a lot of respect, that this is widespread across the banking sector. We have seen the activities of the Royal Bank of Scotland Global Restructuring Group in attacking SMEs. Much as I support the idea of a tribunal, surely now is the time to go further and have a full public inquiry into the character of banking.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. The key issue for many of these people, who have been waiting for a very long time—sometimes up to 10 or 11 years and longer—is to make sure they can get access

[John Glen]

to a mechanism that interrogates the evidence and deals with it swiftly. I was not indicating to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) that we should not say there are not parallels or themes, but I just feel that we have to look at the evidence on a case-by-case basis. I am certain that there is good will in the dispute resolution mechanism to interrogate thoroughly past cases that are unresolved.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): We acknowledge the work that the Government have done to date, and the point the Minister made about the need to strike a balance between banks being able and encouraged to lend and, at the same time, meeting the interests of their customers. Does he agree with me that an equally important balance is that between powerful financial institutions that have all the resources—and sometimes the resources of the state—behind them and small businesses that have been damaged economically by the actions of those banks and very often do not have the resources to fight back? Despite all the measures undertaken, 10 years down the line many are still seeking redress, still finding themselves blocked by the actions of the banks and now, ahead of the historical compensation scheme coming in, finding themselves forced into the courts and perhaps having their cases dealt with before the scheme comes in. Does he not agree that now is the time for an independent financial services tribunal, and for the FCA to make it clear to the banks that, ahead of the historical compensation scheme coming in, no further court action should be taken against individuals?

John Glen: I believe the dispute resolution service that has been set up gives the scope to go back over 10 years of disputed cases, and there is a desire to provide quick access. As the right hon. Gentleman points out, some of these cases have been going on for far too long. The situation is that the banks were in a very bad place with respect to the power they wielded over individuals and small businesses. They want to sort this out, and that is why they have engaged constructively in the construction of this dispute resolution service.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Like other Members who have spoken, I have a number of constituents whose businesses were ruined by the actions of the banks. I think this is a much larger-scale problem than the Minister perhaps implied in some of his earlier answers. It is about an imbalance of power in the relationship between the banks and their customers. The banks have had years to provide redress and they have had years of a voluntary system in that regard, so how is a new voluntary tribunal system going to provide the redress the banks need to provide? Surely the time will come when the Minister will need to make this a mandatory system to provide the justice needed by small business customers who were ruined?

John Glen: We have not in recent times had a system set up to give quick access in relation to disputes over the past 10 years, and my concern was to provide something that is effective and deals with all the issues that have been raised over the time I have been in office.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): Given the personal cost of this—destroyed businesses, personal bankruptcy, mental health pressures, suicide and now a hunger strike—many of these people will not have the ability or the stomach for a historical review. Moving forward, may I tell the Minister that there is little confidence, including from the Treasury Committee, that the FOS has the ability, capacity or expertise to do the work it has been asked to do? I hope the Minister will listen—I am sure he will—to those in all parts of this House who are saying there is now an unanswerable argument for an independent financial services tribunal.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I have responded to I think nine debates in this Chamber and in Westminster Hall on this matter. I am very aware of the pitch and the breadth of concern that exists on this matter and the urgency in getting some outcomes that actually deliver for our constituents, and I will continue to work towards that aim.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I think the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) hit the nail on the head. Let me give the House an example. A couple of years ago, when the Clydesdale proposed to shut its branch in my home town of Tain, I had a meeting with it and representatives of a highly successful local fish-processing business, and the Clydesdale was at pains to say, “Yes, we’re going to shut the branch, but you can use the post office locally.” Well, a fat lot of good that was, because the post office was too small, and I have raised that several times in this House. Now, in the next few days, that post office is going to close, and we will have no Clydesdale branch and no Royal Bank of Scotland branch in my home town. What good is that to SMEs? It is useless for business. I back the hon. Gentleman all the way: the time has come for a full inquiry into these banks, which, in my opinion, are completely out of control.

John Glen: As has been discussed in numerous debates, the changing face of the high street bank causes considerable concern for our constituents. We have a protocol in place on the relationship with the Post Office and, from memory, I think something like 97% of people in this country live within three miles of and have access to a post office. I think the hon. Gentleman needs—

Jamie Stone: Not in my constituency.

John Glen: The hon. Gentleman needs to reflect on the fact that there will not be a one-size-fits-all approach across the whole of the United Kingdom, and the banks are willing to look at individual solutions in different circumstances. I would be very happy to meet him to discuss that further.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): There is probably no more appropriate Member to have raised this than my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) because, as Members will appreciate, Clydesdale is in fact the historical name for a great part of the constituency that she represents.

Does the Minister accept that no form of redress can ever be good enough once a business has gone bust and the owners of the business and their families have been put through 10 years or more of hell? What assurances

can he give us that any future scheme of redress will become active and effective when there is still time to save businesses that, in the vast majority of cases, have operated lawfully within the rules and have been successful businesses? These businesses would not have been targeted if they had not been successful.

John Glen: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. He expresses exactly why I think it is so urgent that we get on and get the banks to engage in this historical dispute resolution mechanism and look at the detail, so that they are in a position to give compensation urgently. People have been waiting too long, and where such evidence exists, the banks need to respond appropriately and swiftly.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I thank the Minister for his response on these issues. As he knows, I have met him on a number of occasions with my constituents to do with their problems, and I just want to put on the record the desperation that they feel. Yesterday, some of them attended the Irish schools—St Patrick’s Day—cup final to protest about Danske Bank, with “Shame on you” on their yellow hi-vis vests to highlight the issue. The Minister quite clearly knows that their story is dreadful—he has seen it—as it all too often involves health issues. When it comes to financial redress, it is compensation we are after. Has the Minister had any opportunity to address the issue of compensation, particularly the issues of the Danske Bank in Northern Ireland, which has false-changed my constituents?

John Glen: I do not personally have investigative powers, but I do recognise the need to have compensation. That is why we have an increased compensation threshold in the Financial Ombudsman Service, and nothing is ruled out with respect to the resolution mechanism. I would like to acknowledge the work that the hon. Gentleman puts in, and I thank him for his email at 9 am on Boxing day, but I was just surprised he had a day off.

Points of Order

1.48 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will know that once a statement has been made under section 13(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, a Minister of the Crown must make arrangements under subsection (6) for a motion in neutral terms to be moved within the period of seven Commons sitting days, beginning with the day on which the statement is made. As you will be aware, such a statement was made on Friday 15 March, and you will also know that Friday 22 March is a sitting day. Can you therefore confirm that, irrespective of what may emerge from the meeting of the EU Council on 21 and 22 March and what, if any, consequential secondary legislation may be brought to the House thereafter, we will have a stand-alone debate on an amendable motion by Monday 25 March?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intention to raise it. As far as I am aware, his exegesis of the Act is entirely correct. Following the decision of this House not to approve the withdrawal agreement and the framework for the future relationship on Tuesday 12 March, the Government made a written statement on Friday 15 March, as required by section 13(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. Under section 13(6) of that Act, a Minister must move a motion “in neutral terms” that this House “has considered the matter” of that statement no later than Monday 25 March. According to the order of this House of 4 December, motions in neutral terms under section 13 of the Act are amendable. The motion has been tabled; it is currently item 64 in part B of Future Business. No amendments have been tabled yet.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am saving the hon. Gentleman. I do not want to squander him too early in our proceedings. That would seem unkind and wasteful.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is a very learned fellow; we will come to him presently.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Further to your, if I may put it this way, intervention—your ruling, perhaps—yesterday, the Government have today announced, no doubt also in accordance with the motion passed on Thursday, and apparently after a tumultuous Cabinet meeting, that the Prime Minister is writing to Mr Tusk to seek an extension of article 50, but not just, as prescribed in the motion last Thursday, till the end of June, but also for another, much longer period. However, we do not know for how long—apparently the Prime Minister might not have even decided herself—and we certainly do not know for what purpose any extension is being sought.

Mr Speaker, can you help us? Is all that in order, given that nobody has come to this place to tell the House of Commons what is going on, so that we can question, yet again, the purpose of that lengthy extension in particular and how long it will be, but also what this

[*Anna Soubry*]

means, given that we are to leave the European Union in 10 days, still with no deal in place? The concern is that the letter is designed to do the very thing that the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) mentioned in her comments yesterday, which she has also mentioned on a previous occasion, in reference to the rulings in “*Erskine May*”, which is, it is believed, to bully, frankly, Conservative Back Benchers into supporting the Prime Minister’s withdrawal agreement, even though they believe that it is against everything they believe in and against their consciences. Could you assist us, Mr Speaker: is all this in order?

Mr Speaker: I am not aware that anything disorderly has taken place, and I must begin by advising the right hon. Lady that I am not privy to these matters. I know that she is customarily exceptionally well informed, and may well be, for all I know, in this case. One of the reasons why I am not privy to these matters is that I have not been advised of them by Ministers. Another reason why I am naturally not aware is that I have been attending to my duties in the Chair, as colleagues and others would expect, so I do not know whether a letter has been written or is in the process of being written.

What I would say to the right hon. Lady is that of course the motion passed by the House last week on, if memory serves me correctly, 14 March did provide for a potential extension of article 50 application to be made. If memory serves me correctly, the first part of that motion specified that if the withdrawal agreement and future declaration were endorsed by the House by 20 March, the Government would be minded to seek an extension to the end of June—specifically, I think, to 30 June. A later section of that motion raised the possibility of a potentially longer extension being sought, in circumstances in which the House had not by 20 March endorsed the withdrawal agreement and future partnership declaration. I think I remember rightly that that reference to a potentially longer extension in that circumstance did not reference a specific period—and that certainly was not at that point a Government policy proposal—and it did indicate that there was no certainty at all that that would be agreed to by the European Union; and of course, a rationale for such an extension would be needed.

I mention all that because it seems to me that, as things stand, nothing disorderly has taken place. The notion that an application for an extension might be made is not new. It is out there and has been for some time. I am bound to say that if the Government are minded to seek something by way of a written application, one would rather hope that the House would be informed of that. Of course, a successful application would not only require the agreement of the Union; as a consequence—I think the Clerk at the Table has consulted his scholarly cranium and advised me that this is so—it would require the agreement of the House. We will have to see whether in due course that will be sought, but certainly the agreement of the House is a prerequisite to postponing exit day—I am pretty sure about that—and the agreement of the Union would also be required.

Knowing the perspicacity of the right hon. Lady, I feel sure that she will be in her place at later points, today and assuredly tomorrow and on subsequent days, and it is possible—I do not have to look into the crystal

ball when I can read the book—that she will leap to her feet with alacrity in order to seek to probe the Executive branch on these important matters. And who knows? She might well be successful in catching the eye of the Chair. I hope that is helpful to her at this early point in the day.

Sir Edward Leigh: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You have told the House that, under the convention dating from 1604, you would not be prepared to allow the Government to bring back the motion. I make no comment on that; I just mention it by way of introduction. However, we have also heard from the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), that it is likely that under the Act there must be further opportunities for debate, and the motion will be amendable.

I sense that the House wants to come to a conclusion; therefore, this point of order is designed to try to be positive and both follow your ruling, Mr Speaker, and not disagree with it and allow the House to come to a decision. If, as we hear, the Government are applying for an extension, which we are told might be quite lengthy, I would have thought that that was a fundamental change of circumstance, and you have yourself alluded to the fact that an SI would have to be brought to the House to implement that. I therefore wonder whether, if the Government were then to bring forward a motion, that might be a reason and an opportunity for you to make a judgment that that change was sufficiently meaningful to allow you to change your ruling and allow the Government motion to go forward.

There is another way. You may be aware, Mr Speaker, that I have argued for some time that the Government should use the concept of a unilateral declaration, and this has now been laid by the Government. What if the Government were to beef up or change its unilateral declaration, so that the motion that they brought back to the House was substantially different? I mention that as another way forward. I am trying to be helpful, so that we can both be true to your ruling, Mr Speaker, and allow the House to come to a decision as soon as possible, because I for one rather hope that this extension will concentrate the minds of my Brexiteer colleagues.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for the terms in which, entirely characteristically, he expressed it. There were quite a lot of hypothetical questions there, and he is both something of an intellectual gymnast—I think I am in no danger of contradiction in making that assertion—and a keen student of history, not least the history of his own party. I do not treat his inquiry with levity, but what I say to him is this: I have always thought that there is much merit in the observation frequently proffered by the late Lord Whitelaw. What he said, many a time and oft, was, “For my part, I prefer to cross bridges only when I come to them”—indeed, it might be thought to be somewhat hazardous to make any attempt to do otherwise. I stand by the point about the same or substantially the same proposition not being able to be brought in the same Session. The logical corollary of that is that if a different proposition is brought forward, it is perfectly possible that that can be done in an orderly way—that is to say, without falling foul of “*Erskine May*”. We will leave it there for now.

Chris Bryant: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a completely different matter, if that is okay. As you know, we all mourn the loss of Paul Flynn, and his funeral is to be in Newport on Friday morning, but because, unusually, we are sitting this Friday for private Members' Bills, your chaplain has agreed to hold a service in the crypt chapel of St Mary Undercroft at 10.30 am. I wonder whether we might be able to put that on the Order Paper for Friday, so that if anybody wanted to attend, they could come along.

Mr Speaker: I see absolutely no reason why that should not be done and every reason why it should be. I am deeply obliged to the hon. Gentleman. As he rightly says, this Friday is a sitting day. Many colleagues will be in the Chamber for important private Members' business and I myself, all being well, will be in the Chair for a significant part of the proceedings. I would otherwise very much have wanted to be at the funeral and I am being represented at the funeral, as I think the hon. Gentleman knows, but I will be here. That service is itself a service—a service to our departed colleague, to his widow Sam and family and to everyone who knew, admired and respected Paul—so let us have it advertised in a rather official way, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Christian Matheson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On a more practical matter, there are occasions in this House when we have debates that are of a timed length. I am thinking, for example, of statutory instruments that are debated for up to 90 minutes or Standing Order No. 24 debates, for which I believe the time limit is three hours. When we have such timed debates, would it be possible for the annunciator to reflect the start

time of the debate, so that hon. Members can see how long has elapsed within that period and how long is remaining?

Mr Speaker: The debate end time is displayed on the clocks at the table in front of the Clerks. I am sure that we can look at the practicality of that end time being displayed more widely. The proposition advanced by the hon. Gentleman is not only inoffensive, but potentially practical. [*Interruption.*] And practicable, as has been in no way pedantically pointed out to me.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We are at a time of unprecedented crisis and time is not quite on our side. The UK is due to leave the European Union next week and the House is sitting on Friday, just as we come to the end of a critical European Council. May I seek your guidance on what scope there may be for Members or for the Government to bring forward a resolution so that the House could sit on Saturday?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. Colleagues, for the second day running, I am obliged to turn to "Erskine May"—namely, page 309, with which colleagues, I feel sure, will be closely familiar—which states:

"Under Standing Order No 11(6) a sitting on Saturday or Sunday...can be secured only by a resolution of the House, made normally...at the commencement of public business."

I hope that my reply sates the hon. Gentleman's curiosity. If there are no further points of order, we will proceed to the ten-minute rule motion, for which the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) has been very patiently waiting.

Fracking (Seismic Activity)

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

2.5 pm

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require fracking operators to monitor seismic activity caused by fracking and take steps if such activity exceeds certain levels; and for connected purposes.

It is great to have the opportunity to talk about this issue today. Fracking is a controversial and difficult subject on which people take different views. Often, when fracking is discussed and debated, it is mainly talked about from an environmental perspective. That is an incredibly important part of the discussion, but it is not one that I am going to focus on today.

The part of the fracking debate that, frankly, has been missed in this place and elsewhere relates to its practicality and the practical implications for local communities who are affected by it, or by the exploratory drilling that precedes it, or who could be affected as a result of the drilling licence that is applied. For those communities, a shadow across the landscape is created by the implications for their local area—for the roads and the loss of agricultural fields—and the industrial impact in otherwise heavily rural areas. I wish to introduce the Bill today because of the continuing attempts by the industry, perfectly legitimately, to try to tweak and change some of the regulations that govern fracking and which this place needs to consider much more carefully and closely than it has hitherto.

The question on fracking is where to start, and the best place I can see is with what we as a country are trying to do with fracking. That is not actually that clear. I have put multiple written questions to various Departments over the past few months and have not been able to get a clear objective from the Government. The best that I have been able to get is a written ministerial statement from May last year, when the Government were clear that in their view, fracking offers “potentially substantial benefits” to the United Kingdom, that

“gas has a key part to play”

in our future energy mix and that they believe that

“it is right to utilise our domestic gas resources to the maximum extent”.—[*Official Report*, 17 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 16WS.]

If we accept that principle, the logical extension of the argument that the Government are very pro-fracking and wish to push it is one of scale and the impact on the local communities who are affected by that scale.

On scale, the challenge with fracking is that to have any material impact when it comes to replacing the amount of gas that we import from outside the United Kingdom with domestic production, a substantial amount of gas would have to be produced from the various fracking wells that would need to be created. Cardiff Business School did a study on that a number of months ago. People from Cardiff Business School and the industry came to the all-party group on the impact of shale gas a few months ago and debated it. There was genuine consensus that if fracking is to be done at scale in our country, thousands of wells will be needed if there is to be any impact on replacing exports with domestic supply.

The Cardiff Business School report estimated that the number of wells required in the United Kingdom could be anything from 6,000 to in excess of 30,000 wells. All those wells are clustered in relatively small parts of the country—that is, where the petroleum licences are—and those include my part of the world as well as Yorkshire, Lancashire, little parts of Somerset, and Sussex. The logical extension of talking about 6,000 to 30,000-odd wells—on the basis that a well pad contains a number of them—is the involvement of thousands of locations in a relatively small space of time, if fracking is to have any impact on the replacement of gas imports with internal production. In each area, the impact on the local community will be tremendous.

In my community of Marsh Lane, permission for fracking exploration has been granted against its will. It is in the middle of green-belt land in the Derbyshire countryside that has remained substantially unchanged since the enclosure Acts of 1795. As a result of this application's having been approved, we are faced with a proposal to place a light industrial estate in the middle of an agricultural field that has been used only for agricultural purposes, as far as we can tell, for more than 200 years, with over 10,000 vehicle movements in the exploratory phase alone; a substantial number of bulks, some over 10 metres high, for the entire period it is there; and a 60-metre-high drill rig during the six months it is being set up—all in the middle of green-belt countryside. That is the impact in just one location. Multiply that by over 1,000 locations and the challenge becomes that we risk substantially industrialising the countryside and other parts of this country where petroleum licences have been issued.

On top of the scale and impact problem comes another problem. There is a desire, because fracking has not been successful in the eight years it has been tested, to tweak the rules to make it more palatable in this country. First, the national planning policy framework was changed several months ago in effect to prioritise fracking and other forms of onshore oil and gas production over other elements, which gave great weight to allowing such energy exploration and production irrespective of where it was—whether in green belt, countryside or other locations that otherwise would be completely ignored and considered inappropriate for such development.

Secondly, an attempt was made last year to loosen the planning policy rules around fracking. It was proposed that fracking exploration—that light industrial estate plonked in the green belt in places such as my constituency—be permitted through the same planning policy processes as those for a kitchen extension and that the actual production, which could last up to 25 years, if not longer, be taken out of the hands of local people and put into the nationally significant infrastructure programme, both of which would be entirely inappropriate and take away control from local people over what happens in their local areas.

Then, in the last few months, after the failure of the first attempts to frack in this country for over half a decade—in Preston—the industry came back and said it wanted to change the rules around earthquakes. During that short two-month period in Lancashire when fracking was attempted before Christmas, more than 50 earthquakes were created near Blackpool—admittedly small ones, but earthquakes none the less—despite the fact that they got no further than about 10% of the way through

the industrial process of fracking. If we multiply that impact by the thousand or so sites in the country, we see the scale of the problem.

My Bill proposes to limit the ability of fracking to create earthquakes to its current regulatory acceptable limit of 0.5 on the Richter scale. The industry has clearly indicated that it wants the limits raised, but that would be entirely inappropriate. We should limit fracking activity in line with the existing regulations. The industry signed up to those several years ago, and any change to them would bring great anxiety, distress and worry to communities such as mine.

In conclusion, fracking is controversial because it has not worked, because it is not working and because, in my view, it will not work from a practical and a community-based perspective. For that reason, I seek to limit in legislation the ability of seismic activity to take place over and above what the regulations already state.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Lee Rowley, Zac Goldsmith, Mr William Wragg, Damien Moore, Mr Simon Clarke, Eddie Hughes, Ben Bradley, Maria Caulfield, Sir Graham Brady, Andrew Lewer and Sir Kevin Barron present the Bill.

Lee Rowley accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March, and to be printed (Bill 359).

Exiting the European Union (Food and Agriculture)

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we will debate motions 2 to 5 together.

2.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I beg to move,

That the draft Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 5 February, be approved.

Mr Speaker: With this, we shall consider the following motions:

That the draft Genetically Modified Food and Feed (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 4 February, be approved.

That the draft Novel Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 4 February, be approved.

That the draft Animal Feed (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 5 February 2019, be approved.

Steve Brine: The instruments, which all concern food and feed safety, relate to those substances collectively known as “regulated products” and to animal feed hygiene and marketing. They are made under the powers in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to carry out necessary amendments to the overarching food regulations so that those can continue to protect public health from risks that may arise in connection with the consumption of food. These are protections that our constituents would expect us to pass.

As the UK leaves the European Union, the Government remain committed to maintaining the high standards of food and feed safety and consumer protection that we enjoy in this country. As some hon. Members are aware, I have recently presented numerous instruments that will help to deliver a functioning body of food and feed law. I say “some hon. Members” because, by and large, they have been taken upstairs—so I like to think that today is a bit like me moving from BBC2 to the primetime slot on BBC1. The instruments will correct deficiencies in the regulations to ensure that the UK is prepared in the event we leave the EU without an agreement.

As with all the previous statutory instruments I have presented, I wish to make it clear that these instruments make no policy changes and that it is not our intention to make any at the present time. Similarly, they are crucial to maintaining the effective controls and standards that protect public health and consumer interests in relation to regulated products used in and on food and animal feed.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): As the Minister knows, in the ceramics industry contact with food is a huge part of the regulations. What assurances can he give to me that I can relay to the industry that should Europe change its own arrangements for contact rates and provisions—in other words, if our regulatory systems diverge—producers in this country that are in line with our regulations could still sell to the EU?

Steve Brine: I shall be able to talk in more detail about the ceramics issue, which I can well imagine is of great interest to the hon. Gentleman. However, the point of the regulations is to port across everything that is currently on the EU's statute book. We have 100% regulatory alignment at this stage, because we are a member state at present; if we have a withdrawal agreement in place, there will of course be a seamless bridge. The purpose of the instruments is to ensure that that seamless bridge comes about regardless.

If, when we are a third country, we as a nation, and this as a sovereign Parliament, decided to make a change to the regulations, we would have to do so with the consent of Members. All the considerations would be taken into account, including the impact on areas such as the one that the hon. Gentleman represents, and I am pretty sure that he would be a very loud voice in any future debate. I hope that that answers his question.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): What consultation has there been with the devolved nations?

Steve Brine: I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear with me. I will definitely come on to that, in respect of all the SIs.

As I said to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), the purpose of the SIs is to ensure that UK domestic legislation that implements directly applicable EU regulations continues to function effectively after exit day. The proposed amendments are critical to ensuring that there is minimal disruption to novel foods, feed additives and other regulated products collectively if we do not reach a deal with the EU.

The first SI, the Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019—also known as Food Contact Materials—refers to all items that are intended to come into contact with food, both directly and indirectly. They include processing line machinery, transport containers—not vehicles, but the actual containers of food—kitchen equipment, packaging, cutlery as sold and dishes and utensils as sold, and can be made from a variety of materials including metal, paper, plastic, wood, rubber and, indeed, ceramics.

Let me say for the benefit of Members who do not live and breathe these regulations, in the unlikely event that there are any, that specific examples of food contact materials are tin cans for holding baked beans and plastic bottles for holding water. The regulations will ensure that those materials are robust enough to do the job, but safe enough to do it without transferring anything to the foodstuffs.

The instrument is critical in meeting our priority of maintaining after we leave the European Union the very high standards of food safety and consumer protection that we currently enjoy in this country. It will ensure that provisions in four main pieces of EU food contact materials legislation continue to function effectively in the UK after exit day. The first is European Commission regulation 1935/2004, which sets out the framework for all materials and articles intended to come into contact with food. The regulations then become progressively more specific. The second is regulation 10/2011, on plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with food. The third is regulation 450/2009, on active and intelligent materials and articles intended to come into contact with food. The fourth is regulation 2023/2006, on good manufacturing practice for materials and articles intended to come into contact with food.

The instrument also makes relevant changes to other specific technical pieces of legislation on individual types of food contact material. It will ensure that regulatory controls for food contact materials continue to function effectively after exit day, that public health continues to be protected, and that high standards of food safety are maintained. Consumers must be protected against potential adverse effects of exposure to some substances used in the manufacture of materials and articles that are in contact with the food that we eat. The instrument will ensure that the effectiveness of the controls that we have is maintained.

This instrument, and the other SIs that we are debating today as part of the fourth and final bundle, will transfer responsibilities incumbent on the European Commission from Ministers in the European Council to Ministers in England, Wales and Scotland and the devolved authority in Northern Ireland. It will also transfer responsibility currently incumbent on the European Food Standards Authority to the relevant food safety authority: the Food Standards Agency, for which I hold ministerial responsibility in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Food Standards Scotland north of the border. The change will also ensure a robust system of control to underpin UK businesses' ability to trade both domestically and internationally.

Let me now say something about the impact of this instrument on industry. The proposed amendments are expected to have a very minimal impact on businesses that produce or use food contact materials or articles. Existing provisions have received very positive feedback from our previous consultations, and there is no evidence that the changes required will be detrimental to industry. I was asked about the devolved Administrations. They have consented to the instrument. We liaise closely at official level with our opposite numbers, and, as with the instruments that we have already debated, throughout this month we have engaged positively with the devolved Administrations throughout the development of these instruments. Let me place on the record again my thanks to them for their positive engagement with me and my team.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I am pleased by the Minister's reassurance about the commitment to the extremely high standards of food safety that exist in our country, but will he consider making some improvements as we take on this responsibility in our sovereign Parliament? A number of my constituents are worried about claims that many of the plastic items used to store and protect food are biodegradable or recyclable when that is actually not true. Will the Minister consider improving the current standards in future, so that we can have proper regulation and proper communications about how biodegradable or recyclable plastics really are?

Steve Brine: It is good to see my hon. Friend here, but not so good to see her there. She knows what I mean.

Along with the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), I chaired the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer for many years. There is definitely talk in the lobbying community about plastics and their impact, and, as the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland

West knows, pieces of academic work make claims in that respect. Those claims are certainly not proven, and there is a wide range of scientific debate about them.

I take my hon. Friend's point about biodegradable plastics, but it is not specifically a matter for me. The instruments deal with food standards and food safety. They do not make any degradations in our food safety, but neither do they make any improvements; they are housekeeping measures.

The second SI, the Genetically Modified Food and Feed (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, is also crucial to meeting our objective of ensuring that the current high standards are maintained. It was made under the powers in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to make necessary amendments to retained EU genetically modified food and feed law. It will ensure that regulatory controls for GM food and feed continue to function effectively after exit day, and that public and animal health and, crucially public confidence are protected. The EU law governing GM food and feed provides a harmonised regulatory framework, including transparent and time-limited procedures for robust risk assessment and authorisation before these products can be placed on the market, and we believe that those strict controls must be maintained.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Food safety is a critical element in the fight against antimicrobial resistance and the tackling of superbugs. Will my hon. Friend do all that he can to ensure that the UK remains a world leader in this area after we have left the European Union?

Steve Brine: I would have been disappointed if my hon. Friend had not raised the subject of antimicrobial resistance. He is ingenious in managing to get it into every debate. He knows of my commitment in that regard, not just domestically but internationally. This country is rightly respected and looked to for its work in the field, and I thank him for putting that on the record.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): We have received assurances from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that in no way will any of our food standards be lowered as we leave the EU. That is very important to all our constituents, not least the people of Taunton Deane. Will the Minister assure me that we will stick to that, and, indeed, that there might be opportunities to raise our standards so that we are effectively a leader in many areas of the food, farming and animal feed sector?

Steve Brine: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and it is an interesting one to bring up at this moment. We have been very clear across Government from the Prime Minister down, including the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary, that we will not lower our standards in pursuit of trade deals as a result of leaving the EU, and that we will use all the tools at our disposal to make sure that standards are protected and we are not therefore left at a competitive advantage. My hon. Friend mentioned the Environment Secretary, who made that point very clearly at the Oxford farming conference, I think earlier this month. That is very much where this House is, and that is very much where I am as Minister responsible for food safety. I hope that is clear.

The law governing GM food and feed provides a harmonised regulatory framework. The authorisation process involves a safety evaluation based on rigorous scrutiny of scientific data by the European Food Safety Authority in line with international guidelines. GM events for use as food and/or feed are authorised by means of individual pieces of legislation. Authorisations are granted for a period of 10 years, which may be renewed if, following assessment of the required renewal data, the previous risk assessment remains valid. The rules also provide for the withdrawal of authorisations in appropriate circumstances.

There are also very clear requirements for the traceability of genetically modified organisms and the labelling of GM food and feed products, and importantly this enables products to be tracked through all stages of the supply chain. So the instrument ensures the continuation of these robust and effective GM food and feed safety labelling controls after we leave the EU.

As was the case with the other SIs, this instrument will make no change to policy beyond the technical amendments necessary, but it assigns powers and responsibilities currently incumbent on EU entities to appropriate UK entities. So I want to be clear that powers to make legislation, and risk management functions currently held by the European Commission to authorise GM food and feed and revoke or modify authorisations, will be assigned to Ministers in England, Wales and Scotland and the devolved authority in Northern Ireland. Those include discretionary powers to set down detailed rules that work for the UK in relation to the UK reference laboratory—laboratory, sorry, not lavatory; that would be strange.

Returning to industry, no changes to the way in which UK food or feed businesses are operated or regulated will arise from this instrument. There will be a continuation of the robust authorisation system I have outlined, the labelling requirements I have touched on, and the controls for GM food and feed that UK industry is familiar with and relies upon. The instrument enables the continued use of GM food and feed authorised in the UK. Again, the devolved Administrations provided their consent for it.

Thirdly, the Novel Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 are another instrument to be made under the powers of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. Novel foods are those that are relatively new or do not have a significant history of consumption in the EU. Those foods must be assessed for safety before they are introduced into the market to ensure that they do not present a risk to public health. This instrument will ensure that the regulation of and controls on novel foods continue to function effectively after exit day and that public health is protected. Anything permitted prior to exit day will be permitted after exit day. The purpose of the instrument—which again makes no policy changes—is to rectify deficiencies in the retained legislation. So foods new to the market are not assumed to be safe; that is where we have decided to place the burden. In the interests of public health the regulations require novel foods to have a pre-market safety assessment to identify whether they pose a risk and how that risk could be managed. The regulations will ensure that the existing levels of public health protection and food safety are maintained.

[Steve Brine]

The EU framework regulation on novel foods is supported by four implementing measures, which provide the detailed rules, data requirements and administrative procedures governing all novel products. This instrument will ensure that provisions in the four main pieces of EU legislation continue to function effectively after we leave. They will correct the following retained EU law: regulation 2015/2283, which is the main framework for regulation on novel foods; regulation 2017/2469, which provides administrative and scientific requirements for the applications; regulation 2017/2468, which provides administrative and scientific requirements concerning traditional foods from third countries, which of course there would be; and regulation 2017/2470, which establishes a Union list of novel foods. Finally, regulation 2018/456 establishes procedural steps for the consultation process to determine the status of novel foods.

I know that food businesses watch these proceedings with interest, and there will be no change in how they are regulated. The instrument will, however, ensure that the robust system of controls that underpins UK businesses' ability to trade both domestically and internationally continues. Again, we have engaged positively with the devolved Administrations, and we have their consent for this instrument.

Finally, the Animal Feed (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which concern feed law, are also made under powers in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. We are making necessary amendments to the overarching food and feed regulations under the powers in the Act, so that we continue to protect the public. The primary purpose of this instrument is to ensure that feed legislation continues to function effectively. The retained EU legislation on animal feed encompasses requirements relating to feed additives, feed hygiene, sampling—when local authorities do sampling, for instance—marketing, and the use of feed, including labelling.

This instrument will fix the inoperabilities in the retained EU legislation and provide a continuation of the legal requirements that already exist in EU law. These proposed amendments are equally crucial to maintain a functioning statute book and to maintain public safety and confidence. The instrument introduces a number of changes, but the purpose of them is to ensure that the animal feed regulations remain operable after EU exit.

Risk assessment responsibilities, currently incumbent on EFSA, will be assigned to the Food Standards Agency and, again, Food Standards Scotland north of the border, and again, we have had consent from the devolved Administrations.

These four statutory instruments are all necessary to ensure that our legislation relating to food and animal feed safety and hygiene continues to work effectively after EU exit day. No policy changes are being made. I hope the House will support the proposed amendments in these four instruments to ensure that continuation, and I commend them to the House.

2.37 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I start by thanking the Minister for introducing these statutory instruments on the Floor of the House

this afternoon and for summarising them so clearly for us. I would also like to start, as I always do, by putting on record once again my disappointment and concern that there could be as few as 10 days before we leave the EU, yet we are still dealing with crucial legislation concerning our food safety. The Government have run down the clock for more than two years and only now, when the deadline is so close, are we considering important legislation that could impact on the public's health if we do not get it right. Of course, that is because the threat of no deal is still hanging over us. I know that the Minister wants to get this right, which is why I have supported him throughout the discussions on these SIs, but I am still disappointed at the way the Government have handled this.

These statutory instruments will transfer tasks and roles assigned to the European Commission and the European Food Safety Authority to an appropriate UK entity. Will the Minister please confirm who that appropriate UK entity will be? While we are taking these SIs as a group, which I welcome, I would like to raise some concerns about each of them in turn.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure my hon. Friend agrees that this is as much to do with DEFRA as with the Department of Health and Social Care, and it shows why we need a food strategy in this country so that we can sort out some of the nonsense caused by the overlap between different Departments.

Mrs Hodgson: I absolutely agree. My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I discussed with the Government and Opposition Whips where responsibility for these SIs fell. There is so much crossover between food and health policy, and we are doing the best we can with the hand we have been dealt, but we should probably look more into this issue going forward.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I do not want to take my hon. Friend off the point too much, but it crossed my mind when I was listening to the Minister—I apologise to him for coming in late—that issues have been raised in the press, certainly recently, about imported food and the use of chlorine to cleanse it. Does my hon. Friend have a view about that?

Mrs Hodgson: Yes. The issue of chlorine-washed chicken did come up in some of the SI Committees that were held upstairs, and the Minister assured Committee members that chicken would continue to be washed in fresh water and that there would be no sneaking chlorinated chicken into our food chain. I am sure he will reaffirm that today.

The first SI today is the Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. As consumers, we are all familiar with the plastic packaging around almost every product—I suppose we are moving on to environmental policies in talking about the waste element of this, but the issue is at the forefront of consumer consciousness. Has the Minister had any conversations with his colleagues at DEFRA about the UK's commitment to reducing plastic waste and about how this SI could help facilitate that? The authorised list of substances permitted for use in food contact plastics is generally updated several times a year. Which body will now undertake that work, and

does it have sufficient resources to do so? Will the updated list be in line with that of our European neighbours?

Moving on to the genetically modified food and feed regulations, all authorised genetically modified food and feed must have a method of detection scientifically assessed and validated by the European Union laboratory, in collaboration with the European network of GMO—genetically modified organism—laboratories. What body will now scientifically assess and validate food and feed? Will the assessment process change, and will businesses have to complete a more complex process than currently? Will the UK be part of the European network of GMO laboratories after we leave the EU? If not, will the UK's validation of GM food and feed be aligned with European network standards to ensure that GM food and feed from the EU can be placed on the UK market after Brexit and vice versa?

Can the Minister assure the House that GM food and feed will be authorised for sale only if they are judged not to present a risk to health, not to mislead consumers and not to have less nutritional value than their non-GM counterparts? Has he made any assessment of the impact that this SI may have on businesses? Has the Department contacted the food and feed industry to notify it of the changes in this SI?

Moving on to what is perhaps the most interesting of the SIs, on the regulation of novel foods, I was surprised to learn that chia seeds are classed as a novel food by the EU. I am sure I eat some of them; I have some in the cupboard—I think you sprinkle them on breakfast cereal and other things to try to get their goodness into you. Lots of other new products that I had not realised were classed as novel foods are now entering the market. I am pleased that foods that are new to the market are not automatically assumed to be safe. Novel foods must have a pre-market safety assessment before being placed on the market.

The geographical scope of the existing regulations is being maintained so that food that had a history of consumption in member states of the EU, and that could therefore be marketed in the EU without needing to be authorised, will not become novel and require authorisation to be sold in the UK when we leave. However, when we do leave the EU and new foods are added to the EU's novel food list, will the UK mirror the same list and authorisation, or will it conduct its own review and authorisation? If the UK conducts its own review, which body will do it? Will the EU's assessment be taken into account when we conduct a UK-only assessment? Public safety is paramount in all of this, as the Minister and I have discussed many times, so it is important that any reviewing body has the funding and resources to conduct a review. Can the Minister confirm that that is indeed the case?

Will a list of novel foods be available in the UK? Consumers are becoming more and more conscious about what is in the foods they eat, and rightly so. Any list must therefore detail all the information taken into account during the assessment so that consumers can make their own decisions. Packaging must also be clearly labelled with information about novel foods to ensure consumers are aware that their food is safe. It is of course highly important that any food entering the UK

market for the first time is safe for human consumption. Leaving the EU should not mean a reduction in our food health standards.

Finally, the anomaly among these SIs, if we did not think that novel food was an anomaly, is the animal feed regulations—I suppose the Minister and I are discussing them because we are the Health Minister and the shadow Health Minister. This SI focuses on animal health and welfare, while taking into account the impact that that can have on human health—that is probably why it has fallen to the Minister and myself to debate it.

The SI says that all rules will remain the same as at present and that there will be a smooth transition for businesses, the feed sector and consumers. The elements of the instrument addressing deficiencies in the Animal Feed (Composition, Marketing and Use) (England) Regulations 2015 apply only in England. What discussions has the Minister had with his counterparts in the devolved Administrations? Is he confident that any regulations on animal feed will be similar, if not the same?

Any animal feed on the market, or used, anywhere in the UK must be safe. The conditions set out for labelling, packaging, sampling, analysis and hygiene must also meet a high standard to protect animal health and wellbeing. Animal feed must also be tested to ensure that it is not harmful to humans in the food chain.

Finally, any changes as a result of this SI must be effectively communicated to the agencies affected in a timely manner. With what could be as few as 10 days to go until Brexit day, will the Minister please confirm that he has had conversations with such agencies to notify them of any changes? The regulations must also be able to be amended easily in the event of emerging threats or changes in safety standards.

In closing, I would like to put on record once again that I am disappointed and concerned that it has come to this just 10 days—if nothing changes—before we are due to leave the EU and that we are still tying up loose ends in such legislation, which is so important to our food safety. We cannot let food safety standards slip as a result of Brexit. They are crucial to human and animal health, safety and welfare. That is why, although I am concerned about the way the Government are rushing through important legislation such as this, I none the less support these SIs. The UK's food safety standards are paramount to our health and something we must not compromise on. With those remarks, I look forward to the Minister's response. As ever, I hope he is able to answer some of my questions.

2.48 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): It is absolutely crucial that the Government take seriously the protection of public health in respect of food. We pride ourselves on our high standards of food production. As I mentioned earlier to the Minister, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a commitment that we would in no way do anything to undermine or lower our standards as we exit the EU. I think a great many of us in the Chamber will be holding his feet to the fire on that commitment. Indeed, not only would we like to keep the standards that we have, but we may want to strengthen them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) said, we may want to address packaging in a different way, for example, and we have an opportunity to do so.

[Rebecca Pow]

I support the approval of these statutory regulations, remembering that they relate not just to the food that we eat, but to imported feed—the soya, the grain and the other myriad crops—for the animals that turn into our meat. The regulations must be in place on day one after we leave the EU, because it is important that businesses can just carry on working. I have met several people from the agricultural supply trade, and they have stressed that point to me, because they want to carry on with business as usual. I was therefore pleased to hear from the Minister that businesses are backing these regulations.

The draft Novel Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 deals with interesting foods such as chia seeds, which I have on my porridge every morning. They are supposed to be a superfood, so I thought that they may do me some good. They are new to the market and, like all novel foods, they had to undergo a pre-market safety check. I am pleased that the regulations mean that we will adopt the whole system that applies to novel foods, which is important for public health and safeguarding. New products must undergo an assessment of the level of risk and then an assessment of how to manage that risk and, quite rightly, we are adopting the tried and tested methods of the EU. They seem to be working so far because nothing untoward has happened to me as a result of eating chia seeds, and I hope that nothing will. It is important to continue to follow the process and to ensure that we keep the labelling and packaging right so that people know about novel foods.

I shall now turn quickly to the draft Genetically Modified Food and Feed (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. It is essential that the system for GM food and animal feed is transparent and well regulated and that it involves a trusted safety evaluation based on sound science. We must adhere to a strict practice, and the EU has an established method, so I am pleased that we are adopting it. It is important to ensure that any process also applies to imports, because we do not want our industry to be undermined by any other country with lower GM standards, something that has been highlighted to me by several people when it comes to soya, for example. We must also ensure that the tracking and labelling systems are in place for GM products.

While we are adopting EU measures lock, stock and barrel, should the EU make any changes to its regulations, we should examine them and consider whether we want to adopt them and whether we may want to add some other standards. If we do that, we should use a bona fide method that protects our consumers while enabling the worldwide trade in which we want to engage.

I assume that the draft regulations will dovetail perfectly with the ambitions in the Agriculture Bill, which sets out plans for a completely new and exciting rethink of land-use policy and for delivering public goods for public benefit. While food is not specifically listed as public good, it is part and parcel of the Bill, and ensuring that we have high standards will be part of all that, so I would like some assurances from the Minister. One thing is for sure: we cannot mess around with food safety. Consumer safety is of utmost importance, and it is beholden on us to put measures in place to ensure that it is properly addressed as we exit the EU. I welcome the approval of these statutory instruments.

2.54 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Many myths were spoken about leaving the EU, but one of the biggest was that it was a means of cutting bureaucracy. In fact, as is becoming obvious by the mess that this place has gotten itself into, we have been lucky over the past few decades that so much red tape has been efficiently managed from Brussels. Access to collective European bodies such as the European Food Safety Authority—expert scientists who independently research and advise and ensure that food standards legislation is fit for purpose—will be sorely missed. We must co-operate with national agencies like Food Standards Scotland, which has been a driving force for public health improvements. However, here we are in the midst of a Brexit bourach. As the damaging deal remains stuck in the mud, we have a torrent of statutory instruments to process simply to get to the starting block.

Existing protections and permissions over food contact materials must continue post-Brexit. No one wants a fall in the standards for containers transporting our food or the machinery processing our food, or for packaging, kitchenware, tableware and so forth—standards that successive UK Governments have contributed towards creating. The same applies, of course, to food standards, and my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (John McNally) will be speaking more about the draft Genetically Modified Food and Feed (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

It is vital that evidence-led food safety and food standards are not diminished or diluted by Brexit, which is important for our future trade with the EU as well as for public health. Any increased auditing of food safety standards and procedures at the borders will take a heavy toll on a sector that is already facing enough challenges from Brexit. Looming trade tariffs on agricultural products could close export markets and put thousands out of jobs and close hundreds of businesses. The loss of the European workforce that keeps everything flowing—pickers and packers, food processors, haulage drivers and vets—will also be a substantial blow. There is a threat to Scotland's carefully cultivated brand identity and our protected geographical indicators. Brexit threatens all of it.

The EU accounts for 70% of annual Scottish food exports, so the possible damage is incredibly worrying, with the industry warning that a no-deal Brexit would cost £2 billion a year. The Government's own analysis shows that the effect of crashing out of Europe on the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries would hit Scotland hardest—twice as hard as England—slashing the economy by 8%. No Government should contemplate such a self-destructive move, but the Secretary of State for Scotland sat on his hands while his Tory colleagues toyed with the no-deal catastrophe button. We cannot allow Scotland's successful food and drinks sector to be hijacked by Brexiteers and those who enable them for party political purposes. Exports of iconic Scottish produce, such as whisky, beef, langoustines and salmon, are worth four times as much to the Scottish economy as they are to the UK's, and seven of the top 10 food export destinations are EU countries.

We are here today to debate the replacements for legislation that we already have because of some xenophobic fear of the EU, but we still do not have cast-iron guarantees about the long-term protection of our food

standards in international trade negotiations. Billions of pounds that should be spent on tackling the problems that people face the length and breadth of these islands is being wasted on Brexit bureaucracy, and countless hours of MPs' time are being wasted replacing legislation that we already had with near-identical legislation. Kafka never came close.

2.58 pm

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I rise in support of all four statutory instruments. While this House, in its wisdom, has decided to send our Prime Minister on her hands and knees to beg for an extension to our leaving the European Union, we do not yet know what the EU's counter-offer will be or whether the terms of that extension will be palatable and acceptable to the House. It therefore remains imperative that we continue to ensure that we have an operable lawbook for day one should we still be required to leave at the end of this month without an agreement.

The vast majority of the provisions in all the statutory instruments relate to the transfer of functions, principally from the European Commission to the food safety authority, which means Food Standards Scotland or the Food Standards Agency in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or in other instances to the appropriate authority, which largely means the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

There is something of an irony in our having a debate on the Floor of the House about whether, in all these statutory instruments, it is acceptable to replace "Commission" with "Food Safety Authority", yet the original powers to which every one of these statutory instruments relates were imposed on us directly by the European Union, typically through implementing Acts or delegated Acts. There would have been little or no scrutiny in this House, and probably the best that could have been expected is a letter to the European Scrutiny Committee or, in some instances, the tabling of an explanatory memorandum before Parliament. The truth is that the most pernicious Henry VIII power we have seen in this country in modern times is section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, which has led to widespread changes in primary legislation.

Today I will focus on a specific point that is relevant to all four statutory instruments, which is the respective roles of the Food Standards Agency, on the one hand, and Ministers, on the other. The hon. Members for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and for Stroud (Dr Drew) both mentioned the role of DEFRA, as the Department in which much of the technical expertise rests. Having experienced it for five and a half years as a Minister, I know there is something of an issue around our current food standards architecture in this country.

The Food Standards Agency was established in the wake of the BSE crisis, and it was made independent in a very special way, through statute, to be entirely insulated from the Government and Ministers. Although the Department of Health and Social Care is its sponsoring Department, Health Ministers seldom show direct policy interest in the FSA's decisions, rightly recognising that it was established to be entirely independent.

However, there is an issue in how the FSA was set up, because the events that preceded its formation mean that, first, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Food and, latterly, DEFRA have been more divorced from its work than they ought to have been, as DEFRA is the Whitehall Department with the vast majority of technical and policy knowledge in this area.

I have always had very good relations with Heather Hancock, the chair of the FSA. However, I have always sensed that the FSA board, collectively, is sometimes prone to being somewhat supercilious in its denial of the expertise in DEFRA and, worse, is prone to making rather unfair assumptions about DEFRA's motives in advancing issues or concerns on particular policy fronts. That is, of course, until something goes wrong.

In 2013, when we faced the horsemeat scandal, Health Ministers did not want to get involved, the FSA sat on its hands and it was left to the then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), to step into the breach. DEFRA took control of the crisis and took ownership of events by setting up a review of food crime and crafting a policy that resulted in a new food crime unit.

When these regulations were originally considered, some on the FSA board sought significantly to extend the FSA's powers by taking direct decision-making responsibility in some of these areas, which would have gone a long way beyond its current remit. The Minister's predecessor and I resisted that approach, and I am pleased to see that the approach we recommended is reflected in all these statutory instruments. We proposed, first, that the FSA should give independent advice to Ministers and that that advice should be public for all to see. Secondly, we recommended that Ministers should have regard to that advice. Thirdly, we recommended that if Ministers choose not to follow the advice, they should have to publish their reasons for not doing so. Those points are reflected variously in regulation 17 of the animal feed regulations, regulation 23 of the novel food regulations and regulation 23 of the genetically modified food and feed regulations.

This is important because, as a holding pattern, we need to ensure there is a presumption for following the advice of the Food Standards Agency. Until we have established a long-term settlement on which decisions should be taken independently by the FSA and which decisions should be taken by Ministers, subject to clear advice from the FSA, this sensible holding pattern makes absolute sense.

In the longer term, although I would not do anything to undermine the independence of the FSA—it was set up in the way it was for good reason—there is a case for trying to increase some of its democratic accountability, and there may be things we could learn, for instance, from the model we have for the Health and Safety Executive. It has now been several decades since the BSE crisis, and it is perhaps time to consider what the food safety architecture should look like, but that is a debate for another time. I fully support all four of these statutory instruments.

3.5 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): Regardless of my party's opposition, in principle and in entirety, to the UK's withdrawal from the EU, I recognise that it is crucial that statutory instruments are enacted to preserve a framework around the status quo. That framework will be essential to our future trading relationships with the EU and the rest of the world.

[John Mc Nally]

Scotland's booming food and drinks industry supports 119,000 jobs and exports £6 billion-worth of produce, 40% of which goes to our European neighbours. Consumers and farmers remain sceptical about the need for GM crops, and allowing GM crops in Scotland would threaten our country's international reputation as a clean, green food and drink producer.

The Scottish Government remain totally committed to opting out of allowing the cultivation of GM crops, thereby giving policy certainty to producers and investors, in stark contrast to the uncertainty and paralysis of the UK Government. Public concern about hormone-tainted meat and chlorine-washed chicken demonstrates how critical food standards will be post-Brexit, both at home and abroad. In my hometown of Denny, which is in my Falkirk constituency, we have a business that exports broiler chickens to Europe and the world, and everywhere it sends those chickens it is recognised as the best in the world. My party intends to ensure that this valuable industry continues to flourish, and we will oppose any attempt to lower the food standards on which its future depends.

The UK imports around £2 billion-worth of animal feed, much of it from the EU or through EU ports. Maintaining high quality standards and as free a flow of trade in such commodities as possible is vital to Scotland's rural communities, particularly those in less favoured areas. Just yesterday, the Scottish non-governmental organisation Scottish Rural Action, a great voice for Scottish rural communities, released a hard-hitting report documenting the widespread anger and frustration felt in Scotland's rural communities, and reporting fears of 21st-century clearances in Brexit's wake. These communities need assurances and protection.

The health and welfare of the UK's 54 million pets also hang in the balance. The Pet Food Manufacturers Association has placed feed safety standards, together with animal health and welfare, at the top of the list of priorities in its Brexit manifesto. Some 80% of its members export to our European neighbours, and half of them import raw materials or finished goods from the EU.

These statutory instruments do not change the legal status quo, and therefore they safeguard confidence in the maintenance of quality standards. In turn, they ensure confidence in our food and drink industry and in the animal feed sector, and that confidence should be maintained. My party intends to ensure that these valuable industries continue to flourish, and we will oppose any attempt to lower these standards.

3.9 pm

Steve Brine: We have heard a number of well-made points, to which I am pleased to respond.

My dear friend opposite, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), often makes the point that it is late in the day. It is late in the day, but we did not say that all the SIs would be done a year ago. These are complex matters and we have to get them right. Whether they are taken now or next Tuesday is immaterial. The fact is that they will be done, as long as the House agrees to them today. It is important that they are done, because we need to make sure that the law is in the right state, as I set out in my remarks.

The hon. Lady asked about risk assessments, risk management and the loss of EFSA and its scientific expertise. Leaving the EU does not change the FSA's top priority, which is rightly to ensure that food remains safe. The FSA has strengthened its risk-analysis process in preparation for EU exit. It has had significant extra funding this year of £14 million. That point has been raised by other hon. Members in respect of the FSA's capabilities.

The FSA will undertake robust risk assessments and provide evidence-based risk management advice and recommendations on future food and feed safety issues. That is nothing new. The UK already produces independent risk assessments that are recognised internationally. The FSA currently undertakes a significant amount of the risk assessment and management work to maintain the high standards we expect.

The point about chlorine-washed chicken came up again, although the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) is no longer in his place. I have been clear about that point many, many times. Chlorine has not been approved and so cannot be used. Chicken that is washed with chlorine cannot be placed on the UK market. The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I have been very clear about that.

The lav—I nearly did it again! I meant to say the laboratory capability. Edit the record. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West made a very good point about having the laboratory capability to assess and validate the methods of detection with the same rigour that we have had at EU level. The bottom line is that the UK is developing alternative approaches to deliver the necessary functions that are currently provided by EFSA, the European Commission and other institutions, including the EU reference laboratory.

We will build on our capacity and capability to carry out those risk assessments and then to manage and control the food and feed safety risks. We already have the network of national reference laboratories in place that help to ensure the safety of our food and feed, and to prevent the entry and spread of infectious diseases in crops, livestock and feed. They are recognised internationally for their scientific expertise, and we are working with them to ensure that they are able to validate new analytical methods and ensure that they can mirror the scientific capability that we have.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West asked about novel foods. I am touched that she thinks that is the most interesting of the four SIs—it is a low bar, but I take her point. She asked whether the UK will maintain the existing process or conduct our own review and assessment. We will start from the list as it stands on exit day. As I said to other Members, there will be full convergence at exit day. Any applications will then be assessed by our UK risk assessors. To answer her question directly, the UK advisory committee on novel foods is the body that will perform the role. That body existed prior to 2015, when that was transferred as a Commission competence. It will be unfrozen and will again carry out assessments for the novel list.

On materials and articles that are in contact with food, the hon. Lady made a point about recycling. She was referring to the requirements of Commission regulation 10/2011. That will be maintained, as I said in my opening remarks. The FSA works very closely

with DEFRA, but the recycling remit lies with the Department and is not in scope of the amendments we are discussing today.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) is no longer in his place, but I will still respond to his point. He spoke about a food strategy to deal with the crossover between the Department of Health and Social Care and DEFRA. That point was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice). I am the sponsor of the FSA as an arm's length body. It works very closely with DEFRA, the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England, for which I am also responsible. We continue to take a co-ordinated approach on food to support consumer choice. Yes, the fourth SI on feed could as easily have been introduced by a DEFRA Minister, but as my hon. Friend knows full well, what we give to animals ends up in the food chain, so it ends up in my brief.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West touched on consultation. She is often rightly concerned about the impact on industry, which was also mentioned by other hon. Members. We carried out a full public consultation on the proposed approach to retained EU law in the food and safety space before we tabled the SIs. It was open for six weeks from 4 September until the middle of October. The approach we outlined proposed making a number of corrections to retained EU law under the powers of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. The responses we received are all available on the food.gov.uk website. Generally speaking, of the 59 responses received, 82% supported or did not disagree in any way with the approach we proposed.

I said to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) that I would come back to ceramics. The ceramics legislation dates from a European directive of 1984. Why it has not been updated before now is a fair question and one that I have asked of officials. I can write to him with more detail without detaining the House. He will be interested to know that work is ongoing at a European level to revise the legislation in this space. The FSA has collaborated closely with the UK industry on the establishment of the new European limits. He may wish to follow that up and check it in his constituency, but I am sure that is the case. Obviously, we are importing the law—the directives and the directions—as they stand. Therefore, anything that was in train on exit, we would not import.

It was interesting to hear the reflections of my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth on how the FSA grew out of the BSE crisis. We should also remember, as I have said many times, that EFSA grew out of the FSA. That is the rock on which it built its church, in many ways. The relationship between the FSA and EFSA is incredibly strong, even though the legal position will change. Many of the people there are actually our people. I am therefore confident that as the ceramics legislation changes, we will have a strong voice around the table, even if, legally, we are not around it.

Gareth Snell: I thank the Minister for that response. It will be heartening for some of the industries in my city, and I look forward to his letter. The issue that will be of most concern to them, albeit diminished because of his helpful answer, is that significant changes to the food contact regulations could affect the way in which

they glaze their products through the use of cadmium or other elements. Whether that changes in the UK has an impact on them, but it also affects them if we lose step with Europe and have two operating standards for exports. I appreciate that that is more of a trade question than a contact question, but the two things are very much linked.

Steve Brine: It is a trade question, but ultimately if we want to trade with our biggest trading partner and our neighbours in the EU, we have to maintain those standards. We would not want to do anything to hobble our world famous potteries industry. I know that he agrees with that sentiment.

A lot has been said about GM food and feed. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) made that the kernel of her remarks. The laws around genetic modification were very high profile, perhaps due to Prince Charles's interventions, back when I was at school.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Not that long ago.

Steve Brine: Quite right. The GM regulations are not about changing the robust controls that we have for GM food and feed; they are about correcting the deficiencies in the authorisations that will exist at the point of EU exit. I want to maintain those robust controls. I am putting in place a UK-centric authorisation process as a result of exit, but the data requirements and the robust scientific studies that are required for application will remain exactly the same. Any assessments made of GM food and feed will be made purely on scientific, evidence-based grounds. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that decisions are not made entirely on those grounds at an EU level at the moment. That is one of the benefits that we will glean from taking back control—I knew I would get it in there somewhere.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) mentioned the Agriculture Bill. These SIs only fix the operability of EU law when it is brought into UK law. It is for the House to discuss and debate any changes required to give effect to policies in the Agriculture Bill, and I know that she will be at the heart of that.

The hon. Members for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) and for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) are absolutely right, and I have said that whenever I have spoken about SIs. There has been a lot of talk of the withdrawal Act containing Henry VIII powers, but Henry VIII was an awful lot more powerful than the Act. It is a piece of housekeeping legislation that allows us to bridge EU regulations over to UK legislation; it does not allow us to make significant changes either way on standards. That is perfectly reasonable. Once this House resumes the role of a sovereign Parliament, it will be able to make those decisions for our country, and the Scottish Parliament will be able to do the same north of the border.

If I may say so respectfully, many of the arguments that the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith made belong back before 2016. The country made a decision to leave the European Union. She argues against a no-deal Brexit, as I do—that is not the Government's policy. I gently say to her that I keep voting for a safe exit from the European Union; she and her party do not.

[Steve Brine]

My hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth, whom I am sorry to see on the Back Benches, because he was an excellent farming Minister, is absolutely right that this is about having an operable statute book and transferring functions. I have learned many things about food and feed in the past few months, because we are discussing them in the House of Commons and its Committees. That is very refreshing, and we will be doing so more, because when we introduce changes either way, they will have to be discussed and agreed by this House. He is right that they were previously only discussed by the Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). I am sure he thoroughly enjoyed that, but they are now discussed on the Floor of the House of Commons. That truly is progress.

My hon. Friend's thoughts on the FSA's conception and birth were very interesting. He was right to spot—he gave the paragraph references in three of the four SIs—that Ministers must have regard to FSA advice. He was also dead right to say that how operability will function is not a finished piece of work. That is why we have taken these powers in the first instance. Once we are a third country, we will have to refine and change that, and we will discuss it with the House and its various Committees. On the architecture, his advice about looking at the Health and Safety Executive was very interesting. I and the FSA, I am sure, will be very interested to talk to him in more detail about that.

We have spent a long time talking about housekeeping measures that will ensure that we maintain the food and feed standards that our constituents expect. Notwithstanding the difficulties we have deciphering what 17.5 million people meant when they voted leave, I am sure we all agree that they did not mean lower standards in the food that they eat and give to their children. These regulations play a very important part in ensuring that those standards are maintained when we leave the European Union.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 5 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

Resolved,

That the draft Genetically Modified Food and Feed (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 4 February, be approved.—(Steve Brine).

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FOOD)

Resolved,

That the draft Novel Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 4 February, be approved.—(Steve Brine).

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

Resolved,

That the draft Animal Feed (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 5 February 2019, be approved.—(Steve Brine).

Foreign Affairs Committee

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I inform the House that Mr Speaker has not selected the amendment.

3.25 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That Ian Austin and Mike Gapes be discharged from the Foreign Affairs Committee and Conor McGinn and Catherine West be added.

I am moving this motion on behalf of the Selection Committee. As Chairman of that Committee, it is my responsibility to ensure that it operates in accordance with the rules of the House. That is the case with this motion. I am moving it in the usual way, following its agreement by the Selection Committee last Wednesday. It is up to the House to decide on its merits.

There is no Standing Order requirement that Select Committees, unlike general Committees, be kept exactly in proportion to the House at large. It is through mutual agreement that membership of Select Committees is appointed in rough proportion to the House. That is why the Selection Committee has discretion in proposing changes to Select Committee membership.

Across all Select Committees, neither of the main parties is over-represented. If the Independent Group is treated as a party, it is very over-represented on Select Committees, given the number of members of the group in the House. Although that over-representation does not compel the Selection Committee to take action, reducing that representation is in accordance with the practices of the House.

3.26 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Ind): I rise to speak against this motion, to say why I think the House should not agree to it and to explain the background to it and why Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party is trying to boot me and Mike Gapes off the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Just to help the hon. Gentleman, he should not refer to Members by their name. He can say the leader of the party or whatever.

Ian Austin: The Labour party, as it is currently led, is making a vindictive attempt to boot me and the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) off the Foreign Affairs Committee.

I want to correct one point that was made earlier: I am not a member of the Independent Group. If the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) has based his calculations on over-representation, I am afraid that is a mistake.

Bill Wiggin: As I said very clearly, that would be true if those hon. Members were taken as a group. It is as a group of others that the representation is seen as.

Ian Austin: That is as may be, but I am not a member of the Independent Group; I am the independent MP for Dudley, standing up for the people of Dudley, and representing the whole of the House on the Foreign Affairs Committee, which is what members of Select Committees are elected to do.

As the Chair of the Liaison Committee pointed out in an article just this week,

“Select Committees have been strengthened” since recent reforms

“which allowed their members to be elected by their fellow MPs—and Chairs by the whole House of Commons—rather than appointed by the patronage of party whips. As a result, members are more likely to have relevant experience and genuine interest in the work of their Committees”.

Of no one could that be said more truly than the hon. Member for Ilford South. As far as I am aware, there is no criticism of the way in which he or I have discharged our responsibilities on the Foreign Affairs Committee. He is a distinguished former Chair of the Committee, and before that he was the Labour party’s foreign policy expert. As I have seen in my short time on the Committee, and as Members in all parts of the House would agree, he has a more detailed knowledge of foreign policy issues, and greater contacts around the world, than anybody else in the House of Commons. Booting off the Committee somebody like that, who holds the Government to account, is a ridiculous decision. It flies in the face of how Select Committees are supposed to operate.

As for me, I was one of the people who instigated the Committee’s inquiries on Kurdistan. I was one of the MPs in this House who campaigned for years for the Magnitsky Act.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): The hon. Gentleman and I may disagree on many domestic policy issues, but for years we have worked together on many foreign policy issues, some of which he is touching on. He mentioned that the Leader of the Opposition is behind this move. Is that because the hon. Gentleman is now an independent Member of Parliament, or because of his views on antisemitism and some of the other foreign policy issues that he has just raised?

Ian Austin: I will come on to that, but I will say this: I have been very clear about why I left the Labour party. I left after 35 years because I had become absolutely ashamed of the way in which the leader of the Labour party had allowed a culture of extremism, antisemitism and intolerance to develop—and for no other reason. Members have a choice to make this afternoon. They can choose to stand with someone who has campaigned against racism all their life, or stand with the leader of the Labour party in his vindictive attempt to boot people off a Committee simply because they stood up to racism. Frankly, I think it is outrageous.

I make one more point on my work on the Foreign Affairs Committee. I was one of the MPs who were a driving force behind the Magnitsky Act—legislation to take tough action against people responsible for gross abuses of human rights and large-scale corruption. I was one of the Committee members who instigated its current inquiry on UK sanctions policy.

As I mentioned, this debate is happening because the Labour party has decided that it wants to kick me off the Committee in retaliation for my decision to leave the Labour party. I want to set out the background to that and explain why I took that decision. I want Members to think about this and consider it when deciding how to vote.

The main reason why I decided to join the Labour party, 35 years ago as a teenager in Dudley, was to fight racism. I really cannot believe that after all this time,

I have ended up leaving the Labour party because of racism. It was a difficult decision for me to take, but I have to be honest with people, and the truth is that I have become ashamed of the Labour party under its current leadership. I am appalled by the offence and distress that the leader of the Labour party has caused to Jewish people. It is terrible that a culture of extremism, antisemitism and intolerance is driving out not just Members of Parliament, but other members, too—decent people who have dedicated their whole lives to mainstream politics.

It is a matter of great shame that someone such as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) has been bullied out of the Labour party by antisemites. It was wrong of the Labour party to threaten the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and me with disciplinary action when we spoke out on antisemitism. It had to drop that, because we had done nothing wrong. The hard truth is that the Labour party under its current leadership is tougher on the people who complain about racism than on the racists.

The current leader and the people around him have turned what was a mainstream political party into something very different. He has spent his entire career working with, defending and supporting all sorts of extremists, and in some cases antisemites and terrorists. I thought from the very beginning—since before he was elected in 2015—that he would be utterly unfit to lead the Labour party, and he is completely unfit to be our country’s Prime Minister. He has said and done things that are clearly antisemitic, including defending that grotesque racist mural on a wall in east London. We need to ask ourselves what he would be saying if a senior member of the Conservative party had defended a grotesque mural that was racist against any other group of people. He called Jewish people Zionist, and said that they did not understand English irony—as if, somehow, they were different from the rest of us. He also calls Hamas and Hezbollah his friends.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. This is a debate about positions on the Foreign Affairs Committee. It cannot become a personal attack on a particular Member who may not have been given notice that that was going to happen in the Chamber. We must work within the rules. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to recognise and understand the frustration with what is happening, but what we should not be doing is attacking another Member who is not here and who may not have been given notice. That is where we are.

Ian Austin: Well, may I seek your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker? I have to say that I do not think that the leader of the Labour party would need much notice to know what my views are of his behaviour and history. If I may say so as well, the reason why we are having this debate is that he wants to boot me off this Committee, because I have stood up against racism. If you will allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to explain why I think the Labour party has got itself into this mess and why, in the end, I decided to leave.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but this is about relevance to the motion before us. The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises could be for another time and another debate, but unfortunately this debate is about

[*Mr Deputy Speaker*]

the replacement of people on the Committee. I understand the frustrations and the anger, but we have to be where we are. Unfortunately, this is about replacements, and we must stick to the agenda.

Ian Austin: I completely understand, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have made some of the points that I wanted to make about the Leader of the Opposition and the position that he has taken the Labour party to under his leadership.

I will draw my remarks to a close. I want to stay on the Committee because I want to speak up for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. I want to carry on campaigning against totalitarian dictatorships such as Venezuela, which are supported by the leader of the Labour party and the people around him at the moment. I want to carry on speaking out against the Kremlin and against Vladimir Putin and his brutal regime of corruption and abuse: he murders people on the streets of Russia and kills them here in Britain, too. I think every Member will recall the appalling response that the Leader of the Opposition gave to the attacks in Salisbury. I will continue to campaign on these issues, which is why I want to stay on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Mark Pritchard: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous, and I am grateful to him for giving way. I will need to decide which way to vote today. Will he also include in that litany of why he should stay on the Committee the potential dismantling of our intelligence agencies, which protect us and our allies, day in, day out—another policy espoused by the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Absolutely, totally irrelevant!

Ian Austin: What I will say, Mr Deputy Speaker, is that, on the Committee, I promise to stand up for the intelligence and security services and the democratic institutions that underpin our democracy in this country. That is one of the reasons why I am keen to carry on representing Members across this House on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

We are elected on to Select Committees not to pursue party political agendas, but to work on a cross-party basis in scrutinising the work of the Executive. I do not think that there have been any criticisms of my work or the work of the hon. Member for Ilford South in that regard. I very much hope that, when the House divides on this motion later today, Members across the House will vote against what I think is the Leader of the Opposition's vindictive and unpleasant attempt to boot us off the Committee.

3.38 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin). Probably seared on to all our memories—I would be surprised if hon. and right hon. Members have not seen this—is the moving interview that the hon. Gentleman gave to the television news in which he talked about being able to look his father in the eye. One can understand entirely the passion with which he has spoken, and I am grateful to him for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), as Chairman of the Committee of Selection, said very helpfully that it is up to the House to decide on the merits of the motion. He moved the motion as, effectively, the servant of that Committee in a way that has come to typify the approach that he adopts in these matters, and the House should be grateful for that.

I very much echo the closing point made by the hon. Member for Dudley North about the role of Select Committees. We all get ourselves frightfully hot under the collar when people are badgering us in the Tea Room saying, “Will you support us on this?”, “We’re going for that,” and so on. But when the Select Committees get up and running, the epithets of party political allegiance seem to disappear. I have served on only two Select Committees, the Procedure Committee and the Welsh Affairs Committee, but I never really felt that I went into meetings as a Conservative member of the Committee. I went in as a Member with an interest in the subject. Each Committee is almost a mini House of Lords, if you will—a receptacle of expertise where people motivate themselves to sit on the Committee because they have an interest in, or experience of, that particular area. It is of course the job of Select Committees to hold the Executive to account, and sometimes the Executive get a bit of a clobbering. It is always worthwhile remembering that it was a Conservative Government who brought in Select Committees as we know them, through the Thatcher/St John-Stevs reforms.

Nobody could doubt the record of the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes): he was Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee between 2005 and 2010 and a member of the Committee from 1992 to 1997, and of course he also sits on the Committee now. I have only been in this place since 2015.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): It seems longer.

Simon Hoare: My right hon. Friend should try looking at it from where I am standing; it seems like 40 years, rather than four.

I hope that the hon. Member for Ilford South will take it in the spirit in which it is intended when I say that I watched the TV news and the proceedings in this place long before coming into the House, and when the hon. Gentleman spoke on foreign affairs, I did not say to myself, “Oh, there goes the Labour Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.” I said to myself, “Here is somebody who speaks with authority, interest, passion and a breadth of experience that the House is well advised to listen to and take heed of.”

I agree with the assessment of the hon. Member for Dudley North. When I read the Order Paper initially—of course, this is the Labour party's second stab at this—I thought to myself that this was one of the most mealy-mouthed, vindictive and small-minded motions.

Mark Pritchard: More widely, the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) has brought to bear his wonderful knowledge and wisdom on foreign affairs at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and other international bodies such as the Council of Europe. The Committee would be missing out on all that knowledge should he be removed today.

Simon Hoare: I agree entirely. One is tempted to say that if the hon. Member for Ilford South did not exist, we would have to invent him. I am not quite sure what the formula for the invention would be, but one would have to invent him none the less.

I agree with the hon. Member for Dudley North; at the kernel of this decision is the discomfort that both hon. Gentlemen subject to this motion have created within the Labour party regarding the Leader of the Opposition's stance on the antisemitism question, and their refusal to be silenced on it. That is true not just of these two hon. Gentlemen, but of many colleagues on the Opposition Benches.

Any student of history could tell us that the vindictive left—I put the Leader of the Opposition very much in that camp—will chase people out, even if the office that they hold is to bring the biscuits to the constituency meeting on a bi-monthly basis. They want to have their nasty little fingers—their spiteful little fingers—on every single lever. I feel very sorry for the shadow Leader of the House, because she is nothing at all to do with that. She is rather the Labour version of my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire, sent to do a job merely by dint of position rather than by instinct or by nature. She is none of the things that I am talking about.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Since in what feels like the dying days of this Parliament we live in a political free-for-all, with Ministers not voting on three-line Whips and colleagues not voting in the Division Lobby for the motions that they move, is it really such a big deal if we allow these two Opposition Members to continue on their Select Committee? After all, all the existing rules of politics have now been broken, so let us just break a few more.

Simon Hoare: I am not entirely sure that I understand the point that my hon. Friend is making. If he is encouraging me to endorse the proposition that there should be an early dissolution of this Parliament, then he will find me in the No Lobby, I am afraid. If he is saying that the hon. Gentlemen who are the subject of this motion should remain in post, then I agree with him, but if not, then I disagree with him wholeheartedly.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend's analysis is entirely right. We live in strange political times, and let us just make them a little stranger.

Simon Hoare: I have to say that there are times when I have cursed the man who wished that we all lived in interesting times. I think that some rather calm, boring times would suit the House very well indeed.

As I say, this is a very vindictive motion, and it speaks to the heart of today's Labour party. Never mind the quantum of expertise; never mind the demonstrable levels of interest; never mind the heights of respect that an individual is met with across the House and within the media—if they do not pass the intellectual purity test, or rather the anti-intellectual purity test; if they do not pass the ideological test; if they do not know in the original Russian all the words of the eighth verse of “I Love the Member for Islington North” and can sing it backwards in the bath, they fail and they are out. This motion is effectively a Muscovite approach to the gulags. It is trying to send the hon. Members for Dudley North

and for Ilford South to some Siberian wasteland of ex-Select Committee members. It is nothing to do with the good that they have done, nothing to do with—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. This is not a debate about the leader of the Labour party, as tempting as that may be for Members in all parts of the House. The reality is that it is about the replacement of members of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We need to keep that in mind, and we need to be more temperate given the way that the Chamber seems to be getting quite heated and excited. I am sorry that I have stopped you when you are going on at your finest rate, but I am sure you want to recognise that there are lots of other speakers who may wish to add to the debate.

Simon Hoare: I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, and of course I take your ruling.

The lesson that we can draw is that if this is how senior and respected Members of Parliament who just happen to sit on Benches opposite to the Government Benches are treated by their former comrades, then God help the rest of us. We will be the first up against the wall. We will not just be off the Select Committees—we will be absolutely cast into outer darkness.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): I think that my hon. Friend is missing an important point that has to be addressed. As much respect as I have for the two hon. Members concerned, and I do, the simple fact is that we will be in a position where nominations for the official Opposition on the Foreign Affairs Committee go down from half of the Committee to two members of the Committee. That does not reflect the make-up of this House as Select Committees are supposed to. One does have to bear that in mind.

Simon Hoare: I take what my right hon. Friend says with great seriousness. He is a former member of the Cabinet and, more importantly, a former Government Chief Whip. I concur with him up to a point. If this motion sought to tilt the balance of a Select Committee's membership in favour of the Government and against the Opposition, I would be with him entirely, but it does not do that. This motion maintains the balance between, for want of a better phrase, Executive Members and Opposition Members, and that is entirely as it should be. However, if I am correct in my assessment—I am perfectly prepared to accept that I am not—in practical, political terms, the badges and colours of separate parties are left at the door of a Select Committee meeting and picked up again when Members leave. I am not sure that this motion does anything other than pursue an agenda of vindictiveness.

Ian Austin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I hope it will allow me to reassure the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) that my views on foreign policy have not changed at all. The values that inform my work on the Committee have not altered in the slightest since I was selected by the Labour party to be a member of it. The arguments I put forward and the way that I scrutinise Ministers have not changed at all. I am absolutely clear that I stand up for the mainstream, decent values of the Labour party that I have stood up for all my life. That is the work I bring to the Committee, and I hope that that reassures the right hon. Gentleman.

Simon Hoare: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for using me as a conduit to send that message to my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales. He amplifies perfectly my definition of what a Select Committee is about.

In conclusion, the Leader of the Opposition may be motivated by instincts of vindictiveness and—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We have gone past that. This debate is not about the Leader of the Opposition; it is about the replacement of members of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We have had a good run round the track. We do not need to finish with another quote about vengefulness. Has the hon. Gentleman finished?

Simon Hoare: No—I just have one final sentence to add. This motion has come from somewhere. It did not just spring on to the Order Paper by itself.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will help the hon. Gentleman. I think Mr Wiggin is responsible for it appearing on the Order Paper.

Bill Wiggin *indicated assent.*

Simon Hoare: Yes, but who triggered the vote on the Committee? That is the question.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not what you asked.

Simon Hoare: Indeed. I asked the wrong question—forgive me.

I happen to be a broad church, one nation, moderate Conservative. I happen to believe—[*Interruption.*] My former right hon. Friend, the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), is doing some sort of peculiar dance of the seven veils to entice me over. I have no idea what she is doing, but I am not coming.

I am not motivated by vindictiveness. I believe that we should respect those who have an interest in issues and who can speak with authority, knowledge and enthusiasm. If this motion is pushed to a vote, I shall vote against it.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance, following the comments you have made so far. We are debating the motion on the Order Paper about the selection of Committee members, but I am interested in the context of how we got there. I seek your guidance on what weight we should put on the context of where we are today, as well as what it is in the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The motion is quite simple: it is about the replacement of people on the Foreign Affairs Committee. It is as narrow as that. This is not a witch hunt of certain individuals. [*Interruption.*] No, it is not. As tempting as it may be, that is not what the debate is about. There has been a little leeway, and I understand the frustration, but it cannot be about that. It is about the replacement of names. I have a job to do. I have to rule on the debate we are having.

Mark Pritchard: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that the context is important. Somebody like me who has no idea what is going on this afternoon—that is nothing new—just needs that contextual help, and I genuinely do.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure you do not, because you are a member of the Panel of Chairs. You have great experience and wisdom, and you do not need to test me on this, because you already have that.

3.55 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Ind): I rise to speak against the motion, in the main on behalf of the Independent Group of MPs, but I also associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin). I want to expand a little bit on what was said by the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), who has moved the motion on behalf of the Selection Committee, and I am clear in my own mind that he did not initiate this motion at the Selection Committee.

We are told by the Library that, at the start of each Parliament, places are allocated to the political parties on departmental Select Committees on the basis of their strength in the House of Commons. There is no Standing Order that governs this process, or which requires that places on Committees be kept in exact proportion to the House at large. That is why there has not been a change every time a Member has been suspended from their Whip, for example, and the Selection Committee is not compelled to act. However, through mutual agreement, Select Committees are appointed in rough proportion to the House. Unlike with General Committees, such as Public Bill or Delegated Legislation Committees, there is no formula that sets out the exact number required.

That advice makes us look behind what is going on here and see that there does appear to be a personal element to this, because the only names being removed are those of Members who declared their independence just a few weeks ago. We are very clear who is initiating this. Suffice it to say—you may want to give your advice on this, Mr Deputy Speaker—I am told that, in something like 35 years, some very experienced Opposition Back Benchers have not known being instructed by their Whip to vote for such a motion of the House. However, they have been told to do so today, as I understand it, on this motion, which is the business of the House. I think that tells us where this is coming from.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): For the information of the House, I would like to read out the text I have received from my Whips: “The motion to change the membership of Select Committees Foreign Affairs will be starting shortly. We remain on a three line whip. We expect a Division in the next hour.”

Joan Ryan: Assuming the Labour Whips represent the Leader of the Opposition and are the vanguard for delivering his will, that gives ample evidence that there is something very personal going on here. May I at some point seek your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker, on whipping business of the House in this way? Is that acceptable? It is certainly very unusual, as we know.

I think this is a mean-minded parliamentary manoeuvre by Labour. It is attempting to remove, from one of the most important Select Committees of the House of Commons, a man who has served on it for almost two decades, including as its respected Chair. Select Committees are one of the most important parts of Parliament, and they are integral to the way in which MPs scrutinise the

work of the Government. They have always operated in a cross-party way and they are at their best when they are consensual. After members of Select Committees are elected to them by their colleagues, they are not ciphers for political parties; they are representatives of their constituents, performing an important function.

Traditionally, members of Select Committees, and especially their Chairs, are treated with respect by political parties and by this House. This motion is utterly disrespectful. That is true for both Members who are the subject of the motion, but let me talk for a moment about my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), because it is especially true for him. He has been a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee since 1992, when he was appointed under the then Leader of the Opposition, Neil Kinnock. He was reappointed to that Committee by John Smith, by Tony Blair, by Gordon Brown, by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and by the current Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, who apparently had faith in him then, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn).

In total, my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South has served for 19 years on the Committee, with five years as Chair from 2005 to 2010. During his tenure as Chair, the Committee published reports on Afghanistan, Pakistan, the implications of cuts to the BBC World Service and to foreign language capability in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, relations with Turkey, the Arab spring, human rights, extraordinary rendition, the future of the EU and relations with the United States. And that is not all: in his time as Chair of the Committee, my hon. Friend took evidence from the Dalai Lama, despite Chinese protests, visited Guantanamo Bay, and exposed corruption and intimidation that led to the UK Government suspending relations with the Turks and Caicos Government, and it was only after the Committee criticised the Syrian Government that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office included Syria as a human rights country of concern. My hon. Friend has also been a convenor and for 10 years a member of the quadripartite Committees on Arms Export Controls.

With my hon. Friend in the Chair, the Foreign Affairs Committee always operated as it should, on a cross-party and consensual basis, not least thanks to his strong belief that the role of Select Committees is to hold Government to account and that Committee members are not there as delegates of their parties. He has served actively and constructively under Conservative Chairs, including Richard Ottaway, the former Member for Croydon South, and the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and the current Chair, the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat).

By virtue of his position, my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South has been a representative of our Parliament at home, welcoming foreign delegations, and abroad, liaising with diplomats and Governments. To this day, he continues to be active in the Committee, playing a role in amending draft reports and regularly meeting international visitors on behalf of the Committee.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I hope the right hon. Lady will forgive me; I was chairing a sitting of the Committee just now, hence I missed the beginning of the debate. I echo her words, because she is absolutely speaking the truth. More than that, to a

new Member who has had the good fortune to chair one of these great Committees very early on, the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) has been an amazing rock to lean on. His wisdom, his courtesy and his judgment have been of great value to me and, I hope, the whole House and the whole Committee, as he has helped to guide not just me but us all through some complex moments of foreign policy, where there have been very few more important subjects for our House, so I echo completely the right hon. Lady's words.

Joan Ryan: I thank the hon. Gentleman, the Chair of the Committee, for those remarks, which I think are well received and well deserved by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South. I take them as an endorsement of all that I am saying about the way in which he has served the Committee, the House and the country. I know that the Chair of the Committee and, for that matter, all its members do not want this to happen and have made that clear in their own way.

Membership of Select Committees is fundamentally a matter for the House of Commons. It should not become the subject of mean-spirited manoeuvres by party leaderships who do not brook dissent. Labour's move is the latest indication of how its leadership is unable to handle criticism, alternative viewpoints or any dissenting voices—a very worrying development in a democratic Parliament. This Parliament works through the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to help other Parliaments around the world to learn from our examples and our experience to be good, democratic Parliaments, to strengthen democracy and to strengthen parliamentary democracy in particular. This move by the Leader of the Opposition absolutely cuts across and undermines all those aims, all of that mission and all that work.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee both in this and the previous Parliament, I support the Members who are on it presently and particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), who I have known for over 40 years. He has been an excellent member of the Committee. He has great knowledge and expertise and, as the Chairman said, he has been a rock to many of us in the Committee. Because of his experience and wisdom, he is an essential part of the Committee. Not for the first time, I will vote against the Whip—if there is a three-line Whip asking us to vote for the expulsion of those Members, I will not do it.

Joan Ryan: I sincerely thank my hon. Friend, as I am sure her hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South will, for those remarks and for her courage in saying that she will not follow this Whip. I hope that other Opposition Members, many of whom I know are not happy about this move, will show their displeasure and vote against the motion. I also hope that will be true of Government Members.

Members from inside and outside Labour who have raised serious concerns about Labour's direction will not want to see the silencing of an experienced voice from the Foreign Affairs Committee at a time when the leader of the Labour party's foreign policy has come under intense scrutiny. From Venezuela to Syria and Russia, the positions taken by the leader of the Labour

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party and Labour Front Benchers have been a concern to MPs on both sides. This attempt to remove a platform from one of Parliament's most experienced voices on foreign affairs should be opposed. I want to refer back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North said about his reasons for leaving, which are virtually identical to my own—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. This is a debate about replacement. I understand the frustration and anger, but unfortunately, I have to chair the debate on what it is about, which is the replacement of people on the Foreign Affairs Committee. The subject is narrow. We have broadened it a bit and I have been generous in trying to do that, but this cannot become a personal attack on one person by every speaker—unfortunately, we have to stick to what we have.

Joan Ryan: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The reasons my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South left the Labour party have a direct bearing on his work as a member of the FAC. He stated three reasons: Brexit, antisemitism and Labour's foreign policy on Syria, Russia and Venezuela.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Being a member of the Speaker's Panel, you know I have to keep the debate within the scope of the motion, and the scope does not allow us to go into the reasons; it is about the replacement of members. I do not want to be hard, but I have to keep to the agenda.

Joan Ryan: Can I seek your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker? There are a few things I want to say about Select Committees that I think are relevant. I understand what you are saying about the narrowness of the debate, but there is the broader context of who is being removed and who has not been removed in the past. There is an underlying reason that is obviously about the people who left the Labour party a couple of weeks ago, and it is difficult to address this matter without being able to address the reasons it comes before us. With your guidance, I will attempt to continue, but I am sure you will tell me if I am wrong.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think you know what you have to do, given your experience of chairing Committees. The reasons certain people left the Labour party can be debated some other time, but this debate is not about that; it is about replacing existing members. I do not want to put words into his mouth, but I presume that Mr Wiggin will establish why the representation of political parties should reflect the make-up of the House when he winds up. This debate is about the replacement of two, let's be honest, very popular Members. There is no doubt about that, but it is about their replacement, so it is quite narrow. I have allowed some freedom, but it cannot be a personal attack on one person.

Joan Ryan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will endeavour not to mention the particular person we refer to.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): Voldemort.

Joan Ryan: I was thinking more of the Leader of the Opposition.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I had not planned to intervene, given that I am in my pink-and-no-tie mode—but hey, we're a modern Parliament! May I tell my right hon. Friend—I will call her that—that when there was a move some years ago to get me off the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, for reasons I will not bore hon. Members with now, I was told by the then Chairman, the late, great Sir Gerald Kaufman MP, that a Member of Parliament was elected to a Select Committee for a Parliament. It might have changed, but, regardless of shenanigans, I think the principle still stands.

Joan Ryan: The hon. Gentleman's intervention echoes where I started: there is no formula setting out the exact required number. It is not entirely without precedent, but it is extremely unusual for this to happen.

I will try to move on. More widely, this attempt highlights some of the difficulties with how the main parties have a stranglehold on how Parliament works—from the way debates are scheduled to the party political carve-up on Select Committees. The dominance of the House of Commons by the Whips and the usual channels does our democracy a disservice. Minority voices are squeezed out and those who dissent from the view of the Front Benches can be summarily dismissed. If we are to reach across outdated tribal lines and agree on workable solutions to the challenges that we face as a nation, we must look again at how we organise Parliament. We must do that if we are to change politics, and we must change politics.

Removing newly independent MPs from Select Committees undermines and runs counter to the spirit of reforms made in recent years to reduce the influence of political parties over Select Committees. Those changes are widely considered to have strengthened the Committee system. For instance, the Wright reforms, implemented after the 2010 election, removed from party Whips the power to appoint Select Committee members, and introduced their election by their parliamentary peers.

Let me quote some of what former and current Members have said about these matters. The background to the first quotation is a rebellion against removing Select Committee Chairs Gwyneth Dunwoody, the former MP for Crewe and Nantwich, and Donald Anderson, then the MP for Swansea East and now, I believe, a Member of the other place. The right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), now Leader of the Opposition, said that appointments to Select Committees should be taken out of the hands of Whips. He said:

"I thank the Leader of the House for giving way. Before he completes his contribution, will he say what thought he has given to the Liaison Committee report 'Shifting the Balance', which is about the future appointment of Select Committees and appointments to vacancies that might occur in this Parliament? Does he accept its recommendation that those should be taken out of the power of the Whips Offices of all parties?"—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2001; Vol. 372, c. 45.]

That was very clear.

Angela—now Baroness—Browning, then the MP for Tiverton and Honiton, put the Tory Front Bench view that the power of the Whips to appoint was

"past its sell-by date."—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2001; Vol. 372, c. 40.]

It is hard to disagree with that.

Robin Cook, the former MP for Livingston and a very respected and eminent Member of the House, and the Labour Government allowed free votes on Select Committee matters, because they were matters for the House. Will Labour do the same now, and if not, why not? I do not think that any free vote will take place today.

During the same debate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) said:

“There is a message to my right hon. Friend. The Government might get away tonight with sacking two hon. Members who should be members of Select Committees, and they might think little of it, but in the last Parliament, and in this Parliament, sadly, they continue to present an image of what they are like which, I am sure, is totally inaccurate. The image suggests that they believe that one can ride roughshod, and grab and take anything. The impression of a belief that we rule, no matter what people say, is being marked down on our card outside. When we are in difficult times, we will find, like the shambles of the Conservative party, that it is too late to reform. The electorate will have marked our card indelibly, and when the moment comes, retribution will be visited upon us.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2001; Vol. 372, c. 61.]

Those are words to which the current Leader of the Opposition should perhaps pay a bit of attention.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The right hon. Lady has mentioned the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), who, to the best of my knowledge, resigned the Labour Whip. Is she aware of any moves by his previous party to remove him from the chairmanship of the Work and Pensions Committee? That question plays into the argument that she and I, and others, have been making that this is a very partial and personal attack.

Joan Ryan: The hon. Gentleman has made that point before, and I could not disagree with him. In my view, this is entirely about Members who declared their independence just a couple of weeks ago, and no others.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Ind): My right hon. Friend will remember the reforms introduced by an ex Member of the House for Cannock Chase, Tony Wright. Does she agree that this motion, and a whipped vote on it on the part of the Labour Benches, goes completely against the spirit of the Wright reforms, which we voted up in the 2005-2010 Parliament?

Joan Ryan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I could not agree with her more. This undermines those reforms in total, and also calls into question the ability of Select Committees to work in a consensual, non-tribal, cross-party way to properly scrutinise the business of government.

Tom Tugendhat: Does my right hon. Friend, as I will accurately call her, agree that equality before the law is one of the principles of British justice and that this House of all places should demonstrate that principle of equality? Does she not therefore feel it is slightly odd that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) has not been singled out and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) has not been singled out, yet the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), who has spoken very clearly about antisemitism, and the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), who has again shown his courage in this matter, should be the two who are singled out?

Joan Ryan: That is a powerful point, and what I would say in terms of equality is that I said in my speech when I resigned from the Labour party after 38 years that it was in the main due to the fact that the Labour party was institutionally antisemitic.

Ian Austin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the shadow Deputy Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), to sit there muttering away, shaking his head every time a contribution is made yet not say a word from the Dispatch Box about why the Opposition have imposed a three-line Whip on their MPs to vote in a particular way in this debate? Stand at the Dispatch Box and explain yourself.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I think we should lower the temperature here a bit—that is not a matter for the Chair. What I would say is that this is about the replacements on the Select Committees and there is quite a lot of muttering going on, and it would be much more polite if we could listen to what the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) is saying. But I remind this House that this debate is focused on the issue of the Select Committees.

Joan Ryan: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To finish addressing the point made by the Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling, as to whether all Members are equal before this House, some are clearly more equal than others. When I resigned on the basis of the Labour party becoming institutionally antisemitic and the fact that I could only say that I considered the Leader of the Opposition not fit to be Prime Minister, I made the point that Labour's founding principle is equality, so I can only agree that that founding principle has been desperately undermined by the current Leader of the Opposition.

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee also mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and it remains seriously concerning that Labour has sought names to replace her on the Health and Social Care Committee; that is on its list of vacancies where it seeks a replacement. Although the party has briefed that there are no plans to replace her, it has begun the process by seeking nominations, and presumably it remains the case that if someone from the parliamentary Labour party puts themselves forward Labour will submit their name to the Selection Committee. It is not right that my hon. Friend faces this situation; she is on maternity leave. What would we say to other employers who took punitive action against an employee on maternity leave? I think we would take a very dim view of that indeed.

I have said a lot about my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington—or rather my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South. [*Interruption.*] I think I have said a lot about both, frankly, and I wanted to say a few more words about my hon. Friend—my very, very good friend—the Member for Dudley North, who I very much wish was part of our group because I very much enjoy working with him, but I understand his reasons why he is not.

Leaving aside members of the Independent Group, it is concerning that Labour is moving against the hon. Member for Dudley North, whose resignation from

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Labour over antisemitism was brave and principled. The fact that Labour is responding by seeking to remove him from the Committee shows how the party's leadership still does not understand the seriousness of the issue it faces. I really think it needs to listen today to what is being said and to the views of this House.

There cannot be independence as long as there is this system of patronage; the House itself needs to take this issue on. However, nobody in this place should endorse these mean-minded, petty actions by the Leader of the Opposition. Beyond that, if they do, they will appear to be endorsing the most despicable views that have infected this Labour party around racism against Jewish people—antisemitism—and not just the inability but the refusal of the Labour party to deal with that. The House needs to express its view on what I consider to be institutional antisemitism. This motion should be resisted at all costs. It has far, far greater implications and consequences than perhaps everyone is seeing at first glance.

4.26 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I will speak to the motion, which starts by saying that “Ian Austin and Mike Gapes be discharged from the Foreign Affairs Committee”.

I will explain why I think that is wrong.

There is no doubt that, on almost every domestic issue, the hon. Members for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and I completely disagree. I would be shocked if there were many domestic issues we saw eye to eye on.

Mike Gapes: As a fellow West Ham supporter, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that is not the case.

Alec Shelbrooke: I am most grateful for that; it just goes to show that we can all be wrong at some point in the day.

This issue is far more important than whether we agree on domestic issues. I want to speak about how Select Committees operate and the sort of people who should be on them. When we look at why this motion has been brought forward, it is worth noting that, in terms of the mathematics of Parliament, we will still have the same number of Opposition MPs on the Select Committee compared with Government MPs.

In April 2013, the hon. Member for Dudley North and I went to Kiev, shortly after the purple revolution. We saw at first hand how people tore up the streets to use the stones as missiles. We actually saw a lynching in the square. Why did we go on that trip? We were trying to understand the threats people faced to their freedom, how they were trying to overthrow a repressive Government and how the country could move forward—let us be honest, all is not rosy in Ukraine to this day, even apart from the Russian aggression and intervention. However, we went there to understand those things. That shows why the hon. Member for Dudley North has given so much experience to the Foreign Affairs Committee: he has gone around the world with cross-party groups—I will come to the hon. Member for Ilford South in a moment, because I would not want to rule him out of this.

That trip was not a Foreign Affairs Committee trip; it was a Back-Bench trip put together to understand what was going on. It was done to understand what was going on because that is what parliamentarians should do in this country—in this free democracy we live in. We have to understand repression around the world and bring to bear the values we hold dear—freedom, the rule of law, democracy and the right to choose what we want to do—when we discuss various issues.

It sends an appalling message to our fellow countrymen that this motion is effectively about the hon. Member for Dudley North standing up to racism and to antisemitism and calling out an affront to democracy. It breaks my heart that in the 21st century we are discussing issues that should have been put to bed 70 or 80 years ago. I do not know what this country is coming to when politicians elected to this House are on the list of the biggest threats to Jews in the world. How did we get here?

Standing up for those principles and going around the world to witness events in other countries to bring that experience back to a wider audience should be appreciated and valued. We should not immediately get rid of somebody from an influential Select Committee just because they stood by their principles. The hon. Member for Dudley North brings his many years of experience, and his skill is based on his time in government—he is an experienced Member of this House.

I say again that the hon. Gentleman and I disagree on many issues. In fact, we have had our ding-dongs in this Chamber—we can see them in *Hansard*—especially back when I was newly elected and full of vim and energy and wanted to make my point. However, that is no reason to get rid of someone with such high-held principles, which this country exports around the world. Those of us who travel around the world encouraging democracy know that this country's principles about freedom of democracy should be celebrated, and we should not kick people off Select Committees when they stand up for them.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) has shown exemplary personal courage on many occasions, most often when I argue in the Conservative interest and he argues in the Labour interest. It is really quite something that someone who is as dyed in the wool—if he will forgive that expression—to his party as he is should find themselves choosing between their father and their party.

What a time it is to find that we are so divided in this House that we have people who cannot reconcile their conscience and their family in one party! As Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on which the hon. Gentleman serves, I pay tribute to him for the exemplary way in which he conducts himself, to his intelligence and subtlety of thought, and to the diligence he brings to reports and inquiries.

Alec Shelbrooke: My hon. Friend summarises why I believe that the hon. Member for Dudley North should remain on the Foreign Affairs Committee under my hon. Friend's chairmanship.

I turn to the hon. Member for Ilford South. This is not just about his membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee, because moves are also afoot to remove him from the delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. I am a member of that delegation and have

been on the same sub-committees as the hon. Gentleman. For those unaware of the work of the NATO PA, I should say that it is divided into committees, and we meet with delegations from the other 28 member nations to discuss pertinent matters.

The hon. Gentleman and I are members of the Political Committee, which discusses the threats facing the world, and it is obvious at any meeting that the hon. Gentleman is almost a go-to man for the other nations. When we socialise outside of those meetings, we are not talking about the football—well, the hon. Gentleman and I may be talking about the football—because we and plenty of other people discuss further the issues of the day.

Other delegates go to the hon. Gentleman because he has 30, 40 and perhaps even—I do not want to be presumptuous—50 years of foreign affairs experience, and he brings that experience to this Parliament and projects the experience of this Parliament to other partner nations. At a time when our standing in the world is being questioned and when people are wondering where we are going next, we should be using those who are respected around the world to give the British perspective on issues of foreign affairs and defence.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I have had the privilege of serving on the Foreign Affairs Committee for nine years with the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). Both he and the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) play an enormously important role in the Committee's work and, frankly, I would not want to lose them—I want them to stay on the Committee. If a Member is selected to be a member of a Select Committee, they should be a member for the duration of the Parliament, just as we are elected to this House for the duration of a Parliament. If we change party, we do not have to give up our seat and, therefore, surely the Members concerned should continue to serve on the Committee for this Parliament.

Alec Shelbrooke: I echo and reinforce what my hon. Friend says about being selected to serve, and I am grateful for his intervention. The number of Opposition MPs on this Committee has not changed, and the balance between Government MPs and Opposition MPs is still the same.

If this motion is passed, we will have decided that if a Member stands up for their values and the things I am sure we would all value as the principles of being a British parliamentarian, they are out—"It doesn't fit in with the views we want, so you are out." How are we then supposed to do soft power around the world? It is up to the Executive and the Prime Minister to go around the world doing the hard power of this nation, but we do the soft power. We make this country relevant, whether we do it through the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe or the Foreign Affairs Committee, which does valuable work feeding in to Government on the direction of events. We would be saying that, because a Member has stood up for their principles, we are not interested.

I cast no aspersions on the Members who have been put forward in this motion; I am sure they are intelligent and capable Members of this House who would bring something to the Committee. But they would not bring

the years of experience and the global respect that the hon. Members for Ilford South and for Dudley North have. How must we look to the public viewing us today?

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Is not the issue that, when it comes to a contest between talent and tribe, talent must always win out? Ultimately, this country is best served by having its star players on the pitch, and the world would not understand if we deliberately took our best players off the pitch. Does he agree?

Alec Shelbrooke: I totally agree although, as a West Ham fan, it is difficult to spot the analogy. It is about talent, but it is also about the cumulative knowledge of so many years' experience and the contacts around the world that make someone the go-to person on specific issues after the meetings of these organisations. It all feeds in.

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Ind): The hon. Gentleman is incredibly kind to give way on that point. He was first elected in the same year I was, and we both aspire to the level and depth of experience of the two Members whom the motion seeks to discharge from the Committee. Is not his key point that the incentives in this place to speak out bravely when we believe things to be wrong need to be correctly aligned with our procedures? Both Members have found themselves in a position where they could do nothing but speak out and face the consequences. Today each of us, even those with the political experience of the hon. Gentleman and me, need to ask ourselves: if it is these two Members first, will it be us next?

Alec Shelbrooke: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I will preface it, but he reminds me of the poem about the holocaust that finishes:

"Then they came for me—and there was no one left".

We should bear that in mind. What has led to this situation? I regard the hon. Member for Ilford South as a good friend, and we have travelled the world together. I saw the huge, incredible levels of abuse he received, often from his alleged supporters in his own party. I think he dealt with that stoically.

I know that it was no easy decision for the hon. Gentleman to leave his party. I do not want to embarrass him, but I know it broke his heart because we have had those conversations. He did not want to leave the Labour party. He was forced into that position by standing up for what was right and standing up for the values we should all stand for in this House. That is the problem with the motion.

What message are we sending to the House with this motion? The motion asks us to replace two Members of this House who have enormous experience. The context is a lack of tolerance in this place. The Brexit debate was framed around the fact that people wanted politics done in a different way—we can argue and disagree about what that way is. What we are actually saying today is, "Stand up for your principles and you're out." It is an establishment stitch-up.

The reason why I want the two hon. Gentlemen to stay on the Committee—this is what I worry about most of all—is that they are experts in their field. They are admired by the other Committee members and by

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the people they see around the world. We should not give in to the pressure and, frankly, intolerance they have had to face, and thereby lessen the capability of the Committee they sit on.

4.41 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to say a few words in a debate that is both important and timely.

There are bigger points of principle at stake in this debate, with all due respect to the hon. Members for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Ilford South (Mike Gapes)—both of whom I hold in high regard and whose treatment I utterly deplore. We are really talking about the rules by which this House governs itself. Just as important as the rules are the reasons for which those rules are put in place. The rules do not just emerge out of nowhere. We have the rules that we have for a particular reason.

It is worth recalling that when the Chairman of the Selection Committee and I came into the House in 2001, it was a very different sort of House that ran to very different rules. The Chairs and members of Select Committees were all appointed at the pleasure of the leaders and Whips of their own parties. That system was, frankly, open to abuse and it was often abused. We all saw it. I remember John Denham—a man I held in high regard—going virtually automatically from being a Home Office Minister to being Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. That was not a proper way for the House to order its business. It happened because it was not the House that was ordering its business; it was done by the party managers.

I also remember the occasion that the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) reminded us of, when the business managers tried to replace Lord Anderson of Swansea and the late Gwyneth Dunwoody as Chairs of the Foreign Affairs and Transport Committees. I remember Gwyneth Dunwoody as one of the most formidable operators ever in this House. You may recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when she chaired the Transport Committee, it was said to be the only Committee of this House that had need of its own witness protection programme. One could quite understand why the Ministers and business managers wanted to be rid of her, but it was obviously in the interests of the House and the good functioning of our Select Committees that she not be removed. On that occasion, the House stood up for Gwyneth Dunwoody and Lord Anderson. They were able to retain their positions as Chairs of the Select Committees and continue doing their very important work.

That is why the Wright committee was set up to look at the workings of the House. Its recommendations were radical and highly innovative in changing the business. I declare an interest: at the time of the implementation of the Wright reforms, I was deputy Chief Whip of the coalition Government. The right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) was the Government Chief Whip, and Lord Young of Cookham, as he now is, was the Leader of the House of Commons, and we brought forward those changes.

For us as business managers, the changes were not always easy. I remember that, during that Parliament, a Chair of a Select Committee came to me and said that the presence of a Liberal Democrat MP on the Select Committee was making it difficult for the Committee to hear all the evidence and information it needed, because it was felt that he would compromise in some way some of the information being given to it. I had to say to that Select Committee Chair, “I’m sorry, but there’s not really anything I can do to remove him. I no longer have that power.” We have spoken about soft power and hard power. I should put it on the record that, as a result of sweet reason and good persuasion, we were able to persuade that gentleman to remove himself from the Committee. In that way, the House was able to continue.

For those reasons, I think it was right that we handed over control of Select Committee chairmanship and membership to the House. That is why I feel profoundly uneasy about the motion that has been brought to the House today. The reforms that we implemented as a consequence of the Wright report were long overdue and very hard-fought. For the House to be complicit in somehow rolling them back would be a retrograde step at a time when it is surely more important than ever that the House is prepared to assert its control and primacy over the Executive and the party machinery, which is being challenged.

Tom Tugendhat: The right hon. Gentleman and I represent opposite ends of the country, so I ask him this question: has he ever heard in the community he represents that what people really want is more political party control?

Mr Carmichael: With the possible exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), just about everybody represents seats in the other end of the country, as far as I am concerned. No, of course I have not.

That was why the House eventually acted in the way it did. We did not rush to act—my goodness, it was long overdue. Let us not overstate the party influence here. It is important to recognise that we are all elected on a party ticket, but once we are here we have other considerations to take into account.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): My right hon. Friend’s position as a former deputy Chief Whip of the Government gives the points he is making even more weight. Does he accept that, of all parts of this House, the Select Committee system is so successful largely because people leave their party allegiances at the door and work together collectively? It is one of the most respected parts of our Parliament, so it is disappointing that the Labour party is trying to politicise it and make some sort of territorial claim on those seats, even though there are excellent individuals serving in those roles.

Mr Carmichael: Indeed. I had cause to reflect on the role of Select Committees recently, when the recently retired Clerk of the House stood down. He was instrumental in building the reputation of those Committees, because he started his career as a Clerk clerking them. The strength and standing of the Select Committee system that we enjoy today is not an accident. It is not something that happened overnight. It has been hard won.

Many people had to work and fight very hard to build it. If we undermine it, we not only do a disservice to the hon. Members for Ilford South and for Dudley North, but risk doing a disservice to the House.

I understand why the Labour party moved in this way. I do not challenge the competence of the motion before the House, but it is significant that at the end of the day, this matter remains in the control of the House.

Angela Smith: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the competence of the motion is not in question, but surely the imposition of a three-line Whip is entirely against the spirit of the reforms that have made this House a better place.

Mr Carmichael: It is not entirely without precedent for parties to whip House business, but it is rare, and it is ill advised. As I say, I certainly do not challenge the competence of the motion, but I do challenge and seriously question the wisdom of those who sought to bring it forward in this way, at this time. I do not refer to the members of the Committee of Selection, and certainly not to its Chair, the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin); they are there to perform a function—to facilitate the House's having this debate. Ultimately, the question of who should be on the Foreign Affairs Committee remains within the control of the House. I hope that the House will thank the Chair of the Committee of Selection and his colleagues, and politely decline to accept their advice.

4.52 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called in this debate. It is worth saying that I have no personal objection to the hon. Members for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) joining a Committee; I remember the rather courageous stand that the hon. Member for St Helens North took a few years back in supporting the Government's taking military action against Daesh when his party leader was not doing so. The comments I am about to make are no reflection on those two Members, but I do feel rather conflicted.

There has been a lot of talk about whipping and potential arrangements. I do not think it is right to discuss on the Floor of the House Members' conversations with Whips, but I must say that while it is always lovely to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), my Whip, it was nice not to hear from her today about this motion and the amendment. She has the joy of texting me to ask if I am here, which usually gets the response, "I'm sitting on the other end of the Bench from you."

There is a bit of a conflict in my mind today, and I will explain why. Previous motions from the Committee of Selection that we have considered on the membership of Committees, including Select Committees, have usually been brought forward when a Member has said that they no longer wish to be on a Committee, and the relevant party is looking to replace them. That is why when, a couple of years back, there was a motion relating to the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) being on the Justice Committee, I took the view that it was a Labour vacancy, and the Labour party had nominated someone. While the motion was controversial to those on the Government Benches,

I took the view that it was not really for Government Members to pick who represented the Opposition on a Select Committee; I felt that voting against the motion would set a bit of a precedent, so on that occasion, I was prepared to vote in favour of it. It was not that I had any great thoughts about the merits of the individual concerned; I felt that it was a Labour vacancy, as a Labour Member was standing down from the Committee. The Labour party was therefore entitled to nominate someone. I did not feel it was for a Government MP, particularly one who was quite involved in things, to say, "No. Come back with someone else."

I accept that today the situation is very different. Neither the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) nor the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) wishes to be removed from the Foreign Affairs Committee, and neither has done something that makes it necessary for the House to remove them. They have both given exceptional service. We saw in the superb speech of the hon. Member for Dudley North exactly why he is on that Committee. It is because of the incisive nature that he brings to debates and his passion for the subjects concerned. In the case of the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), I can say that I may not share some of his views, I may not share his thoughts on a second referendum, and every time he speaks, I may not innately think, "Yeah, great point. That is one I would have made myself." That is not what it is about; it is about making sure that there is independence on these Committees.

Where I feel uncomfortable is whether it should really be the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster who goes through the Lobby to decide who represents the Opposition on Select Committees. That is why I feel uncomfortable with suggestions that we should vote against this motion. It will set a precedent. I am conscious that there will be a number of Members on the Government Benches who will wish to vote against this motion. In particular, the respected members of the Committee may feel that they have a stronger need to express their views. None the less, as PPS to the de facto Deputy Prime Minister, I feel reticent about going through the Lobby to choose the Opposition representatives on that Committee.

Tom Tugendhat: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I appreciate the point that he is making about choosing who should serve on Committees—which party they come from and how they should be selected—but surely the question before us today is a fundamental one about whether those who are elected to serve on a Select Committee are delegates of the whole House or representatives of their party. That is a fundamental question that we should be considering. The truth is that the Select Committee system was established so that the whole House could look into matters at greater depth than is possible for the Chamber as a whole. That is the question that we should be asking ourselves today. Therefore, once the House has made a decision as to who should represent it, should it be up to the Whips Office from one party or another to make a difference?

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. In relation to Committee Chairs, he is absolutely right that we select as the whole House. They are appointed by the whole House, and I would be reluctant to set a precedent, if Chairs of the Committees were to change

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their political affiliation—there has been one such change—that they were delegates of one party or another. At the start of the Parliament, we makes the allocations. If there comes a vacancy, that would potentially make a difference.

For me, there is a challenge in this. This matter is being debated on the Floor of the House. Members are appointed by the whole House to be Chairs and members of Committees, but we are talking about the Opposition's spaces, and I do have a view on that. Although I suspect that, in this Parliament, things will be handled quite maturely—in fact I suspect that, under a number of Labour Governments, things would be handled well—we could be setting quite a precedent if Government Members, particularly Government payroll Members, started choosing the Opposition members on a Committee, regardless of what I might think on this particular occasion. It is different for those who are not on the Government payroll.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind) *rose*—

Kevin Foster: I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way on this point. I will, if I may, try to persuade him. Does he agree that Select Committees are at their best and acting on behalf of the public when their members can leave tribal politics at the door, focus on the evidence and work collaboratively to come up with solutions? That is what the public wants to see from this Parliament, as opposed to the often confrontational picture that they might see. This is the part of Parliament that often shows us at our best. My concern is that what we are seeing tonight will fundamentally undermine and degrade the important reforms that were brought in a decade ago, so I really hope that he will join me in the Lobby this evening.

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend—and I mean that—for her intervention. She is right that the Select Committees are at their best when a member of the public attending a sitting would not be able to tell which party label applied to which Member of Parliament. I remember the time that I spent on the Public Accounts Committee, and the questions there were as fearless from Government Members as from Opposition Members. That is the strength of Select Committees. The fact that we work by consensus in most instances gives strength to our reports. If an inquiry was just an attack by an Opposition motivated by party politics, it would not get the support of Government Members. And ditto—if a report were trying to praise the Government too much, funnily enough Opposition Members would probably not sign up to it.

It is right that people do not take their party labels into Select Committees, but the conflict for me is the issue of the Opposition having certain protections in this place. In a situation where a Government had a significant majority, they could in theory start playing a game with these sorts of motion. I think it is safe to say that a game is being played this afternoon, but it is quite clear to me that there is a difference between Members on the Government payroll and other Members. Each Member can take their own view; I just feel a slight difficulty in choosing the Opposition Members on a Select Committee from my position.

Dr Wollaston: Does my hon. Friend feel that it would undermine the system if we were in a position where members of a Select Committee were always having to look over their shoulder, because they might suddenly find that their place had been made unilaterally vacant on their behalf if they were not following the party line? In this case, there will still be the same number of Opposition Members on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Kevin Foster: I accept that the balance of Opposition Members will be the same. This is not, for example, about someone having gone from the Government Benches to the Opposition Benches, and then a motion trying to flip back the balance. For me, though, this is about choosing the Opposition Members on a Select Committee. Let us be candid: there will be occasions when the Government might not particularly want certain individuals from the Opposition on a certain Committee. That is where the conflict lies. This is about Government Members—particularly those in the Government—choosing the Opposition Members on a Select Committee.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): This is the first time that I have ever had to disagree with anything my hon. Friend has ever said on the Floor of the House. I still hope that he will think again, listen to the rest of the debate and perhaps be persuaded. I must say that if any move is made to remove the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) from the chairmanship of the Liaison Committee, I shall certainly vote against that. As someone who disagrees with the stance taken on Europe by all the Independent Group Members, which has led them to find themselves cast into the wilderness, I would certainly say to my hon. Friend that it is not about him choosing who should be the Opposition Members to go on a Committee; it is about him deciding whether a witch hunt should allow Opposition Members to be driven off a Committee.

Kevin Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend, who shows his skills as a parliamentarian in recognising how this place works. It is not about our own views; it is about how we see the process working. Although I hear his strong point, I still have my view, and I will be abstaining—I will not be voting in favour. I would normally say that a nomination by an Opposition party should be respected by Government Members, but this situation is different in that it is not the case that Members are looking to retire from the Committee and that a vacancy therefore exists that needs to be filled. I do question the motivations and timing behind this move, but I do not feel that it is for me to be choosing Opposition Members. I might change that view if we were talking about Government Members, but it is my view that this decision is for the Opposition.

Dr Lewis: If my hon. Friend's objection were well founded, does he not think that our own Whips Office would have issued a three-line Whip and not given us the free choice to vote as we please?

Kevin Foster: Actually, I commend the Government Whips Office for giving us a free vote to allow people to make their choice according to their conscience. I will abstain. I am not whipped as a payrolled Member to be in the Aye Lobby or the No Lobby. It is right that all Members of the House should make their own choice today. We all differ, and each choice will be valid.

With that, I bring my remarks to a close—[*Interruption.*] I can hear the disappointment of the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin). The reason I will abstain is purely that I do not agree with the principle of key Government Members making a decision about Opposition Members.

5.4 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I will not detain the House for long, but I felt the need to stand up and be counted on both the specific and the general contents of this debate.

I oppose the removal of my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and for Dudley North (Ian Austin) from the membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee. That is not because I oppose my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) or my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) being members of that Committee in future. I am sure that they will, in future, make fine members of the Foreign Affairs Committee should they wish to stand for it. This, for me, is about people being removed because they have held their heads up and said that the membership of the party in which they entered this House no longer represents their values and their views. Because I know both those Members, I know how hard and how difficult that was, and I commend them for their bravery. Over the past almost 22 years of my membership of this House, I have had little interest in the rules of the House, of debate, or of memberships of Select Committees—for me, what matters is what I do in my constituency and how I represent my constituents. I appreciate that people have different views of how they do the job. Surely that is the point, and the strength, of our system.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) may like to look at evidence from the House of Commons Library about how members of Select Committees are dealt with if they leave their party and transfer to another. On 2 March 1981, Robert MacLennan defected from Labour to the Social Democratic party. He was a member of the Public Accounts Committee at the time. He remained a member until the end of the Parliament. On 2 March 1981, John Cartwright defected from Labour to the SDP. He was a member of the Defence Committee at the time. He did not leave the Committee until 31 March 1982—a year later. On 7 October 1981, Tom McNally defected from Labour to the SDP. He was a member of the Defence Committee at the time. He remained a member until the end of the Parliament. On 7 October 1981, James Dunn defected from Labour to the SDP. He was also a member of the Defence Committee. He did not leave it until December 1982, over a year later, and even then he was replaced by an SDP Member.

On 2 December 1981, Ronald Brown defected from Labour to the SDP. He was the Chair of the Committee of Selection at the time and remained so until the end of the Parliament. On 18 December 1999, Shaun Woodward defected from the Conservatives to Labour. He was and remained a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. In 2005, Paul Marsden returned to Labour, having previously defected to the Liberal Democrats. He was and remained a member of the Transport Committee. I would therefore suggest to the hon. Gentleman that the experience in this House, even in the days when Whips had more control over who was on Select Committees, suggests that people could remain.

We all know that this measure is a vindictive one. It shames our Whips—I say that as somebody who has been a Government Whip—to be involved in this manoeuvre today. There is no suggestion that either my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South or my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North have not done their job well, been regular attenders or argued their point of view. They are not being removed for any disciplinary issue or for not being up to the mark. They are being removed because of their politics—because my party has become intolerant and unwilling to listen to other voices.

Joan Ryan: As evidence to support what my hon. Friend is saying in the most powerful way, members of the Independent Group who left the Labour party just a couple of weeks ago and who sit in the Council of Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe have all been threatened with removal by the actions of our Whips. The Whips cannot remove all of them, because they have a term of office, but that more than demonstrates the fact that this is, exactly as she says, about intolerance.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank my right hon. Friend, who is my friend in this place in the true meaning of the word. One of the most shocking things is that attempts were going to be made to remove my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) from the Health and Social Care Committee while she was on maternity leave. Those were attempts by the Labour party—the Labour party of Barbara Castle, of Mo Mowlam and of the late, great Tessa Jowell. The party that introduced statutory maternity leave was considering removing a Member from a Committee while she was on maternity leave. Is that not an indication of how much we have lost our values and sense of who we are?

Whether it is the Conservative party having to remove people because of Islamophobia or the Labour party having to remove people because of antisemitism, we all have to stand up in our parties to extremism and totalitarianism. I say that with regret, but I hope that Government Members do not believe that I do not mean them too—I do. They need to watch their constituencies and their membership. If we move away from where the quiet, moderate majority lie, they will become disaffected with our politics.

Membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee is a small, arcane matter for this House, but it exemplifies the problems that all parties are experiencing. However uncomfortable it is and whether or not it means that some people on our side of the House will choose not to speak to us after this debate, we have to stand up, because for evil to triumph, it only needs the majority of us to say nothing.

5.12 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): I am moved by the speech of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). Those were extraordinarily courageous words to say in this extraordinary Parliament, where we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory in so many ways, with a new fluidity in politics that we need to reflect. I will detain the House for only a very short moment.

[Richard Benyon]

As the leader of the UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, it has been my good fortune to work with the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). At the moment, when we go to these forums, parliamentarians from across the world—in our case, from across the NATO alliance—ask, “What is going on in the United Kingdom?” We try to explain, which at times I find almost impossible. If they are confused by our actions in this Parliament and our inability to get through a certain matter, they will be doubly confused when they see that somebody of the hon. Gentleman’s standing and stature in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is being excluded from a Select Committee on which he has extraordinary experience and of which he is a former Chair. If he were also to be removed from our delegation, that would be extraordinary, and I simply would not be able to explain it to the many parliamentarians who look to this Parliament for inspiration and feel that there is a basic sense of fairness and decency, which we should uphold. I am grateful that the Government’s whipping allows me to do what I was going to do anyway.

Angela Smith: Does the right hon. Gentleman—I think he is right honourable—not think that this Parliament, in removing someone like my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, would be sending out a message to the international community that Britain no longer stands for fairness and justice?

Richard Benyon: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. I do think that the membership of a Select Committee or of a delegation—although, out there in the real world, it is not what they are talking about in the Dog and Duck—is an indication of the kind of politics we do in this place, and to me, it matters.

The machinations of the Labour party are something that, in one sense, we on the Conservative Benches could just not be part of. Personally, however, I am saddened if a great internationalist party does not still have people on its Benches—they have now moved to a different arrangement—who really understand the importance at this time of that internationalist approach and have an understanding of the dynamic of foreign affairs. If we are to define global Britain, it is not just going to be done by the people on the Conservative Benches; it has to be something on which Members of this Parliament engage across a whole range of different forums.

Alec Shelbrooke: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Richard Benyon: I will give way very quickly, and then I will conclude.

Alec Shelbrooke: Would my right hon. Friend summarise it in this way? The UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is one of the most respected delegations because of the strength and depth of its knowledge, and if this was to pass, along with changes to the NATO PA delegation, we would diminish ourselves on the world stage.

Richard Benyon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

I will conclude by saying that the hon. Member for Ilford South does the work, chairs committees and understands how these things work, and I hope—

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Richard Benyon: I will not, because I have made a promise that I am going to shut up.

I just want to say that I have huge respect for the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) as well. He and I have worked on issues relating to Russia and Magnitsky, and I know his knowledge and understanding, and his courageousness as well. For goodness’ sake, let us be a Parliament that raises ourselves above this. Let us just be a little bit mature and reflect on the fact that, even if we were talking about people who had been on the Conservative Benches, we would actually stand up for something more important than what we are talking about today.

5.17 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): There have been times today when I thought I was listening to my own obituary, and it has been quite moving to hear some kind things said about me. But it is not about me, and it is not about my good friend the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) either; it is about the way in which this Parliament works.

I have had the privilege and the honour to be a Member of Parliament for 27 years. For the vast majority of that time—19 years—I have been a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I have also served on the Defence Committee, the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy briefly, the Liaison Committee and, for more than 10 years, the Committees on Arms Export Controls, formerly known as the Quad. I know that the only way that this Parliament’s Select Committees work and work effectively is if we produce unanimous reports. We get listened to and noticed only when we work on a cross-party basis and leave our party labels behind us. If we get a 9:2 split in a Committee, it is better that the two are from different parties and that the nine are from different parties, than if it goes the other way. That is how Parliament works, and it works effectively.

Dr Julian Lewis: Is this not the heart of the matter? Is it not absurd to be talking about changing the balance between Opposition and Government membership on these Committees? These Committees, with very few exceptions, never divide along party lines. When the Defence Committee meets, I never ever have to consider the fact that it might be me—one Conservative—and five Opposition Members who happen to be in that meeting at the time.

I crave your indulgence for a second, Madam Deputy Speaker, to say that I am very sorry I cannot make a full speech in this debate because I was chairing a Defence Committee meeting that overlapped with a large part of it. However, I have known of the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) since the 1970s, when we were both fighting Trotskyists inside the Labour party. In the 1990s, I remember going with Conservative delegations to eastern Europe, only to find that the hon. Gentleman, as international secretary of the Labour party, had got there before us. The idea that the hon. Gentleman has had to leave the Labour party, when every drop of his blood is infused with the ethos of the Labour party, is absolutely tragic—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

Mike Gapes: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

When a Select Committee produces a report that contains lots of recommendations and says some telling and critical things and it wants the Government to produce a serious response, that Committee has effect if it works collectively and comes to a consensual report. If the Government then gives an inadequate response, the Committee goes back. Under the chairmanship of my very good friend the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), we have been persistent. We have told the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: “This is an inadequate response. We’re not accepting it.” We have made it difficult for them—we are persistent—and we do that on behalf of the House as a whole. We do it not as delegates from the central committee of a political party, but as parliamentarians who have used our knowledge, experience, integrity and persistence to beaver down, get the facts, expose the scandals and the problems, highlight them and then challenge the Executive.

There has been a trend in this Parliament for the Executive to treat Parliament with contempt. We have even passed motions saying that. I will not deviate from the terms of the motion, but we have seen lots of examples of Parliament having to struggle to assert our authority. It would be very strange if today we start to undermine Parliament’s authority in a different way.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) *rose*—

Mike Gapes: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Steve McCabe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I should probably say in passing: you are not dead yet. Can there be anyone who has witnessed this debate who could think that voting for this motion would be to represent the will of the House? If the purpose is to represent the will of the House tonight, do we not know what we should do?

Mike Gapes: I am very grateful. Obviously every Member has to look to their own conscience and presumably their own relationship with their party to decide what they will do, but I must say that I am astonished that there is a Whip on this House business. It is not usual.

I was in the House in 2001, and I recall the attempted removal of the Chairs of the Select Committee on Transport, Gwyneth Dunwoody, and the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Donald Anderson, now Lord Anderson. That was not exactly the same as tonight’s proposal, because there was a vote in a parliamentary Labour party meeting, but it was ultimately a decision for the House as a whole. The House at that time rejected the proposal from the Labour party and those names were reinstated. We are in a different situation today, but the essence of my point is that, regardless of what happens to my personal position, this is about how Parliament and the Select Committees work.

Alec Shelbrooke: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the fundamental point is that the number of Opposition and Government MPs remains the same? He has not crossed the Floor; therefore, the fundamental mathematics remain the same.

Mike Gapes: Yes, that is factually correct. More importantly, this is not just a question of positioning on the Benches. My views on the awful Maduro regime

in Venezuela, the Putin kleptocracy and the barbaric, murderous Assad regime have not changed from when I said those things over recent months. It may be that factors around those have played some role in this—I do not know.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is aware that as a fellow Committee member, he has my full support, and I look forward to him, and indeed, the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), being on the Committee for the rest of the Parliament.

Mike Gapes: I am very grateful. I say to all the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee that I am very pleased and grateful that the Committee decided unanimously that it did not want to have two of its members removed. The Chairman of our Committee wrote a letter to the Chief Whips of the respective parties pointing that out, so there is no doubt about the position of the other nine Committee members with regard to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North.

In conclusion, whatever happens today or with the NATO delegation, I will continue to do the right thing and fight on foreign affairs to represent the best interests of our country abroad and to highlight issues of concern, because those internationalist values that I had when I joined the Labour party 50 years ago are still my internationalist values.

5.26 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I confess that when I read this motion, to begin with I was in two minds. I thought back to my days as a city councillor—I spent 10 years on Hull City Council and was one of two Tories out of 59—and what happened whenever there was a defection. Someone once defected to us—it was a terrible mistake for him and we tried to talk him out of it. When there were two members, we were never split more than 50:50—it got worse when there were three of us. However, when we had a defection on the council, there was always a change in the political make-up of committees and that reflected the change in the political make-up of the chamber. I think back to those days and the way we did things on Hull City Council—we even used to follow our standing orders on Hull City Council. They were not open to interpretation in the way that they seem to be in this place. We used to follow the rules, whether it suited the person who was chairing it or not. However, I digress.

So, I think back to those rules and to the changes here. I have to confess, when the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) crossed the Floor, I thought, “There has been a change in the balance on the Health and Social Care Committee between the Government and the Opposition,” but then I thought, “We elected her for the duration of the Parliament”—and I have to say, given the hon. Lady’s record in chairing that Committee, I do not think that the Government will notice much difference.

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend for that extraordinary compliment.

Andrew Percy: It was meant as such. I thought, “I really hope that my party does not move to remove the hon. Lady”, despite a certain knee-jerk reaction on

[Andrew Percy]

my part when I saw that she had crossed the Floor, precisely because we elected her for the duration of this Parliament and she should serve out her term as Chair of that Committee.

The reason that I will oppose the motion this evening is that it is not based on the balance of this Chamber. What is behind this motion—we in the Chamber must always look for what is behind something—is vindictiveness, as has been stated. There is no doubt that the way in which these two Members departed the Labour party and the policy differences that they have, particularly on foreign policy matters, are behind this move. I am not going to put my name to anything that is based on pure vindictiveness, which is what this is.

A lot of things have been said about the two Members today. I did think that they may have died, because people are not normally that nice about those who are alive. Somebody even accused the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) of a subtlety of thought—I have never thought he has that, which is the reason I like him so much. There is no doubt, however, that in matters of foreign affairs they bring to the Committee a voice and experience that it would be the poorer without. We should consider, too, the views of the Members who serve with them on that Committee, who to a person wish them to remain on the Committee.

For that reason and because of the vindictiveness that lies behind the motion, I will 100% be opposing it this evening, and I hope that other colleagues will do the same and that they will consider carefully whether a three-line Whip should really be imposed in matters concerning the business of the House. I hope that colleagues on the Opposition Benches will reflect carefully on that and will support these two Members. If they do not, I should remind them, as has been said, that it may be these two today, but it could be others in the future.

5.30 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I came to this debate with an open mind, not sure how to vote, and, as a relatively new Member, I do not know either the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) or the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) terribly well on a personal level.

On the argument about over-representation, numbers and fairness, there is a point: the TIG, in particular, but independent Members generally, are over-represented. The SNP, which has 35 Members, has two Select Committee Chairs, whereas the independents, of whom there are 21, also have two. The TIG, in particular, is well represented on Select Committees, holding almost two and a half times as many places as the Lib Dems, who have a similar number of Members. It is a fair point, then, that the Independents have more Select Committee places and that, had this been done at the start, the places held by these two hon. Members would have been contested by Labour Members, not Independent Members.

That said, we have to consider what Select Committees are for. I am lucky to serve on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee and previously to have served on the Health and Social Care Select Committee. The role of a Select Committee is to scrutinise the work of Government. Does having left the Labour party and sitting as an Independent make someone less able to do that? I would argue that it does not. It is clear

that both Members are held in extremely high regard by the Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), and each Committee member. Conservative members of the Committee have said how well they regard these individuals and how well they do their job of scrutinising the Government on matters of foreign affairs and attested to the level of expertise and skill they bring to their role.

Had these two hon. Members crossed the Floor, it would be fair to say that there had been a change in the balance of power in the scrutiny of the Government between Government and Opposition Members, but given that they have remained on the Opposition Benches, I do not think that argument holds any water.

On the motivation behind this move, I have listened to what has been said today, and it seems to me that this essentially is bullying. It is saying to people: “You didn’t agree with us, so you can’t do this job any more, not because you cannot do it, but because we don’t want you to, because we don’t agree with you any more.” That is wrong. I do not want to be part of a vendetta being waged against individuals for taking a stand, particularly a stand against racism, which is something we should all do. I will therefore oppose this motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 199, Noes 134.

Division No. 366]

[5.34 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Dodds, Anneliese
Ali, Rushanara	Dodds, rh Nigel
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Amesbury, Mike	Donelan, Michelle
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Doughty, Stephen
Baker, Mr Steve	Dowd, Peter
Benn, rh Hilary	Drew, Dr David
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Dromey, Jack
Blomfield, Paul	Duddridge, James
Brabin, Tracy	Eagle, Ms Angela
Brennan, Kevin	Eagle, Maria
Brown, Lyn	Efford, Clive
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Elliott, Julie
Bruce, Fiona	Elmore, Chris
Bryant, Chris	Elphicke, Charlie
Burden, Richard	Esterson, Bill
Burgon, Richard	Evans, Chris
Butler, Dawn	Fletcher, Colleen
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Fovargue, Yvonne
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Foxcroft, Vicky
Carden, Dan	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Champion, Sarah	Frith, James
Charalambous, Bambos	Furniss, Gill
Coaker, Vernon	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Cooper, Julie	Gaffney, Hugh
Crausby, Sir David	Gardiner, Barry
Cryer, John	George, Ruth
Cummins, Judith	Gill, Preet Kaur
Cunningham, Alex	Girvan, Paul
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Daby, Janet	Goodman, Helen
David, Wayne	Green, Kate
Davies, Chris	Greenwood, Margaret
Davies, Geraint	Griffith, Nia
Davies, Philip	Grogan, John
De Cordova, Marsha	Haigh, Louise
Debbonaire, Thangam	Hanson, rh David
Dent Coad, Emma	Hardy, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Harper, rh Mr Mark

Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, Clive
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McInnes, Liz
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mills, Nigel
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Norris, Alex
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Pidcock, Laura

Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pow, Rebecca
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sherriff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevens, Jo
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

Nic Dakin and
 Jeff Smith

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Austin, Ian
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Bebb, Guto
 Benyon, rh Richard

Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Leslie*)
 Blackman, Bob
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bryant, Chris
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coffey, Ann
 Collins, Damian
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 Davies, Glyn
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Docherty, Leo
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Gapes, Mike
 Gethins, Stephen
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hughes, Eddie
 Jardine, Christine
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, Julian
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lamont, John
 Leslie, Mr Chris

Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Murray, Ian
 Neill, Robert
 O'Brien, Neil
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Percy, Andrew
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quince, Will
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Streeting, Wes
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Williams, Hywel
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William

Tellers for the Noes:

Angela Smith and
 Jo Swinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That Ian Austin and Mike Gapes be discharged from the Foreign Affairs Committee and Conor McGinn and Catherine West be added.

Business without Debate

PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Dan Carden be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Gareth Snell be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Children Act 1989: Local Authority Responsibilities

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Jo Churchill.*)

5.51 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this pertinent issue. The “no recourse to public funds” condition applies to people who have arrived in the UK in a range of immigration categories, including students and workers and their spouses, who may have the right to work but not to access benefits. There is considerable confusion over what services people with no recourse to public funds are entitled to, which has led to terrible suffering for both adults and children, including many British-born children, who fall through the net of Home Office and local government support.

It was interesting that I was met with departmental confusion simply in trying to secure this debate. Over the past few days, the Department for Education, the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government were each in turn named as the Department that would respond to this debate, and I fear that that speaks to the profound confusion around accountability—namely, which body or institution is responsible for assisting those who have no recourse to public funds.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Lady has secured an important Adjournment debate. Does she agree that the biggest duty of care we owe is to children who rely solely on the state to look after them? All local authorities must understand that that duty includes considering historical cases to ascertain the safety of children in foster care. More than just the bare minimum, that duty means taking responsibility for the welfare of a child who has no one else in their corner, and it is essential that all local authorities understand that. I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this important matter forward for debate. Let us get it right.

Kate Osamor: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who makes a valuable point. I will go on to express similar concerns around the responsibility for looking after such children and the fact that many children have been and are being failed.

Local authorities, in practice, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, on a strategic level, need to get a better grip on the issue and take responsibility for the people affected. The picture is currently bleak, but the legislation is very clear. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 provides a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in need in their local area. This means that local authorities must do whatever possible to ensure sufficient services and measures are in place where a child’s health or development is not being achieved or maintained, or where it is being diminished.

This support is not considered a public fund and includes accommodation, subsistence and help for children with additional needs, such as a disability. For many destitute migrant families, section 17 support is their only opportunity to feed themselves and put a roof over their head. One of the last comprehensive national

studies of children from families with no recourse to public funds receiving section 17 support was in 2015, when an estimated 6,000 children were receiving such support.

I tabled a written question on 12 December 2018 asking the Home Office whether it had any up-to-date data on children in need with no recourse to public funds, based on applications showing a change in their parents' circumstances. I received a response from the Minister for Immigration on 20 December stating that no ideal data was being held "entitled 'Change of Conditions'." I used that wording in my question, and maybe it is not correct, but I was trying to ascertain the data for people whose circumstances have changed. I was told:

"Answering this question would require manual inspection of all family and private life leave to remain applications within the date range. This would incur disproportionate cost to the public purse."

When we are talking about the livelihoods of young children, I would hope the public purse could extend to ensuring that we are looking after those children.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. As well as children, other people in vulnerable situations are being missed in this system. My constituent fled domestic violence elsewhere in the UK, and she found herself being turned away from several shelters. It was only through the diligence of my caseworker that a local charity, Ubuntu, found somewhere for that young woman to go.

Does my hon. Friend agree that a wide range of people could be affected by this lack of recourse to public funds?

Kate Osamor: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. A multitude of people are getting caught in this trap of destitution including, as he clearly spells out, people experiencing domestic violence, which is even more complex. Those people need more support—immediate support—and, in many cases, they need to be made safe. I am grateful for his input and, more importantly, for the civil society group he mentions. I will mention other civil society groups that are doing fantastic work in picking up the public purse and doing the work that the Government are not doing, about which I am quite aggrieved.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): North Lanarkshire Council runs Club 365 so that no child in North Lanarkshire goes hungry. Every child has a meal available every day during the holidays and weekends. It is a great scheme, and other councils should follow that lead.

Kate Osamor: I thank my hon. Friend for that valuable point, from which we learn that not all councils are failing to meet their responsibilities. We have to ensure that such work goes across all councils, rather than being ad hoc, which is unfortunately the case at the moment.

A freedom of information request has shown that 980 individuals with dependants were given a no recourse to public funds condition in 2016-17. The figure grew to 2,100 in the next financial year, and it continues to rise. Between April and December 2018, the figure went up to 3,405.

A child's immigration status should not be affected by their parents' immigration status. It is upsetting that because of their parents' immigration status, a child born in this country can be denied access to benefits, to their wants and needs, and to the comforts they desire. Despite statutory guidance stating that local authorities have a duty to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children and take them into account when planning provision, according to the Children's Society, in 2015 six in 10 families with no recourse to public funds who applied for section 17 support were not supported by their local council.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech in favour of some of the weakest and most vulnerable people in our communities. This is a particularly urgent issue in Glasgow, where the Home Office tried to force contractors such as Serco to enforce a move-on policy. It was actually forcing people out of their homes if their asylum application failed. Many of those people had no recourse to public funds.

We are talking about the risk of mass destitution. Is that not just another example of how the Government's hostile environment has permutations that affect the weakest people in society, even among our communities? Councils often do not have the funds, after years of cuts, to step in immediately and fill that gap.

Kate Osamor: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. I will go on to discuss the hostile environment and its impact on the most vulnerable in society.

Project 17, an east London-based charity that I have been working with, works closely with families who have no recourse to public funds. Its recent report, "Not Seen, Not Heard", documents the experiences of children living under this condition—I call it a "condition" deliberately. In 2018, four of the eight families living in Enfield who attended Project 17—my constituency of Edmonton is in the borough of Enfield—were told to call the emergency out-of-hours service each night for extended periods, rather than being provided with accommodation. It is standard practice for some local authorities to wrongly refuse interim support when they are first approached by families who need help. One woman was forced to call the out-of-hours service every night for almost two months.

The practice of not being child-focused is deeply concerning for a number of reasons. First, families have no stable place to be. When they are asked to leave temporary accommodation by 9.30 am, they wander the streets and have no safe place to go. Secondly, it is unclear how long it will take the out-of-hours service to arrange temporary accommodation following a request in the evening. Thirdly, navigating the out-of-hours service can be difficult for anyone, not least for those who struggle with English as a second language.

I hear reports of more and more families sleeping in the A&E reception. The reasons vary from them not understanding the system to safety, warmth and, basically, being destitute. One such report comes from Joel, who is nine years old. His family were forced to sleep in the accident and emergency department when they were left street homeless after a local authority refused their request for section 17 support. Joel said:

[Kate Osamor]

“We had to keep going to McDonalds every night and we would also go to A&E. I would have to wear my school clothes and sleep like that. They would say we have to sleep where the people wait but it’s just like lights and there is nothing colourful there. The chairs were hard. You know when you just sleep in the waiting room? I felt sorry for my mum because she had to stay up and my head had to be on her lap. She had to stay awake, her eyes were open like 24/7, all night and all day so she could watch over me. It was hard for her but also hard for me.”

Joel mentioned that he slept in his school uniform. That gives us more context on the plight of these children: despite having no fixed abode, Joel sleeps on his mother’s lap every night in an unsafe A&E reception. He is also expected to get up and concentrate in school.

I thank the Education Minister for being here today. I will not focus much on those young children’s experience in school, but I want to highlight the fact that, because a lot of their parents have no access to public funds, they cannot apply for free school meals and other things that would help their day in school.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an important contribution and is outlining the problem. Local authorities have obviously been underfunded in relation to childcare for a very long time, although the Government will not admit it; they keep telling us that they are putting more money in, but they are starting from a low base.

One thing that struck me in what my hon. Friend said—I have come across cases like this—is that kids, whatever their background, are expected to go to school, but they cannot concentrate on their education if they are worried about where they will live when they come home from school, whether they will get a square meal, whether their father and mother are together and whether there has been domestic violence. We can understand why kids sometimes become resentful in those circumstances. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Kate Osamor: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. What I take from it is that there is a lot of emotional strain on young children, which we must express and, more importantly, acknowledge.

The “Working together to safeguard children 2018” statutory guidance says that, where urgent needs are identified,

“social workers should not wait until the assessment reaches a conclusion before commissioning services”.

As I have illustrated, homelessness or destitution is clearly an urgent need. A refusal to provide interim support has led to a vulnerable woman and her children in Enfield having to stay with a local stranger they met on the street. When I first heard that story, my sadness turned to frustration at the fact that families are having to risk their safety and, ultimately, their dignity.

Why are families—mainly black families—forced to live like that? Would there be more of a public outcry if the victims of this pernicious policy were white? Would I even be standing here speaking on this matter? The hostile environment has a lot to answer for. The Prime Minister has a lot to explain, because it is her legacy that those innocent families are enduring.

Housing is a chronic issue across the UK, but housing scarcity does not remove local authorities’ obligation to

ensure that all children are safe and that their needs are met. Amir, aged eight, described living in shared accommodation for 10 months:

“Where I live now, I’m not comfortable. There’s a lot of noise from people coming up and down the stairs. It’s always dirty. I have no space to do my homework and I don’t feel safe. At 3 am someone broke a door in the house—people were fighting.”

Poor living conditions are commonly reported. Project 17 reported the issues that children raised about the conditions of accommodation provided under section 17. They included living with rats, not having access to cooking facilities, cockroach infestation, antisocial behaviour from other residents in shared accommodation, not having basic furniture such as a table or chair, and not having access to washing facilities.

Civil society groups also report families receiving rates of financial support below the support rate of £37.75, set out in section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The Home Office says that that is the minimum amount required to avoid a breach of the European convention on human rights. Case law suggests that it would be unlawful for local authorities to expect families in receipt of section 17 support to live on less than that amount. It is unreasonable to expect families to live off less than £37.75 per week, and I am concerned that the Department, and thus local authorities, do not adequately recognise the negative impact of lower levels of support on children’s development and wellbeing. Even when support is provided, the current provision is insufficient. Interim support is being refused, and poor accommodation and low rates of financial support are being offered.

How are we helping these families and children? While there are process and practice issues that local authorities need to address, civil society groups across the UK have also reported that local authorities are increasingly deliberately putting barriers in place before supporting these families. Embedded Home Office immigration officials are one method by which that is done. While they can be used constructively, there are more consistent reports of their deployment to intimidate. The perceived threat of immigration enforcement action can deter the most vulnerable families from seeking support that they should be able to access. The management of these officers differs considerably between local authorities. Local authorities must take charge of their use.

Unfortunately, it is not just Home Office officials who intimidate parents. Worryingly, there is a trend of excessive scrutiny—of credit checks, minor inconsistencies being used to undermine a family’s case, allegations of fraud, and even threats of removing children without sufficient cause. I am sorry to say that several families in Enfield were simply misinformed by council officers. One family was even told that Enfield does not provide financial support to families.

How can we work together and help the failing authorities? Looking ahead, I would like to offer some solutions. At a local level, councils can take steps to ensure that such hardship is a thing of the past by signing up to a commitment to ensure the health, development and wellbeing of every child in their area. There is already such a pledge in Project 17’s children’s charter, and the Children’s Society has a charter, too. Project 17’s charter sets out a framework for local authorities working with children in need of support

under section 17. It was derived from the UN convention on the rights of the child, the legal duties defined in the Children Act 1989 and subsequent case law, and what children and young people have told civil society groups about what they want.

I ask the Minister whether the Department will agree to meet Project 17 to discuss its work and its children's charter. At a strategic level, I ask the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, if it is listening, to encourage local authorities to sign up to such a charter, and to clarify the procedures that local authorities must follow, and their obligations, regarding their care for every child in their area. In addition, those in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government can lobby the Prime Minister and their colleagues in the Home Office to end the hostile environment policy, which causes me deep concern. With all due respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, although Brexit is important, it is all we debate in this House, while this important issue only gets an airing in an end-of-day Adjournment debate.

The hostile environment policy builds destitution into the asylum process; destitution is going to happen, and that is wrong. Any attempt to combat destitution will be limited as long as the hostile environment continues. In a sense, people with insecure immigration status being forced to go without money, food or nappies for their children is not a failing in the system; it is the system. Can the Minister really say that he is happy with such a system? If not, will he do everything he can to ensure that the Department looks at the policy and how it affects the most vulnerable?

Ensuring that the needs of children are met should be the utmost priority of local authorities. However, if boroughs are expected to provide this essential support, it is crucial that they be provided with the resources to do so. In an age of austerity, it is imperative that the Government take this matter seriously and open a dialogue with local authorities and other organisations involved, to determine how much annual funding is required.

To put this in context, London boroughs spent £53.7 million in support of an estimated 2,881 households under the no recourse condition in 2016-17, and the estimated average total annual expenditure per borough was nearly £1.7 million, but the case load size in six boroughs led to their having far higher expenditure than the London average—expenditure of £5 million per year. That funding is primarily derived directly from the local authority's social services budget: if pressures are not uniform across London then funding levels to cope with "no recourse" families should not be uniform, but targeted to ensure effective service delivery.

As I come to a close, let me say that I understand that local authorities are under immense pressure from a population with growing and increasingly more complex needs, from year-after-year reductions in Government funding, from the hostile environment policy and from a host of other problems and concerns. That is why no one expects every council to be able immediately and perfectly to adopt every proposal that I and others have made. However, when the stakes are so high for the children and families involved, I ask local authorities, the Minister and the Government to make concrete steps in the right direction.

6.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): Let me begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) on securing this important debate today. A number of colleagues intervened on her, and I thank them for the points that they made—the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen), for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), and for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham). The message that I want to convey to local government is that all children should have access to the support that they need to keep them safe regardless of immigration status. Our main interest tonight is the discharge by local authorities of the important responsibilities under section 17 of the Children's Act 1989, for which I am the Minister responsible. I need first of all to say a word about how the "no recourse to public funds" condition comes into this.

The Project 17 report, which has helped to inspire this debate, concentrates on local authority support for families with no recourse to public funds under section 17 of the 1989 Act. In particular, it focuses on families who are destitute because they cannot claim benefits or access social housing owing to their immigration status. Those families turn to local authorities for support under section 17. They are, though, not the main group to whom the responsibilities under section 17 are applied, and we must not lose sight of the fact that these responsibilities of local authorities involve many more groups, who also have needs.

Some of the questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton and other hon. Members are based entirely on immigration status issues. I will ensure that they are brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration, and I have her assurance that she will write to hon. Members in response to questions that were entirely immigration related.

What it is perfectly sensible for me to do this evening is to set out the main points of the Government's position, as approved by Parliament, when it comes to the "no recourse to public funds" condition. The position is quite simply that those seeking to establish their family life in the UK must do so on a basis that prevents burdens on the taxpayer and that promotes integration. That position has been approved by Parliament in primary legislation and is reflected in the immigration rules. The application of the "no recourse to public funds" condition to those with a temporary immigration status is, therefore, a standard means of pursuing that legitimate objective.

The Project 17 report and hon. Members who have spoken this evening have drawn attention to the fact that, for a certain group of families, the "no recourse to public funds" condition did not used to be automatically applied to their status, and that it is now. That is true. In their changes to the immigration rules in 2012, the Government acted to correct an anomaly whereby some groups were not expected to be self-sufficient. That was entirely necessary to ensure that the Government could fulfil their intention for incoming families to establish themselves here without needing access to our limited public funds.

The Government's view is that access to public funds should still be available, but not automatically. For those now coming to the UK, therefore, no recourse to

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

public funds is a standard position. But I must make it clear that there is scope in immigration legislation for family life and private life applicants to request that no recourse to public funds should not be imposed, or that it should be lifted once imposed. Those applications are given very careful consideration in the light of the applicant's circumstances and the welfare of any children involved. Of course, that does not apply to those who have been refused leave to remain in the UK and whose appeals have been turned down by the courts. These individuals are expected to leave the UK and are not eligible for support from public funds.

Sometimes there are barriers to individuals leaving the UK—for example, the difficulty of obtaining documentation from their own national authorities. Parliament has accepted that, as a result, they may qualify for local authority support where that is necessary to avoid breaches of human rights obligations, and where children are involved. This is the group whose support needs are brought to our attention by the Project 17 report. The Government's view is that the right framework exists for providing them with support. There will be occasions when the support is provided in order to avoid a breach of the adult's human rights. There will also be occasions when support is provided under section 17 of the Children Act, because it is the specific needs of the children of the family that call for such supportive intervention. This means that such families are supported by local authorities, even if they have no recourse to public funds. However, these decisions are made locally, according to an individual local authority's protocol and assessments.

Although the Government's position is that those seeking to establish their family life in the UK must do so on a basis that prevents burdens on the taxpayer and promotes integration, nothing in any of the legislation prevents the provision of support to those in genuine need, whatever their immigration status and at whatever stage they are in their migration journey. The Government have an impressive track record of ensuring that those who are in genuine need are supported appropriately.

The Home Office provides specific support under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to families with children who have come to seek asylum and cannot provide for their own needs. Individuals and

families with children may also be granted recourse to public funds even if their leave would otherwise be subject to an NRPF condition, where there are compelling circumstances relating to destitution, the welfare of a child or exceptional financial circumstances. Local authorities may also provide basic safety net support to families with children using their own powers, if it is established that there is a genuine need that triggers an obligation under human rights or children's legislation.

The hon. Lady mentioned local government funding. I recognise that Enfield and other local authorities are delivering in a challenging environment, and have had to make really tough, difficult choices as they work to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. I welcome the further £410 million in 2019-20 for local authorities to invest in adult and children's social care services. That is on top of the more than £200 billion until 2020 made available at the 2015 spending review for councils to deliver local services, including children's services. Of this, Enfield is currently forecast to have core spending power of £236 million for 2019-20—an increase of about 1.7% on the previous year. I would like to assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that my Department is continuing to work closely with the sector to build the strongest evidence base for long-term children's services funding as part of the spending review.

The hon. Lady mentioned free school meals. Let me reiterate—it is important to put this on the record, because many people will be listening to this debate outside this place—that where a child is in need, for example because they are homeless or the parent cannot afford to meet the family's basic needs, families with the NRPF condition are not prevented from getting additional help from their local authority's social services department. To establish eligibility for assistance, the local authority must undertake a child in need assessment. It is clear that many local authorities are doing the right thing and delivering free school meals for those children.

Again, I thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate. We have a shared ambition, I think, to ensure that the most vulnerable children have the safety net and stability that they need to enable them to thrive in their homes and in their families.

Question put and agreed to.

6.26 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 19 March 2019

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

Leaving the EU: Health and Social Care

9.30 am

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of leaving the European Union on the UK's health and social care sector.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to the debate, and all hon. Members who have come along to take part in it. I put on the record my sincere thanks to Robert McGeachy of Camphill Scotland, to Craig Wilson and Gareth Jones from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, and to Andrew Strong of Alliance Scotland, for all their help and support in preparing for the debate.

The debate's origins are in my private Member's Bill, which I tabled in November 2018. It sought from the UK Government provision for an independent evaluation of the effects on the health and social care sector of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. Like many others, my Bill will almost certainly fall this Friday, without ever seeing the light of day or being debated. I was always prepared for the likelihood that the Bill would fall because of a lack of time, so that does not surprise me. What did surprise me, however, was my Bill's impact on the organisations that deliver vital health and social care to so many vulnerable and needy people day-in, day-out right across the United Kingdom.

Currently, no fewer than 102 different third sector organisations, trade unions and charities have publicly supported the measures in the Bill. Not a single one of those organisations believes that Brexit will be good for the health of the people of these nations. Moreover, they all support the idea that an independent evaluation of the effects of Brexit on the health and social care sector should be carried out, and that it should examine the sustainability of public funding, the challenges faced by the workforce, and the efficiencies and effectiveness of the sector.

I will not test everyone's patience by naming all 102 organisations that have lent their support, but I can assure hon. Members that they cover every part of the United Kingdom. They include the Western Isles Carers, Users and Supporters Network, which is based in Stornoway, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, Disability Wales, and the London-based Mentor UK, which does great work with young people on alcohol and drug misuse. Those organisations share my concerns, and I want to put on the record my sincere thanks to each and every one of them for contacting and supporting me.

In the light of the extremely high levels of concern among those delivering services at the sharp end, I did not want this hugely important issue simply to disappear from the radar on Friday, when my private Member's Bill will almost certainly fall because of a lack of time. I

felt that I owed something, not just to those organisations, but to the most vulnerable in our society: those with disabilities; children and young people; older people; unpaid carers; those living with long-term health conditions; and those who rely on the vital contributions made by the highly valued EU citizens who provide for our health and social care needs right across these islands. Their voices are not being heard, or their views properly considered. I felt that I owed it to those people to ensure that the very serious issues that the health and social care sector will face post Brexit are examined and discussed in this place so that, 18 months from now, no one can claim not to have known what the sector or the service users were saying.

Every one of us knows that there is already a crisis in social care across the United Kingdom, with a seemingly relentless pressure on funding. Our population is ageing and has increasingly complex care needs, and we face major challenges in the retention and recruitment of the workforce required to meet those needs. One would have thought that, in the immediate aftermath of the EU referendum in June 2016, the Government would at the very least have made a top priority of safeguarding the health and care of their citizens. Guaranteeing a secure supply of the vital medicines that are manufactured in the EU, or that have to be transited through it, would have been a good starting point, particularly as the Department of Health and Social Care's own estimate states that two thirds of the medicines that we use in the UK come from or via the European Union.

One would have thought that securing access to the essential pool of labour that we require now, and will increasingly need in future, would have been at the top of the to-do list, or thereabouts. Yet in March 2019, just 10 days from possibly crashing out chaotically, we are still discussing the dangers that the weakest and most vulnerable in our society will face as a result of Brexit, and particularly the type of Brexit that the UK Government have chosen to pursue. It is one in which their ideologically driven, self-imposed red lines will deliberately sever the essential link between the health and social care sector and the pool of labour on which it depends. Exactly two years ago, Professor Ian Cumming, the chief executive of Health Education England, said:

"Our biggest risk in the short term, as a result of Brexit, may be in the non-professionally qualified workforce across health and social care".

Without exception, every single organisation that offered me support for this debate or prepared a briefing ahead of it highlighted the enormous damage that Brexit, and particularly the end of freedom of movement, would do to their ability to deliver care and undertake essential medical research—every single one. They include Cancer Research, CLIC Sargent, the Local Government Association, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, researchers from the University of Birmingham, Macmillan Cancer Support, the British Medical Association and Age UK, to name but a few. They have all said that the health and social care sector values and wants to retain its EU staff, and wants nothing to stop it recruiting more of those hugely valued and important staff members in future.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): It is timely that the hon. Gentleman is bringing this issue to the forefront once again. On healthcare, one of the

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

things that certainly worries my constituents and me is the potential for the national health service to be open to predators post Brexit. As I am sure he knows, on one hand, the care side of the NHS is vastly underfunded, while on the other hand, people cannot afford care to look after their families, including elderly parents and others. Research and development in medicine and collaboration with Europe are also important, and two universities in Coventry that engage in a lot of that have voiced concerns to me about it. Does he agree with those concerns?

Brendan O'Hara: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The fear in the sector and among care users is palpable. A recent article in *The Lancet*, which backs up his points, states:

"All forms of Brexit involve negative consequences for the UK's leadership and governance of health, in both Europe and globally".

For me, that sums up the hon. Gentleman's point exactly. I hope that he agrees.

We cannot get ourselves into a situation in which there is a barrier between the health and social care sector and that pool of labour. Age UK recently said that

"our care workforce is in no position to withstand the loss of good...care workers, wherever they come from."

The King's Fund said:

"Widespread and growing nursing shortages now risk becoming a national emergency and are symptomatic of a long-term failure in workforce planning, which has been exacerbated by the impact of Brexit and short-sighted immigration policies."

The message from the sector to the Government is therefore clear and unambiguous: we simply cannot afford to cut ourselves off from the labour markets on which we have become so reliant and on which we will depend more and more in future. One look at the frontline of the health and social care sector and its delivery, and it is easy to see how heavily it depends on workers from outside the United Kingdom. Without access to those workers, the UK home market will be required to fill the gaps, but people are not queuing up to fill the vacancies that exist now, so do the Government believe that somehow post Brexit people will suddenly become available for work in the care sector?

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. He talks about the workforce, but is it not natural that as the economies of other countries get stronger, the workers who would have come here will be lost to natural erosion as they no longer want to come to the UK? The emphasis needs to be placed on training our own young people and making it advantageous for them to join the health service.

Brendan O'Hara: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, but we have to compete for workers and to have an attractive package for people to come here to work, but if we take ourselves out of the game, we are no longer in the competition—we will have cut ourselves off. There are issues relating to retraining and getting people into the sector, but unfortunately the demographics are incredibly skewed against that happening, certainly in the short and medium term. I will come on to some of the statistics.

At the end of June 2018, NHS England had more than 100,000 unfilled posts. The NHS regulator has stated that such vacancies will become even more commonplace during the remainder of 2018-19. Both the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Social Services Council have found that 40% of social care organisations report unfilled staff vacancies. There is no professional analysis out there that does not estimate that the demand for care will only increase in future. The King's Fund, the Health Foundation and the Nuffield Trust have predicted that NHS England staff shortages could rise from 100,000 to almost a quarter of a million by 2030. That is more than one in six of service posts. At the end of last year, Care England estimated that by 2035 an additional 650,000 care jobs will be required just to keep pace with the demands of our ageing population.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. On the statistics, did he establish whether it was also estimated what the level of vacancies was likely to be were we to remain in the EU over that 10-year period, given that there are 100,000 vacancies now, despite the UK being a member for 40 years?

Brendan O'Hara: I realise that many things have been blamed on the European Union, but the demographics and the population outcome of the UK cannot be blamed on it. What one can say about the present situation, however, is that we can predict that it will not get any better in the short or medium term. I think that Skills for Care has calculated that a quarter of the health and social care workforce are aged 55 and over. They will be due to retire sometime in the next 10 years, which will mean another 320,000 vacancies that need to be filled.

Let us not kid ourselves: we are facing a looming crisis. Equally, it is a crisis of the UK Government's making, because they chose to go down this road of a hard Brexit. They want to take us out of the single market and the customs union; they chose to end the freedom of movement that has done so much to enhance the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the UK over the past 40 years; and they did so knowing the consequences that such actions would have.

I therefore look forward to the Minister explaining exactly why the Government allowed that to happen and what their long-term plan is to fill those hundreds of thousands of vacancies facing health and social care in the coming years. If that plan includes yesterday's launch by NHS England of the campaign to encourage GPs to come out of retirement, then heaven help us.

The primary purpose of this debate is to focus on the enormous challenges that will face our biggest asset, the people, whether they work in or rely on the sector, but as important as recruitment, retention and the level of care we provide is the issue of medicines and access to research. As I said, I have been inundated with representations from charities and third sector organisations, which are all extremely worried about the future of medical research and the ability to source vital drugs and treatment, particularly if we have a chaotic crashing out of the European Union. Who would have believed that in 2019 we would have a UK Government advising people to stockpile medicines? Those medicines might be life-saving, but we all took it for granted that they would be there if and when necessary. Now people are stockpiling, in 2019—it beggars belief.

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): The hon. Gentleman ought to be absolutely clear: we are not advising people to stockpile medicines. That is alarmist, and he should not be saying it. That is not what the Government are doing.

Brendan O'Hara: I will rephrase that. The Government are advising the stockpiling of medicines—perhaps not by individuals, but the Minister and the Government have advised the stockpiling of medicines.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Through my hon. Friend, I ask the Minister this: if the Government are not stockpiling, why on earth are they ordering all those extra fridges?

Brendan O'Hara: Perhaps the Minister will answer that when he gets to his feet to respond.

How in the name of the wee man did the United Kingdom ever end up in this appalling, self-inflicted mess, in which the sick, the elderly and the vulnerable do not know who will be there to look after them, while healthcare professionals are unable to provide the comfort to their patients that everything will be all right? Only last week, Professor Andrew Goddard, president of the Royal College of Physicians, said that

“the public rightly expects candour from health professionals, and we have ultimately been unable to reassure our patients that their care won't be negatively impacted by the UK exit from the EU.”

When the BMA wrote to the Prime Minister on 27 February, it left her in no doubt as to its thoughts, stating that

“there is no clearer immediate threat to the nation's health than the impact of Brexit.”

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the reason why members of the public and our constituents are so concerned is that we have no guarantee against predatory procurement in the NHS or against an interrupted supply of medicines, so how can people be reassured?

Brendan O'Hara: I could not have put it better myself. I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

Much more could be said on this topic, but I am keen for other Members to have their say. I will conclude with a number of questions, in addition to my earlier one, for the Minister to address when he gets to his feet. What assurances will he offer to each of the 102 organisations that supported my private Member's Bill that the health and social care sector will not be adversely impacted by the UK leaving the European Union? What plans are being put in place to guarantee that the sector will be able to recruit the workforce it needs post Brexit? Will he support moves to amend the £30,000 minimum income threshold proposed for the immigration Bill, which will be so devastating for those seeking to work in the sector? Will he confirm once and for all that there will be no detrimental impact on the supply of medicines or devices if the UK proceeds to leave the European Union in a catastrophic crashing out? Finally, will he support my call for an urgent, full and independent evaluation of the effects of leaving the European Union on the UK's health and social care sector?

9.49 am

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone, and to follow the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). Above all, this debate allows a reasonable discussion of the issue, which I hope we can have, but I was struck by the similarity between it and last night's debate in the main Chamber. Like the hon. Gentleman, I am aware of constituents who have expressed their great problems in getting drugs for two conditions, in particular: insulin for diabetes and the drugs required for cystic fibrosis. Cystic fibrosis is a particularly horrible disease that requires a continuous supply of drugs, so I can understand the concerns.

Throughout all the discussions on this matter, I have been conscious of the lack of objectivity from anyone, including the medical profession. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that those in the profession can stand aside and take an independent line, but I do not believe that is true or that what they say is necessarily helpful. Allow me to pick up where the Minister left off: the guidance published by the Government for pharmacists and members of the public is not to stockpile medicines. As part of the Brexit contingency measures, the Department of Health and Social Care has asked drug manufacturers to ensure they have a six-week buffer stock, on top of the three months already in place, but the public do not need to stockpile medicines.

Mr Gregory Campbell: During a recent episode of “Question Time”, the new presenter Fiona Bruce asked the audience how many of them were stockpiling. Almost nobody put their hand up, much to the embarrassment of the BBC.

John Howell: The hon. Gentleman has much more leisure time than me, as he can still watch the BBC. I cannot remember when I last watched it, but I am pleased to join him in condemning its attitude. He makes a strong point. During the Brexit campaign, the health sector was dominated by the promise on the side of the famous bus, but equally, the remain campaign has lied through its teeth in saying many things. I have no real confidence that, if we were to have a second referendum, we would at any stage be able to have a debate free of exaggeration.

A constituent contacted me to say that he had been to a local hospital and was astonished to see that as a result of Brexit—although it has not happened yet—the ward was closing and had lost a large number of staff. I decided I would not let that go, but would find out the facts. I spoke to the matron who ran the ward in question. She said to me, “That is absolute rubbish. We have a full ward; this is a normal cycle of people's leave and it has nothing at all to do with Brexit.” If we make Brexit arguments we need to ensure we have a rational and objective discussion, which so far we have not been able to have.

Brendan O'Hara: To have a rational and objective discussion, we have to rely on experts and take evidence from the people in the field. The contributors are objective: Macmillan Cancer Support, the British Medical Association, Cancer Research UK and CLIC Sargent have come to us to say there is a major problem. I presume the hon. Gentleman would not say that they are partisan players.

John Howell: I am not sure that I agree with the hon. Gentleman. As politicians, we have the principal duty to explore the situation. There will be times when we need expert opinions, but I am complaining about the debate and discussion in this country where people on both sides use the issue as a football and produce exaggerated claims.

I have a great deal of sympathy regarding mental health, an issue on which I have done an enormous amount of campaigning. Outside the EU, there is another organisation with responsibility for mental health, the Council of Europe, on which I serve as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly. The Council of Europe has an expert committee on mental health, which is nothing to do with the EU. That means that if we leave the EU, there is a body of evidence and recommendations already in place to take forward mental health issues. That expert committee has produced a reference tool to determine the essential basket of potential rights that an individual should have, to consider whether the human rights of a patient suffering from mental disorders can be maintained with a great deal of dignity. That is an important element that we seem to ignore; we pretend it does not exist, yet many of us spend a huge amount of time at the Council of Europe trying to push forward those sorts of rights, not to take the place of the EU—it works the other way around—but to provide a safety net for people who are suffering from mental disorders.

I want to end on the issue of care. In Henley, the Government have spent about £12 million rebuilding a new hospital that is a model of how to integrate care and medical provision. The hospital was built without any beds; the beds are in the care home at the side of it. That has changed the way that doctors look at the provision of care. They do not immediately think that they should simply send patients to a bed when they can be treated better at home. I have taken various Ministers along to look at that hospital. I do not think it will be affected by Brexit in the slightest. The model set up there is one we can all take as a better way for the system to work in future. I extend an invitation to the Minister to come and see that hospital and how it operates. I hope he will enjoy the experience and see the lack of impact that Brexit will have on the provision of service.

9.59 am

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), whose constituency is almost as picturesque and beautiful as mine, for securing this debate.

The debate is extremely important, since we have had no evaluation, independent or otherwise, of the effect of leaving the EU on the UK's health and social care sector. I heard what the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) said, but the Royal College of Nursing pointed out that the Brexit process is presenting new and exacerbating existing

“challenges around workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention of the existing and future nursing community”.

That should be of concern to everyone in Parliament.

We know the health and social care sector already faces a recruitment and retention crisis, for a whole host of reasons, including poor pay, the lack of recognition of the important work and professional commitment of those in the sector, and the statutory and voluntary

demands of a growing elderly population. We face similar challenges across the UK, but social care in England faces a critical situation, for a variety of reasons. I am therefore extremely disappointed that so few Labour and Conservative Members are present.

The context of this debate is important. The sector relies heavily on workers from the EU, but we have no plan for filling the gaps that are increasingly being left. I have been told in previous debates that no EU workers will necessarily be forced to leave the UK post Brexit if they have been here for a certain number of years and fulfilled certain conditions, but the Minister must recognise that the environment that has been created around Brexit means we will lose many of those workers, in the health and social care sector and beyond. Why should any worker stay in the UK when they can take their skillset and professionalism anywhere they wish in the EU, where they will be welcomed and appreciated? Sadly, that is something they do not feel very often in the current UK environment.

It is deeply concerning, because it is expected that by 2035 we will need 650,000 social care workers in the UK simply to keep pace with rising demand. That is in a sector that, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute, already faces a range of challenges. The challenges in England are well documented, but we in Scotland are not immune to them. The Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Social Services Council found that more than 38% of social care services report unfilled staff vacancies, even before Brexit has happened. Around 104,000 of the current health and social care workforce are EU nationals, and at any one time around 110,000 positions are unfilled. In addition, about 320,000 of those working in the sector are 55 or older, so they will retire in the next 10 years or so.

The situation is alarming, and the strains are affecting not just our social care sector but our entire national health service across the UK—our nurses, our doctors and our GPs. The situation could throw rural care in particular into real danger. For example, one in five of our rural GPs in Scotland is an EU national, and it seems likely that EU-qualified clinicians are already located disproportionately in hard-to-fill specialisms and shortage occupations such as radiology.

Medical isotopes are used to diagnose and treat cancers. In 2016-17, the NHS used radioactive materials in nearly 600,000 procedures. Those medical radioisotopes have a short half-life and cannot be stockpiled, even if one was minded to do so. The Royal College of Radiologists is preparing for difficulties in accessing radioactive materials by planning a lighter workload for the week following the date of our exit from the EU. However, that will hit patients who need and deserve treatment for their cancer. I mentioned that very point in a debate in the main Chamber two years ago and I was jeered and accused of scaremongering, despite the fact that I was simply quoting the Royal College of Radiologists. The jeering has stopped, but the challenges posed by Brexit are in no way receding; they are growing.

I do not have the relaxed attitude to these challenges that the hon. Member for Henley seems to have. Throw into the mix the UK Government's inability to guarantee uninterrupted supplies of medicine, and the future looks grim indeed. That inevitably will affect our ability to look after the vulnerable and ill people in our communities in every constituency—the people who need care and

the people who need support. Of course, that is in the wider context of NHS services across the UK being open to predatory procurement, which the UK Government refuse to guarantee will not happen.

No evaluation has been undertaken of the effect of leaving the EU on the UK's health and social care sector. That is an absolute disgrace. The Government of the day have a duty to serve and protect those they seek to represent. Too little attention has been given to the calamitous situation that awaits us unless this Brexit madness, which has been characterised by confusion, incompetence, a complete breakdown of Cabinet responsibility and not a little arrogance, ends. Those who will bear the brunt and pay the price have not featured prominently enough in this unfolding tragedy. Today, their voices and concerns are being set out clearly. The Government should—they simply must—listen and do all they can to protect our health and social care sector, on which we all at some point will rely.

10.6 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to speak about this issue. I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) on setting the scene, and I support his request for the Minister and the Government to look at this issue. When I look at my constituency and at Northern Ireland more widely, I understand the criticality of this issue. So many Brexit issues need attention and urgent answers, but over and above Brexit, the NHS requires immediate attention.

I am pleased to see the Minister in his place; he seems to have been a fairly regular presence in Westminster Hall this last while in debates about issues that are his responsibility. It is also nice to see the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper), in her place. I look forward to her contribution, too.

My heart sank when an NHS staff member said to me, "Jim, being in the A&E is like living and serving in a war zone." That shocked me and underlined the fact that we need urgent changes and more support for our NHS, not simply with respect to Brexit but to ensure the survival of that incredible system, which is overloaded, overworked and underfunded.

I am gravely concerned about the mental health of our NHS staff on the frontline, because of the sheer volume of stress they face. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) referred to mental health issues, in which I have a deep interest, as do other Members present. We should consider the mental health not only of patients but of staff. There is a lot of stress in Westminster at the moment because of Brexit, but stress among staff on the frontline of the NHS is at an all-time high.

Nurses are working on their off days; they feel so guilty that colleagues are working on understaffed wards and they are so interested in the job—it is a vocation for them—that they stay on, sometimes without the remuneration they deserve. That may be admirable in the short term, but in the long term it means we have exhausted staff, who work too many hours without enough rest. Their home lives and their family lives suffer as a result. The long-term mental health implications for those who are so focused on helping others that they neglect themselves must be addressed.

To address that, we need better working conditions, less reliance on the bank, and simply more staff working on the floor in wards and taking appointments. We

need more GPs, so people can see a doctor when they need to instead of going to A&E because the next doctor's appointment is not for three weeks. We must ensure that all NHS staff are able to stay in place, or that scenario will worsen. I welcome the Government's recent NHS long-term plan, which confirmed that the workforce implementation plan expected in April will set out arrangements to help overseas recruitment. The Government have acknowledged the issue and are seeking to act in a positive way. When he responds to the debate, perhaps the Minister will provide some idea of where that is going.

EU nationals make up a sizeable proportion of the health and social care workforce and represent 10% of doctors, 8% of social care staff and 6% of nurses in the UK. They are an integral part of the NHS workforce. It is therefore recommended that the Government take steps to understand any potential impact of ending freedom of movement on the health and social care workforce. There are many options for how best to shape that workforce after the UK leaves the EU, but given our historical reliance on the recruitment of EU workers, it is important that the impact of ending freedom of movement is understood, and we must start a conversation immediately about how best to future-proof the sector. This debate provides us with an opportunity to highlight those issues, and it allows the Minister to respond with, I hope, the answers we seek.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute referred to many organisations—there are a large number of such organisations, and it would probably have taken him five or 10 minutes to name them all if he had tried. Specifically, however, Macmillan Cancer Support highlighted that improvements in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer mean that more people are surviving it or living for longer. Some 2.5 million people across the UK live with cancer, and that number is expected to rise to 4 million by 2030. Such figures are great news because they show that there have been significant advances in cancer research, cancer drugs and care, and that our NHS and healthcare system can do lots of good things and help people.

Given the need to support our growing population, we need an immigration system that complements the NHS's long-term ambitions to improve cancer care across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Across the wider workforce, primary and acute medical and social care staff shortages are impacting on people's access to cancer care in hospitals and the community. There is a significant variation in vacancy rates, which in many places can be as high as 15% for chemotherapy nurses. In some areas, those shortages in cancer nursing staff are exacerbated by the fact that there is an ageing workforce—the hon. Members for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and for Argyll and Bute referred to the fact that the workforce is ageing, and we must prepare for that as well.

In many cancer services, more than 40% of professionals are due to retire in the next 15 years. That issue poses a significant challenge for our current workforce so we should focus specifically on those services, and on those who will be retiring and those who will replace them. That is why this debate is so important. There is a clear need to recruit and train younger staff in specialist and chemotherapy nursing, and that would go some way to countering that shortfall. Will the Minister consider

[Jim Shannon]

that issue? Will he also consider writing off the student debts of those who serve in local GP clinics for five years? Similarly, the nursing bursary should be reviewed and uplifted, and perhaps we should also consider perks to encourage occupational health therapists to stay in their positions.

I think we have to consider something new when addressing these issues. This is not just about ensuring that immigration fills some of the gaps in our workforce, because we must also address the needs of local people and provide opportunities. Given the nature of our society and jobs, perks can be a methodology for doing that—it is not wrong to offer such measures, because if they bring in the right calibre of staff and help people to stay in their posts, that must be good news. In conclusion, all the issues that I have raised must be priority considerations for the NHS, especially in the light of us leaving the EU, and I seek clarification from the Minister about how they will be addressed.

10.14 am

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to see a fellow member of the Procedure Committee in the Chair, Mr Bone. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) for securing this debate and for the immense amount of work that he has put into his excellent European Union Withdrawal (Evaluation of Effects on Health and Social Care Sectors) Bill, which I wholeheartedly support.

I had not intended to mention stockpiling today but, like my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), I was taken aback by how relaxed the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) was about the issue. My wife has type 1 diabetes and relies on insulin to stay alive, so we in the Linden household are not quite as relaxed about the possibility of insulin shortages. I will leave that point with the Minister.

Despite what some might say, there is no good Brexit, and no deal is as good as the one we have now as members of a 28-strong bloc—I am pretty sure the Minister agrees with that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute said, our withdrawal from the European Union will have profound effects on the health and social care sectors. This morning I will focus my remarks solely on the impact of limiting free movement of people, and the disastrous consequences that that will have on the health and social care sector.

As Members of Parliament and leaders in our communities, we have a responsibility to be up front and enthusiastic about the benefits of immigration. If we are not, major challenges will come down the track, not just for our economy and public services, but especially for social care. For example, we know that the number of people with dementia is expected to increase by about 40% over the next 12 years, which could mean more people living in care homes. Who will provide that care?

It may be a harsh reality, but the vast majority of people with whom I went to school do not generally like the idea of working in care homes. Quite simply—I would have put this point to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson), but he is no longer in his place—for many people of my generation, the idea of personal care, serving meals or feeding people is, sadly, not attractive. I wish to change that perception, but

given the current economic climate, we must understand that young people are not moving towards caring as a career choice. The Government should work to tackle that, but it is a reality we must face. If we do not confront the reality of our ageing population, we will have serious difficulties with workforce planning and meeting the demographic challenges in the years to come.

I also wish to mention some concerns raised by charities that I am proud to work alongside, particularly Children's Hospices Across Scotland, which does amazing work for children who have life-shortening or life-limiting conditions. Hon. Members will also be aware of the sterling campaign by CLIC Sargent on child cancer costs. We know that leaving the EU without a deal could lead to significant disruption to the economy in the short and medium term. CLIC Sargent has raised legitimate concerns that the impact of Brexit on the economy, and any associated increase in food, travel and energy costs, will lead to increased costs for young cancer patients and their families. When he responds to the debate, will the Minister outline what assessment has been made of the financial impact of leaving the European Union on young cancer patients, and what measures are being implemented to mitigate that?

I am concerned that Brexit will undermine our efforts to meet those profound social care challenges, which is why it is vital that the Bill sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute receives Government support and is expedited through the House. He is right to say that the shambles of the private Members' Bill process makes it likely that the Bill will die at the end of the week, but if the UK Government are serious about Brexit meaning Brexit, and about us making a success of it, they should support the Bill and ensure that we confront these challenges. If we ignore them, people will look back on us and say, "That was the Parliament that abdicated responsibility." By taking part in this debate, I wish to place firmly on the record that I did my bit to make sure that we face up to those challenges.

10.19 am

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is an absolute pleasure and a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) for his thorough and passionate account of why a clear focus on the health and social care system is so important. That will be true beyond Brexit, but Brexit is our immediate concern, which is why we must give it serious attention.

The NHS does fantastic work. I had the privilege of working for four years in Argyll and Bute, covering the hospital there as a forensic psychologist. Rural hospitals in Argyll and Bute are excellent and innovative in their practice. Even 10 to 15 years ago, when I was working there, we were grappling with the internet and how to engage in therapy on timescales that would best suit patients. The use of technology in those rural areas was innovative, and I commend the NHS staff I worked with, many of whom still work there, for their work to provide fantastic patient care.

Two weeks ago there was an extraordinary meeting when seven all-party parliamentary groups came together to look at health and social care. I am fortunate enough to have been the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability since the 2015 general election. The

chairs of the all-party groups were there and we brought in carers and service users to speak about their concerns. There is growing concern in Parliament about the NHS, and about the implications of a no-deal Brexit, particularly on medicines regulation and our ability to staff hospitals and provide excellent care, as we always have. It was an important and informative meeting and I suggest to the Government that a further meeting might come out of it, with the all-party group chairs, to hear the views of the service users and carers who attended, and to take forward some of their recommendations. They are on the frontline and know what happens day to day in our services. I am sure that they will be extremely informative and constructive if they have an opportunity to meet the Minister.

When I was a member of the Health and Social Care Committee, we conducted an inquiry into Brexit, medicines, medical devices and substances of human origin. A particular concern was raised about our ability to lead on research trials, and about patients' ability to participate in trials, particularly on diseases that are perhaps less common but where there is a need to pull in subjects or participants from a huge area such as the EU. Currently, patients here can participate in such trials, and we can also lead on some of them. That has brought some of the best scientists and researchers to the United Kingdom. I would be interested to hear from the Minister how we will ensure that continues. Also, how will our constituents continue to have access to such important trials, rather than having to wait until some way down the line to get new and innovative medications?

During that inquiry, the Select Committee urged the Government particularly to look at regulatory alignment and the implications of no deal. We raised concerns about the lack of references to Brexit in the Department's single departmental plan. It would be useful to have an update from the Minister on that work, which I am sure is ongoing. There was also some concern about protecting the UK's position globally in relation to pharmaceuticals. On the matter of full membership of the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use, reassurance was sought that that matter would be taken up at the earliest opportunity. It would be extremely helpful if the Minister gave an update on that.

The Select Committee recommended negotiating a close relationship with the EU, including associate membership of the European Medicines Agency, and supported the Government's intention in that respect. Our report stated:

"Failure to achieve an ongoing collaboration would signal the triumph of political ideology over patient care."

I say firmly to everyone involved, from all parties in Parliament, that patient care must be placed firmly before political ideology. The NHS is one of our most prized institutions—for everyone across the United Kingdom—and must remain so. Our overriding message was that almost all the evidence received suggested that "the UK should continue to align with the EU regulatory regimes" for medicines and devices. An update from the Minister would be helpful.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), who is not currently in his place, made an interesting intervention about predatory procurement. I understand that we do not want to be alarmist in Parliament, but

patients bring such concerns to us, so reassurance from the Minister would be helpful. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) spoke eloquently about his constituency and talked about diabetes and cystic fibrosis. Many constituents go to their Member of Parliament seeking reassurance about the implications of Brexit for their medicinal needs. The hon. Gentleman also spoke about mental health, which we cannot speak about enough in Parliament, because for many years it was never broached. I am the Scottish National party's spokesperson on mental health, so I thank him for raising it, because I consider it important for it to be mentioned in as many debates as possible. It has an impact in every part of our lives, and if we are to provide holistic care it must have parity with physical health in all we do.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) spoke about medicinal isotopes. There is a huge pharmaceutical industry presence in my constituency, and I have been in touch with those businesses in the past month. There continue to be grave concerns about alignment and regulation for the industry. I think it is the continuing uncertainty that puts such a burden on businesses.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran also said that one in five GPs are EU nationals and talked about our heavy reliance on workers from the EU, who do a fantastic job in the NHS. A number of witnesses to the Health and Social Care Committee told us just the same. We of course do not want to lose their valuable skills and expertise. They have built bonds with patients—or, if they work in the social care sector, with the people they care for—over a long period of time, and that cannot be overestimated. We must never undervalue their contribution. They need their place to be secure. Many of those workers do not earn over the £30,000 threshold, so we need a specialist case to ensure that the expertise stays in the country to support those vulnerable constituents of ours who need it.

Something that was repeatedly raised with the Select Committee—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) also mentioned this—is the fact that we have come to rely on high levels of staffing from the EU and elsewhere. It has been mooted that if we cannot attract staff from the EU, we could attract them from India or perhaps Africa. Those places in particular need their trained staff, and something must be done about training for young people in this country who want to go into health and social care settings.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend makes a good point, but she will be aware that many people who have qualifications are currently not allowed to work by the Home Office. Two of my constituents worked in a care home and it would have loved to have them back, but the Home Office says no. Does she share my frustration that the Government say one thing on the one hand, and then something else on the other?

Dr Cameron: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Things have to be joined up exactly so that we can provide the continuity of care that patients need so much. There are thousands of excellent, high-achieving students who particularly want to study medicine, as well as psychology, occupational therapy and other occupations that are badly needed to support our NHS and our community health services. We must invest in

[Dr Cameron]

these young people as we go forward. That point was made strongly by the hon. Member for Strangford, who is always an extremely good advocate for his constituency.

I look forward to the Minister's response on social care, on medicines regulation and on the other issues we have spoken about. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) also expressed concern about social care and those working in care homes. We must make that a more attractive occupation for people coming from school. I did it for a few years before going into clinical psychology; it is a rewarding occupation where carers build a real bond with those they care for. I ask the Minister to meet the APPGs, and I say to him very sincerely that we want to collaborate in a constructive way.

10.31 am

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) for bringing this time-sensitive subject to the Chamber for debate. It is my pleasure to speak on what must be the most important subject of the day.

It is true that in June 2016, the majority of people in the UK voted to leave the EU. However, they did not vote for a worsening of health and social care provision, for reduced access to medicines or for fewer nurses, doctors and care workers. They did not vote to damage medical research or to leave vulnerable people without social care. It is therefore important that we turn to some of the specifics and seek reassurance on behalf of the British people.

The question of medicines has been much talked about, not least this week in this place. Coming from a pharmaceutical background, I am extremely worried about the Government's complacency. This is not about scaremongering; it is about listening to the real concerns of patients, patient groups and medical professions. Contrary to the comments made by the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), it is not only helpful but vital for those groups to raise their serious concerns. I agree with the Minister that not only is it not Government advice to stockpile medication, but it is dangerous for patients to do so. One can understand why they might be driven to do so, however; it is an indication of the Government's failure to provide reassurance on that point.

Medication forms an important part of NHS care. Each year, 1 billion prescriptions are dispensed by community pharmacies. For patients with long-term conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, epilepsy and many more, daily medication is an essential part of staying well. Whether we are talking about medication to treat cancer or heart disease, medication for the management of high blood pressure or the occasional prescription for antibiotics, we take it for granted that the medication that we need will be available when we need it.

The pharmaceutical industry is, by definition, an international business. Key ingredients are often manufactured in India and the far east, and transported to specialist manufacturing plants. Many of the plants that supply the UK are located elsewhere in Europe, and the finished products have to be imported into the UK and distributed to hospitals and pharmacies for use with patients. The entire process has to be carefully managed to ensure that everything happens in a timely way. That is particularly true for medicines with short

shelf lives, such as the lifesaving EpiPens needed by those with severe allergies. It is also true for medicines with special storage requirements, such as insulin, which has to be kept refrigerated.

Patricia Gibson: A number of us are deeply concerned that because some people in this place are enthusiastic about Brexit, they are wilfully blind to some of the challenges that the hon. Lady is talking about. Does she agree?

Julie Cooper: I absolutely agree. We cannot dismiss concerns just because we do not like their implications; it would be irresponsible to do so. Delivery into the UK is currently a just-in-time service for the pharmaceutical industry, for many of the reasons I have mentioned. It is true that in the long term, there is some manufacturing capacity in the UK and we could change the way we get our supplies, but that is not going to happen overnight. It would take a considerable amount of time, given the stringent safety requirements involved in the manufacture of safe medicines, for us to be able to do that.

I am not convinced that we have sufficient supplies or that sufficient steps are in place to ensure an uninterrupted supply. People, including those who rely on insulin, are legitimately worried. Breast cancer care organisations have raised the issue of access to radioactive isotopes needed in the vital treatment of breast cancer. It would be irresponsible of them not to raise that. It is extremely worrying, given that we have only 10 days until the UK leaves the EU, that there are still no arrangements in place. There is no doubt that the UK will need time to establish new supply chains, which is perfectly possible. It is not scaremongering. [Interruption.] I thank the Minister for the comments he has just made from a sedentary position, but we are not convinced. If we were to leave without a deal, the effects would be catastrophic.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we should be worried. Just last night, the Government made changes to the human medicines regulations to bring in a serious shortage protocol, under which Ministers would be able to add medicines to a list and designate a shortage. In practice, it will mean that pharmacists can replace prescribed drugs with others at the pharmacy if there is a shortage. Does that not illustrate what she is saying?

Julie Cooper: The hon. Lady makes a really important point. I would be the first to speak up for the skills of community pharmacists, but that measure is a passing of the buck. It does not put the interests of patients and their safety first and foremost, which is very worrying.

I move on to the life science industry and research, which several Members have touched on. The UK is a world leader in life sciences and a major centre for research. The sector employs 220,000 people and attracts some of the finest research talent in the world. Four of the world's top six universities for the research and study of clinical and health topics are based in the UK. Biotech company clusters and partnerships are found across the country, making up the largest biotech pipeline in Europe. It is a fact that the UK has been the recipient a bigger share of EU research funding than any other EU nation. It is hard to overstate the importance of the EU to the biomedical sector in the UK and the health outcomes for British patients. Shared initiatives—such as the “New Drugs for Bad Bugs” programme, which

aims to tackle antimicrobial resistance—in which pharmacologists from across the EU work together for mutual gain are incredibly important for the future. As we leave the EU, we risk losing the benefits that arise from being a hub for world-class research. The investment, the talent and the infrastructure, including jobs, are all at risk. The removal of those benefits has begun, and arrangements are already in place to relocate the European Medicines Agency from London to Amsterdam.

Time is short, and there are many issues of concern about this subject. One key concern is workforce. I agree with the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), and I thank our NHS staff for the tremendous work that they do. I pay tribute to the excellent service that we still enjoy, in spite of the many challenges. It is because of that excellent service that we feel so passionate today; we do not want to lose it. I also put on record my thanks to the care workers, especially those who have helped me to look after my mum. It just so happens that they come from Poland and Latvia, and they are amazing, but their status is at risk.

Hon. Members have talked about the existing challenges in the workforce, and rightly so. We already have a workforce crisis in the NHS and in social care. There are many reasons for that, including some that have already been mentioned: we do not train enough staff; we put up barriers to training, including the removal of bursaries; and working conditions and pay are often not what they should be, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said. There is no doubt that making it more difficult for EU health professionals and EU carers to work in the UK will not help the situation we face.

The scale of the contribution from the EU cannot be underestimated: 5.6% of the total NHS workforce come from the EU. In addition, we already have 100,000 care workers from the EU working in this country, and we know to our shame that we currently have 1 million vulnerable people with unmet care needs. I appreciate the points that the hon. Member for Henley made about the excellent work in his constituency, but I point out to him that the majority of care for vulnerable people is delivered in their homes—or not delivered, in many cases, which is a massive problem for us.

To replace the EU NHS staff and the contribution that social care workers from the EU make would be extremely costly to the NHS. It certainly will not be a saving to the nation. The worst situation we could face would be if the Government failed to prevent a no-deal situation. There are ways of coping with all the other areas, given time and a transition period. I am keen to stress to the Minister that this is not about scaremongering, but about sensible concerns and a reassurance that sensible provision is in place.

I want to touch on future trade deals. People rightly raise concerns that many of the current problems experienced in both health and social care have arisen as a direct result of the fragmentation and privatisation of provision following the Health and Social Care Act 2012. There is a risk that future trade deals will add to the problem of privatisation.

In the months leading up to the referendum, the people of this country were promised that there would be a Brexit dividend for the NHS, and the figure of an additional £350 million per week—surely the biggest

exaggeration of the Brexit campaign—was irresponsibly promoted. However, the reality is that in the light of the Government's own predictions of low economic growth, there will be less funding for the NHS after we leave the EU. The Government are also very clear that if we leave the EU next week with no deal, the economic cost to our nation will be even greater.

It is our duty to respect the result of the referendum, but as public servants it is our highest duty to ensure that our constituents' standards of health and wellbeing are protected. The NHS is regularly cited by the British public as one of the greatest achievements of—I have to say—a Labour Government. Brexit was sold as a way to protect the NHS, and no matter how misguided that promise was, as servants of the people we must deliver on it. Protecting the NHS is also the will of people, as they have shown in many elections.

To protect the NHS and to respect the will of the people, can the Minister provide assurances on the specific points that have been raised today? Can he confirm that the Government will rule out no deal and minimise the potential for negative impact on the NHS and social care sectors? Can he demonstrate that he is not ignoring the legitimate concerns raised today and out there in the community, from Members of this place, from patients and their representatives and from healthcare professionals? Can he demonstrate that the Government are listening and have sensible provisions in place, and that they will take every step to avoid a no-deal Brexit next week?

10.44 am

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this morning, Mr Bone. I will start by addressing the remark by the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper). She should know that the whole of the Department of Health and Social Care, and indeed the whole of the Government, are absolutely committed to ensuring that there are in place detailed plans, which I hope I will be able to outline and reassure hon. Members about, to ensure that in any post-Brexit scenario the health and social care of our country's citizens is our top priority.

I thank the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) for securing the debate and commend him for his private Member's Bill. He will know that the Government do not support his Bill—although we support the spirit of it—in part because, as the contribution from the SNP Front Bench showed, it is unnecessary. He is arguing for an independent evaluation and careful analysis of Brexit, but I thought the contribution from the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), frequently citing the Health and Social Care Committee, proved that there is a huge amount of independent evaluation, accountability and scrutiny of the plans.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute raised a number of questions. I have with me a prepared speech, but I am not sure I will get on to it, because I want to address as fully as I can some of the concerns that hon. Members have raised. He raised a number of concerns about the social care sector, and he is right to do so. Brexit or no Brexit, it is a fragile sector and any event could hinder care provision. That is why, in the light of Brexit, we are working with the sector and local authorities to ensure that we have contingency plans in place.

[Stephen Hammond]

I will speak more, if I have time, about what we have done regarding EU nationals in the short term, but I want to stress, as the hon. Member for Burnley did, my thanks to all EU nationals who work in either the healthcare system or the social care system. They play a crucial role in delivering high-quality health and social care, and we all recognise that. It is a fact, of course, that the number of EU nationals in adult social care has increased each year, from about 5% in 2012-13 to 8% in 2017-18, but that is no reason to be complacent. That is why we have put in mitigations regarding the EU settlement scheme and are implementing long-term policies to deliver the workforce and address the supply-demand gap that exists.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute will of course have noticed the recent recruitment plan, Every Day is Different, which started only last month. As he challenged me directly on this, I can say that we are currently in discussions with the Home Office about the salary threshold for social care.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) spoke eloquently, as he always does—I have heard him speak in several of these debates—about Henley and other matters. He challenged me to visit Henley, which I would be delighted to do—perhaps on a Friday in July, when other events are on as well.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) asked a number of questions. I made this clear at the start of my speech, and I will make it clear again directly to her: we value all the professionals who work in the national health service and the social care sector. We are putting plans in place, both short term and long term, to ensure that our words are followed by actions and there is practical support, and to ensure that people know how much they are valued. I heard her charge of arrogance, but she might like to reflect on the fact that some might consider it arrogant to suggest in any way that this Government are not putting in place all the necessary preparations to protect the NHS.

Patricia Gibson: Will the Minister give way?

Stephen Hammond: I will not take an intervention. If the hon. Lady listens carefully to my remarks, she will understand why some of us feel that her charge was unfair.

Patricia Gibson: Well, explain it.

Stephen Hammond: I am about to, if the hon. Lady will give me time, which is why I will not take her intervention.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) asked about NHS investment. He knows, of course, about the increase in cash terms of £33.9 billion by 2023-24, which reflects, as I said at the outset, our top priority. He also challenged me about the cancer workforce. Baroness Dido Harding, the chair of NHS Improvement, is carrying out a rapid programme of work for the Secretary of State, engaging with relevant stakeholders across the system to build a workforce implementation plan, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. We have charged her with making sure that her plan matches the long-term plan's ambitions. The hon. Gentleman will

know that the long-term plan superseded previous plans to establish a larger cancer workforce, and Health Education England is now working with Baroness Harding to make sure that is in place.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), who asked important questions about insulin and the financial impact of leaving the EU on cancer patients. My officials spoke this morning to insulin suppliers, who have increased their buffer stocks so that they will hold 16 weeks of additional stocks over and above their normal supply. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is stockpiling, but it is stockpiling that we have asked the whole pharmaceutical industry to undertake. As the hon. Member for Burnley rightly pointed out, there should be no stockpiling by individuals or pharmacists. I will explain the whole stockpiling issue and why we are rightly putting in place buffer stocks to ensure continuity of supply. The hon. Gentleman asked me whether buffer stocks of insulin are in place, and I can confirm that they are.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me what assessment has been made of the financial impact of EU exit on cancer patients, and what measures are in place to protect services. He will know that the long-term plan contains clear proposals for improving cancer diagnoses. That plan is fully costed. As I just said in response to the hon. Member for Strangford, the workforce implementation plan is putting in place the cancer workforce.

I also listened carefully to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow, who asked whether my door was open to chairs of all-party parliamentary groups. The answer is yes, of course. If she wishes to contact me, I would be delighted to engage with her, and with chairs of other all-party parliamentary groups.

It is also worth putting on the record the relationship that we are likely to have with the European Medicines Agency post Brexit. The Government are clearly striving for a deal, and in the light of the withdrawal agreement being signed, the political declaration sets out that it is the UK's intention to explore the possibility of EMA co-operation during negotiations on the future framework. In the event of no deal, we would clearly no longer be any part of the EMA, and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is ready to carry out EMA functions as a sovereign regulator.

To ensure the continuity of supply, the UK will continue to accept batch testing of human medicines carried out in countries named on a list by the MHRA, including EU, European economic area and European Free Trade Agreement countries, and most third countries with which the EU already has in place a mutual recognition agreement.

Patricia Gibson: I thank the Minister for giving way; I know there is a lot that he wants to say. As he is talking about ensuring the supply of medicines, can he reassure the House that that includes medical isotopes?

Stephen Hammond: I reassure the hon. Lady that we have been working since last August to ensure that companies understand the routes available to maintain continuity of supply, including air freight routes. We will ensure the potential use of those alternative shipping or air freight routes because, as she rightly points out, these are short-life products. The worst-case scenario—no deal—has been looked at, and routes will be available to ensure that medical isotopes can continue to come into this country.

The hon. Lady referred in her speech to the operationalisation of those plans, which is relevant. Normally, if sea routes are used, it can be ensured that medical isotopes or short-life products are at hospitals by 9 am. She referred to the likelihood that, if air freight routes are used, those products would not arrive until midday, which the NHS advises us would mean that some clinics would be likely to be rescheduled to later in the day. People's opportunities to undergo treatment will not be interrupted.

Julie Cooper: Will the Minister very quickly give way on that point?

Stephen Hammond: Very quickly.

Julie Cooper: I hear what the Minister says about making his best efforts to ensure that there is no interruption of supply. However, does he accept that, as of yesterday, health professionals who deal with this were not reassured? We could be in a no-deal situation in just over a week's time. Will these arrangements hold good in a no-deal situation? Will he assure us that those vital isotopes will be in the places where they need to be?

Stephen Hammond: Had the hon. Lady joined me in walking through the Lobby to vote for the withdrawal agreement—so that Brexit would happen on 29 March and leaving without a deal would be impossible—she would know that all the arrangements currently in place would pertain. We are talking about arrangements for a no-deal situation, which I and the Government certainly hope will not happen. These arrangements are specifically designed to ensure that arrangements are in place for no deal.

In the short time I have left, I will stress the continuity of supply. It is essential that any responsible Government, even if they wish for a different outcome, should prepare for the outcome that they do not want, which in this case is no deal.

Brendan O'Hara: Will the Minister give way on that very quickly?

Stephen Hammond: Very quickly.

Brendan O'Hara: I want to give the Minister the opportunity to answer the question I asked about the long-term plan to fill those hundreds of thousands of vacancies now and in future, and to reassure supporters of my Bill that health and social care will not be adversely affected by the UK leaving the EU. I would be hugely grateful if he did so in the next three minutes.

Stephen Hammond: There are so many issues that I could tackle in the next three minutes. However, as the hon. Gentleman will have seen, the long-term plan has ambitions to ensure that there are new routes into nursing and that there are extra doctor training places. I said in response to the hon. Member for Strangford that we have commissioned Baroness Harding to start a workforce implementation plan. I assure the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute that driving down the number of vacancies is a priority for the Government. However, he will recognise that several of those vacancies are not necessarily unfilled posts, because they are usually filled

by staff from the temporary staff bank. We need to be clear about what we are talking about. Recruitment into our national health service and our social care system is absolutely a key priority.

My Department has overall responsibility, on behalf of the devolved Administrations, for ensuring the continuity of supply of medicines and medical products. All supply arrangements take into account the whole of the United Kingdom. We have had significant support from, have given reassurance to and are constantly working with the pharmaceutical industry, the whole of the medical supply industry, clinicians and patients, and I am delighted to say that last week we held a roundtable with the devolved Administrations, so that their concerns could be listened to and directly addressed.

Several Members commented on stockpiling. We recognise that if we leave the EU without a deal, the medical supply chain will come under a lot of pressure. Around three quarters of the medicines and more than half the clinical consumables that we use come from the EU. Since last August we have been working with the industry to ensure that, before 29 March, there is at least an additional six weeks of stock over and above the usual buffer stocks in the UK.

We have also advised companies that if they are likely to face difficulties in their supply routes, there are ways of bringing in supplies outside the normal short straits route, either by using existing services or by making use of the additional capacity that the Government have procured. We are reliant on transport and freight being re-routed, but I am confident that, if everyone—including suppliers, freight companies, the health and care system and international partners, all of whom we have worked with since last August—does what they need to do and have committed to doing, the supply of medicines and other medical products will be uninterrupted.

I had intended to deliver a rather longer speech this morning, but I thought it was important to try to answer directly the questions put to me by hon. Members. There is no doubt that many areas of the health and care system will be directly affected by EU exit. We do not have time to address those today. However, it is important that the country knows that the Government are committed to ensuring that, whether we leave with or without a deal, we have in place the contingency plans needed to meet those challenges.

10.59 am

Brendan O'Hara: I thank everyone who has taken part in the debate. The shadow Minister said that this is the most important issue of the day, and she is right, so where are her colleagues? Every constituency in the country will be badly affected by this issue.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. I apologise to right hon. and hon. Members, but time has beaten us. I place on the record my particular thanks to the Minister for not reading a prepared speech and for dealing with the questions that Members asked.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Flooding in Cumbria

11 am

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered flooding in Cumbria.

It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I wish to speak about the situation with regard to flooding in Cumbria. In the days following Storm Desmond in December 2015, in response to our collective call for action, I was promised by David Cameron that funding would be provided to protect those towns and villages along the River Kent and its tributaries. I thank the Minister for her support in holding to that; it is genuinely appreciated.

This week, the Kendal flood defence scheme will come to the council's planning committee. MPs are generally advised to stay neutral on planning issues, but I have chosen to intervene on this occasion because, having won the funds to deliver that flood protection, I am determined to do everything I can to give families and businesses the protection and peace of mind that they so desperately need. Having waited more than three years even to get to the planning stage and having been through many iterations during the consultation, those who still live with the trauma of Storm Desmond should not be made to wait any longer, so I place on the record my concern that the proposal should not be dragged out further by an unnecessary public inquiry.

Storm Desmond's impact on communities in Cumbria was unprecedented and long-lasting: 7,465 properties were flooded, affecting an estimated 14,694 people, the largest number of whom were in South Lakeland. Some people were out of their homes for three years, and 3,000 children were unable to return to school until the new year of 2016. They missed a vital part of their education; for some, this was in the run-up to very important January exams. In addition, 1,029 businesses were flooded, causing huge economic damage to our communities. Jobs were lost and some businesses went to the wall. Flooding caused poverty as well as heartbreak.

The long-term toll on the tourism industry is also unquestionable. In terms of popularity, the Lake district as a destination is second only to London. UNESCO recognised that in 2017 by granting world heritage site status. The Cumbria visitor economy contributes £3 billion a year and employs more than 60,000 people. However, Storm Desmond saw a 76% decrease in tourism business profits and a drop-off in visitor numbers of about the same proportion; 57% of Cumbria's tourism businesses also reported reduced numbers of international visitors. Four months on from the floods, 77% of businesses continued to suffer reduced booking inquiries.

As well as people's property and livelihoods being affected, there was a significant impact on Cumbria's infrastructure. The A591 north of Grasmere was simply washed away, cutting the Lake district in two, as its most important road was then closed for more than five months. There were 107 other road closures; there was damage to 792 bridges and the closure of the west coast main line. The impact on other vital services was devastating. More than 1,000 hospital operations were cancelled, causing significant suffering and distress.

In the light of the widespread and long-term impacts, both personally and economically, it is clearly in both the national and the local interest that the Government

should invest significantly in preventing a repeat of the devastation. The current plans for flood defences in my constituency provide protection for residents and businesses in Kendal, Burneside and Staveley and are welcome, but many badly affected communities are being offered nothing by the Government.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The Derwent river catchment, which is in my constituency, has no significant flood alleviation projects in the pipeline, despite being flooded multiple times during the past 10 years, and does not qualify, under the current funding formula rules, for significant funding. The Minister is aware of our concerns, and I thank her for taking the time to listen to us on this matter, but recent alerts have led to more concerns about mental health problems among my constituents. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need a serious and thorough review of the current spending formula in order that all our constituents can be properly protected, as well as those in other rural areas that fall foul of the current system?

Tim Farron: I thoroughly agree with all that the hon. Lady has said. The funding formula for Cumbria works massively against us in terms of both resilience and response to crises. I will talk later about the impact on mental health. The hon. Lady makes an extremely good point in that respect. The lasting consequences of flooding are very often huge when it comes to people's wellbeing and their fear of what might come next.

We welcome the funding that we have got, but it is insufficient. Many areas, such as those that the hon. Lady has referred to in her own constituency, have not received that support. In my own community, we look at the failure to come forward with funding and support for places outside Kendal in particular. Windermere Road in Grange has flooded for many years, and only now has the Environment Agency been given approval to do a 12-month appraisal. We were expecting spades in the ground by now, not more chin stroking. I would appreciate the Minister's intervention to ensure that the residents of Grange are not kept waiting for the flood protection that they desperately need. People will be reassured by tangible, visible construction and action, not by meetings and promises. The funding has been allocated for the scheme and plans have been made; we now need to move forward with actual delivery.

Flooding in the village of Holme, along Stainton Beck, in Burton and on the Strands at Milnthorpe remains unaddressed. Those places are on a list of flooding hotspots where action remains to be taken. The same is true of many other places throughout Cumbria. The Burneside and Middleton Hall bridges have been closed for more than three years, dividing and damaging communities. In the year and a half for which the Staveley bridge was closed, the community found itself cut off and isolated, without any financial support from the Government. Kendal's bridges, including the Victoria bridge, were closed following Storm Desmond because of safety concerns. However, when Cumbria local enterprise partnership put in a bid for £25 million to make the county's bridges and infrastructure more flood-resilient, it was rejected by the Government.

Meanwhile, the Government have failed to come forward with any plans for protections for the communities around Windermere: Bowness, Waterhead at Ambleside and Backbarrow in particular. Those communities have

been completely ignored in the Government's plans. They remain exposed and vulnerable, subject to whatever the weather throws at them next. Of all the businesses in Cumbria closed by Storm Desmond, more than one tenth were around Windermere lake.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and on the powerful case that he is making. It is extraordinary that when the Government can, at the stroke of a pen, assign £4 billion to a no-deal Brexit that it is in their unilateral power to stop, these relatively minor sums are not being spent even though they could alleviate the misery felt by thousands of our constituents. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me and local businesses that the Government, in allocating money for alleviation schemes, should take more account of the impact on businesses?

Tim Farron: I agree with all that the hon. Gentleman has said. He makes an important point, which is very significant to his constituents, but also to mine around Windermere lake. Residences are affected, but so are dozens and dozens of businesses, all of which are the backbone of our local economy and have a massive impact on the wellbeing of local people. The Government must now take responsibility for the failure to invest in protecting those businesses. We cannot get away from the impact on families and businesses, which cannot plan for the future because they feel that they might get hit again. Even a modest downpour can trigger real panic in people of all ages, especially children. Flood prevention is about protecting not just properties, but the wellbeing and mental health of the people who live in them.

I was hugely affected by what I saw and experienced on the morning after Storm Desmond, as we helped stricken people to empty their homes. I saw the forlorn Christmas decorations and sodden Christmas trees left out on the front garden or yard. I stood with people who had been made destitute. Barely able to afford to feed their children or pay the rent in the first place, they had forgone insurance because, frankly, they could not afford it, and they were left facing utter ruin. We cannot guarantee people that there will not be floods again, but we can massively reduce the risk. We can help people to give themselves permission to have confidence in the future and reassure their children, so that they can sleep easier at night.

A survey carried out by the Cumbria community recovery group reported that in the areas hit by the floods, a sense of vulnerability and loss of control was created, which re-emerged following further heavy rainfall of any kind. People reported anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which worsened further for those facing the loss of their employment, as well as their home.

For those flooded communities that have not received help—such as Grange, Windermere and Backbarrow—I ask the Minister to change the Government's position and agree to intervene. There are deliverable schemes that will protect all those communities around England's largest lake, as well as the community in Grange-over-Sands. I ask that she agrees to fund those as a priority.

The failure to hold water companies to account is a further area of concern. Despite the Kendal flood defences being built to withstand a one-in-100-year event, the

water companies—in our case United Utilities—are only required to meet the standards for a one-in-30-year storm event. That is ludicrous. Millions of pounds are being spent on flood defences for our community, but the area will be just as vulnerable from surface water flooding. Surface water is one of the biggest factors to cause homes to be flooded in Cumbria over the last 10 years. On Steeles Row in Burneside, poor drainage means that residents have to deal with raw sewage overflowing into their homes and on to the street every time there is even a moderate downpour. I challenge the Minister to hold water companies, such as United Utilities, to account—to a one-in-100-year standard—so that homes receive the protection that they need.

Let us be clear that we are talking about not simply flood protection, but the mitigation of a human-created disaster—the consequences of climate change, which is more properly described as a climate catastrophe. The Government have moved away from renewable energy. They have changed feed-in tariffs, so that it is harder for businesses to invest in solar energy, while giving licences for fracking. *The Guardian* recently outed the Government as providing some of the heaviest bursaries for gas and oil companies. The cancellation of the Swansea tidal lagoon proves that the Government have stopped even pretending to care about climate change. Britain has the second-largest tidal range in the world, and yet we fail to use that natural, renewable resource to cut carbon and create jobs.

I want us to mitigate the consequences of our failure to tackle climate change in time to protect my communities from flooding, but I am also determined that the Government take the big strategic decisions to fight climate change. That requires a revolution in renewables and a push for energy self-sufficiency, which would protect our environment, boost our economy and give us vital energy security. I see no sign of any appetite for that from this Government. I was with students in Kendal last week, protesting against inaction on climate change. That was a reminder that the coming generation will not let us get away with it, and they are absolutely right not to.

Sue Hayman: I was in Cockermouth on Saturday with students from Cockermouth School and other primary schools, and they take the issue very seriously. In my constituency we also have to deal with coastal erosion and coastal flooding, which are greatly impacted by climate change. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to build coastal protection into the broader funding formula for flooding protection?

Tim Farron: Yes, I agree, and I will come on to the need to treat Cumbria as a special case when it comes to flood funding allocation. We have a very long coast with many tidal estuaries, which could be a source of energy but are also a source of flood risk. The hon. Lady makes a very good point.

Flooding is a problem in my patch, as well as for my constituency neighbours, the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), but it is a problem that only stands to get worse. The extreme weather events that we face are becoming more frequent. According to the Met Office website, Westmorland has the highest average annual rainfall of any place in England. The most beautiful place in the country turns out to be the wettest—who would have thought it? We have a lot of lakes to keep topped up.

[Tim Farron]

I ask the Minister to re-evaluate the funding criteria, to ensure that Cumbria is treated as a special case with recurring support for flood resilience, because for us it is not a question of whether it will flood, but when and how severely. I want the Minister to intervene with emergency funding to protect the communities around Windermere, such as Grange and Backbarrow, which currently face the future with no protection. We need more than just one-off lumps of money to deal with crises; we need a fundamental change in the funding formula.

The current partnership funding mechanism focuses on the value of assets protected. That obviously favours wealthier communities and parts of the country where house prices are higher and homes more densely built. It dilutes any consideration of how likely an area is to flood. The system of classification is, frankly, not fit for purpose. Many communities flooded in 2005, 2009 and 2015; that is three floods in 10 years, each of them at least a one-in-100-year event, meaning that flood frequency estimations are now wildly inaccurate for Cumbria. Properties should now be placed in the higher risk category, based on the reality of the past 10 to 20 years. The current figures are based on statistics that are so far out of date that they have basically become fantasy.

In short, the steps that the Government need to take are clear and threefold. First, we need urgent investment now. We need to build capacity to take water out of Windermere at times of high rainfall in order to protect the communities on its banks. I have presented the Minister with a case for such a scheme made by one of my constituents, and I look forward to hearing her response. Secondly, we need the Government to hold the water companies to account, so that communities are given the long-term protection they need. Thirdly, it is clear that the Government need fundamentally to shift their thinking when it comes to the allocation of funding for flood defences, so that we in Cumbria—England's wettest county—get the recurring funding we need to make ourselves resilient, and to keep our families and businesses safe.

I am massively proud of our people and communities in Cumbria. In the face of devastation, they pulled together to support one another at great personal cost. For example, the Kendal Cares initiative sprang up literally overnight after Storm Desmond, to meet the needs of those who had lost so much. Today, I want the Minister to commit to supporting our communities in an enduring way, so that we can prevent a repeat of the devastation that occurred in December 2015. Cumbria surely deserves that protection, and I hope that the Minister will provide it.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) on securing the debate. We have spoken previously on this topic, one to one as well as in the wider group of Cumbrian MPs, two of whom are present—the hon. Members for Workington (Sue Hayman) and for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock). I commend them for the representations that they have made on behalf of their constituents. They are rightly passionate about trying to secure more flood funding for important projects in their constituencies.

Flood and coastal risk management is a high priority for the Government, and I am acutely aware of the impact that flooding can have on lives and livelihoods, which was the case in my constituency following the 2013 surge. People face ongoing challenges and have ongoing concerns, whether those are to do with aspects of weather or surges and high tides combining. Compelling evidence suggests that climate change may lead to increases in heavy rainfall and increased risks from fluvial and surface water flooding by the middle of this century. Both present significant risks, so we are putting in place robust, long-term national strategies to protect our communities. I am sure that hon. Members will recognise the £2.6 billion Government investment made in flood defences over six years.

There has been no major flooding since I have been the Minister responsible for flood risk management—perhaps that is why I have been in post for nearly three years—but I take a keen interest in the latest developments in Cumbria, which is an area particularly prone to the devastating impacts of flooding. That is why I think I have visited Cumbria on more occasions than any other county during my time in office, to hear the community's experiences at first hand.

I am very aware of the extreme flooding events that have been suffered and the damage that has been caused, and I recognise the impacts, including on mental health, experienced by people and communities. I pay tribute to the responders and volunteers from across the county, and indeed the country, who worked around the clock in challenging circumstances during Storm Desmond, and for their ongoing work in flood action groups.

I also praise the ongoing work of the risk management authorities and the local community groups that contribute their time and vast local knowledge to protect their local communities. They are also involved in discussions about different projects, and they recently produced a report on how to improve funding in Cumbria, as well as a practical guide to natural flood management measures. Together with the expertise of the Environment Agency and local councils, those actions are leading to strong local decisions.

The Government have committed to spend £68 million in Cumbria as part of our current programme, which began in 2015 and will complete in 2021. Hon. Members may be aware that £10 million was initially allocated under today's funding formula, but I am conscious that my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), when he was the Minister responsible, allocated an extra £58 million to tackle the issues resulting from Storm Desmond. The Environment Agency continues to maintain its flood risk management assets in the county and has spent £1.4 million on maintenance since 2015.

To better improve the flood resilience of properties, a grant of £5,000 per property was made available to homeowners and businesses that were flooded in December 2015 for additional resilience or resistance measures. I understand that 4,307 properties have received that money, which equates to more than £15 million of grant.

The important 2016 Cumbria flood action plan continues to be a living document. Of the 100 actions agreed in it, 74 are now complete, with 96% of short-term actions also complete. The remaining actions are being reviewed to determine whether they are still valid. Recently, the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill successfully completed its stages in this House and is now going to

the House of Lords for consideration. If the Lords do not amend it and it becomes an Act of Parliament, I hope that it will provide a welcome opportunity to meet three actions in the plan that aim to develop water level management boards in the Eden, Derwent and Kent Leven catchments.

Several schemes to reduce the flood risk in Cumbria are progressing. As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale pointed out, some will go out for planning consultation shortly. He referred to the preferred option for a £45 million scheme in Kendal, which is expected to reduce the risk of flooding to more than 2,500 local homes and businesses. As he points out, the determination date for planning permission is Thursday. In line with Government guidance, multi-criteria analysis has been used to assess the merits of each option against economic, technical, social and environmental criteria. That is why the Environment Agency has considered the feedback on the options to shape the scheme.

In Carlisle, following public engagement in January, a planning application was submitted for a scheme last month. The completed scheme will cost approximately £25 million and is expected to reduce the risk of flooding to more than 1,000 homes. The flood defence scheme in Egremont received £1.6 million of additional funding from a £40 million national fund to support economic growth and regeneration in 2018. The scheme will cost approximately £6.2 million and is predicted to reduce the risk of flooding to 221 homes and commercial properties. I hope that will get planning consent in May. A further 44 properties will be protected by the installation of property-level protection. In Rickerby, the flood alleviation scheme has received planning approval and, subject to the approval of the final business case, work is expected to start in the next few months.

To respond to national emergencies, the Environment Agency has 25 miles of temporary barriers, which it deployed in Braithwaite, near Keswick, when there were concerns. We continue to work hard on natural flood management to gather evidence on how best it can, or whether it can, be a key part of how we reduce the impacts of flooding. Overall, 11 communities in Cumbria are involved in the pilot project, into which we have put £2.5 million out of a total investment of £15 million. Of that, £800,000 was allocated to the River Kent catchment across eight projects.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to some specific bridges. I went to the Middleton Hall bridge—on a political visit, rather than a ministerial visit—and I know that the county council are working hard to repair the Ford and Middleton bridges that were damaged in Storm Desmond. My understanding is that it expects to complete the works this year. I am conscious that, particularly in Middleton, cars can get over the temporary bridge but emergency services and small buses cannot, which is a real source of disruption to the everyday lives of people in the area.

John Woodcock: Will the Minister and her Department keep in mind that, notwithstanding the terrible damage that Storm Desmond did, they should not let that displace the suffering of other residents, such as my constituents, who are still feeling the effects of storm damage from previous years?

Dr Coffey: Of course, the storms of 2005 and 2009 have had a long impact, which I recognise.

On the funding policy, our current investment programme is due to protect more than 300,000 more homes, although I am conscious that not all of that will be in Cumbria by any means. I am sure that hon. Members, while fighting for their constituents' needs, also recognise that the Government have to consider projects across the country. In the current programme, it is not possible to deliver every scheme that would reduce flood risk, but I assure hon. Members present that I am fully alive to the issues raised about Cumbria.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale referred to wealthy communities and the funding formula, but the funding formula specifically gives a boost to parts of the country that are not as prosperous, so that is taken into account. Our main impact and focus has been on people, rather than businesses, but I am looking at the funding arrangements ahead of a review of funding needs beyond 2021. We are working closely with the Environment Agency and the Treasury to consider future investment needs and the Government's role in supporting the resilience of communities. My Department launched a consultation in January, which began the discussion on enabling more local funding to be raised for flood management. While considering the requirements for future programmes, I am looking carefully at the impact on Cumbria.

I am aware of the £58 million, which I have explained to hon. Members, and I am keen to build on that work and continually improve overall flood resistance in Cumbria. I reject the comments of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale that the Government have given up on renewable energy and climate change. He will be aware of the situation regarding the tidal lagoon, which was deemed poor value for money. I think I am right in saying that a prominent non-governmental organisation also challenged the scheme because of its impact on tidal habitats and birds. We have to take a balanced approach.

As the only Member with the word "coastal" in their constituency name, I am conscious of the issue of coastal erosion, which my constituency also suffers from, and I recognise that extreme weather events cause people worry. I do not want to reject what the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness said but, dare I say it, the Government have to be responsible in preparing for a no-deal Brexit. I repeat the mantra that if hon. Members do not want no deal, they have to vote for a deal. The £2.6 billion investment has been put to good effect, however, and I will push for more to be done in the next spending review, if we can.

I have corresponded with the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale about water companies before. We have a different perspective. Some of the challenges of surface level flooding will be due to the county council not managing to drain the gullies or whatever—it will be a variety of things. Sewers are expected to have only a one-in-30-year event design standard, based on the rainfall return period, which is surface water flooding. That is different from the one-in-100-year river flood event experienced in Kendal, so it is not necessarily the case that we should compare them and make them identical.

Regarding the other aspects of the scheme that the hon. Gentleman specifically mentioned, he knows that we have considered it and that we are waiting for an Environment Agency report. He will also be aware that there is a big gap between the grant in aid for which it is

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

eligible and the cost of the scheme. That is why I continue to encourage businesses to take advantage of the tax relief that they can get if they make capital contributions. I know that it will be an ongoing challenge for many people around the country, but I hope that we have considered it today.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Gambling-Related Harm

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered gambling-related harm.

It is nice to see you—a Portonian—in the Chair, Mr McCabe, and to see the number of people who have put their names down to speak—although it is about not just the quantity but the quality of the speakers that we have in the Chamber.

When we think of harm caused by drugs, alcohol or tobacco, we have a very specific idea of what it looks like. When it comes to gambling, the harm may not be so obvious but it is there. The Responsible Gambling Strategy Board proposed that the following definition of gambling-related harm should be used in British policy and practice:

“Gambling-related harms are the adverse impacts from gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society.

These harms are diverse, affecting resources, relationships and health, and may reflect an interplay between individual, family and community processes. The harmful effects from gambling may be short-lived but can persist, having longer-term and enduring consequences that can exacerbate existing inequalities.”

From that definition, it is clear that the harm is not restricted to individuals, and that it can have a detrimental effect on entire communities and those living in them.

Debt incurred by gambling creates instability and insecurity, and can lead to bankruptcy. In the extreme, it results in criminal activities. Relationships can be disrupted, which often leads to emotional and social isolation. This can lead to mistrust and it erodes cohesive relationships. The consequences can include psychological distress, such as feelings of shame, stigma and guilt. Anxiety levels increase, and depression and even suicide can be the final outcome.

The Office for National Statistics has published data showing that between 2001 and 2016 there were 21 suicides

“where the death certificate mentioned ‘gambling’ or ‘gamble’.”

Furthermore, the ONS stated that

“the data is not considered completely reliable, because a coroner will not always record detailed information regarding the deceased’s history”.

According to *Gambling With Lives*, 4% to 11% of suicides are related to gambling, which is the equivalent of 450 to 620 deaths per year in the UK. These figures are based on research carried out by Paul Wong that appeared in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* in 2010 and research from Louis Appleby at the University of Manchester in 2017.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a very strong case. I wonder whether the starting point in all this should be in schools, and in trying to provide children with the necessary education to prevent them from starting to gamble.

Ronnie Cowan: I agree with that point and I hope to cover it later on, when I will look at the educational support for kids and the possible grooming of children, normalising gambling as part of their lives.

On my last point, will the Minister consider ways whereby coroners can ensure that data around suicide can be captured, so that accurate figures can be maintained?

Jack Ritchie was 24 and from Sheffield. He was a history graduate who taught English in Kenya and Vietnam. He began gambling at 17 and would visit betting shops during his school lunch break. By 18, he admitted that he had a gambling problem and that he had lost thousands of pounds, including £5,000 given to him by his grandmother. After another gambling loss, he committed suicide in 2017, while he was in Vietnam. Jack's mother, Liz Ritchie, compared gambling addiction to heroin dependency. The harm is real and it is growing, while the research and support is massively underfunded.

I commend the work undertaken by Henrietta Bowden-Jones at her clinic in Fulham. There are plans to open a similar clinic in Leeds, and hopefully more in Scotland and Wales. That must happen, but the funding model requires scrutiny. Currently, the industry pays a voluntary levy that raises £10 million to £14 million a year. That money is used to fund support for problematic gamblers, and campaigns to educate people and hopefully reduce harm.

That voluntary contribution of £14 million must be measured against the gambling companies' profits. In November 2018, William Hill issued a profit warning, saying that it expected yearly profits to be in the range of £225 million to £245 million—in 2017, company profits were £291 million—whereas 888 Holdings reported pre-tax profits of £83 million on revenue of £541 million in March 2019. Paddy Power Betfair reported pre-tax profits of £219 million in 2018 on revenue of £1.87 billion, and bet365 posted an operating profit of £660 million on revenue of £2.86 billion.

The total gross gambling yield for Great Britain between April 2017 and March 2018 was £14.4 billion, which was a 4.5% increase from the previous year. The annual sum that gambling firms win from their customers has risen by 65% since the Gambling Act 2005. It is against those figures that we have to consider the voluntary levy of £10 million to £14 million. A statutory levy of 1% would guarantee £140 million a year and that sort of money, in the right hands, could do some serious good.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that, given the numbers he has cited, it is nigh impossible for local authorities anywhere in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to implement their statements while they are dealing with a marketplace in which the money created for the businesses fundamentally outweighs anything that they can do locally through a simple planning statement?

Ronnie Cowan: I wholeheartedly agree. I am not going to war with the gambling industry here, but we have to look at the figures, and the money that companies have to spend in order to promote gambling far outweighs anything that we have got at local council level to counteract that and the damage that has been done.

In addition, because the levy is voluntary, the amount raised can vary from year to year, and therefore budgeting for long-term treatment is extremely precarious. I ask the Minister to review how gambling-related harm reduction is funded and to investigate more effective methods.

Let me be clear: I am not asking for financial recompense from gambling companies just to improve their public image. A sponsorship deal here and a charitable donation there are no more than fig leaves to hide the companies' own embarrassment—and they should be embarrassed. How can a family be recompensed for the loss of their son, or a child who has lost their father? I am not asking for token gestures; I am asking gambling companies to stop doing the damage in the first place. Rather than merely asking punters to “gamble responsibly”, they should run their organisations responsibly. If the Gambling Commission cannot act, and if self-regulation is not adequate, the UK Government should step in and legislate to ensure responsible working practices are in place. Will the Minister review the role of the Gambling Commission and its funding model?

While we talk about responsible working practices, companies are gathering data pertaining to the habits of online gamblers. Astonishingly, they are closing down the accounts of people who are successful and winning—even those winning small amounts—while targeting and encouraging vulnerable gamblers who are losing to continue gambling. This callous disregard for the welfare of their customers is tantamount to gross negligence.

Another outcome of the increased use of technology is that the division between gambling and gaming has been blurred by the introduction of “loot boxes”. That did not happen by accident: adults designed and wrote the software; adults considered the returns; and adults are grooming children to be the next generation of gamblers.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and congratulate him on securing the debate. He is making many points that I agree with entirely. On the point about how we can better control some of the excesses of the gambling industry, does he agree that we need to consider how the advertising strategies of the gambling industry are conducted, and in particular how they use social media and advanced techniques to target people who are already known to gamble, encouraging them to gamble further?

Ronnie Cowan: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. We could have an entire debate about advertising in the gambling industry. It is such a deep concept, because of the methodology that can now be used by gambling and media companies to get access to people and their information and then specifically target them in a way in which they know will manipulate that information. It is a whole big data, fake news almost, subject.

We know that loot boxes can be closed down, because they have been in Belgium—they have even managed to do it in the Isle of Man—so will the Minister take action to ban loot boxes from the United Kingdom?

Where to start when it comes to advertising? Live televised sports events are swamped with betting adverts and inducements to bet. The impression is given that a sporting event is not sufficient entertainment in its own right unless we take a punt on the outcome. Gambling has become normalised through such extensive advertising and in popular discourse. Football punditry now increasingly refers to bookies' odds, and many more sports teams are sponsored by operators. As the latter qualifies as sponsorship rather than advertising, the same regulations do not apply. With punters being

[*Ronnie Cowan*]

encouraged at every turn, the ease with which gamblers can sign up to an online operator is of great concern. Punters can gamble 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year. There is now no cooling-off period.

The style of games is carefully crafted to draw users in, with frequent offers of free spins and other techniques that are used to start habitual gambling behaviour. Money is readily available through credit cards, PayPal accounts and phone accounts—they are all accepted as means of payment.

Finally, to be perfectly blunt, the gambling companies have stacked the odds against the punters and the damage that is being done needs to be redressed. However, it can be done only if the money is raised and put in the right hands to support gambling addiction, advertising is curtailed and the behaviour of bookmakers, particularly regarding online betting, is monitored and adjusted accordingly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. Before I call anyone, I want to say that we have, I think, seven people down to speak. We can get everyone in without a time limit if people confine themselves to six minutes or less.

2.42 pm

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) for securing the debate. I would like to feel that I played some part in making his speech happen because, had I not lost Greenock and Inverclyde, which I fought valiantly in the 1997 general election, he might not be here with us—that election in itself was something of a gamble.

I was just reviewing some of the things I spoke about when I was shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport between 2005 and 2007, opposite the late Dame Tessa Jowell, whose memorial service I was pleased to attend. Tessa, I think, was slightly conflicted during that time. The Labour party of the day was absolutely obsessed with the idea, which it had imported from America, of inner-city super-casinos as the panacea to all the problems of inner-city regeneration. We debated that back and forth across the House and many people on both sides thought it a terrible idea. In the end, it did not really happen. At the same time, however, the issue of online gambling was beginning to emerge. Although Tessa admitted in 2006 that she had presided over an explosion of online gambling, she was concerned about the regulatory side, particularly about trying to regulate offshore gambling, which remains a problem. The Government of the day, and Governments since, have always been one step behind.

It is the Opposition's job to be critical of the Government, and I remember being critical of the international summit on remote gambling that Tessa put on in October 2006, rather appositely at Royal Ascot—the home of racing. The conference prioritised crime, competition and safeguards for children and vulnerable people, but had little to say about how to prevent, given the growing online arena, gambling-related harm or its associated social costs.

Reviewing what I said, the questions I laid down and the debates we had in that period, it is salutary to think that we have not moved on that much. The latest

Gambling Commission figures show that 48% of adults participate in some form of gambling, and for online gambling the figure is 18%. I should think, but I do not know and the Minister will be able to correct me, that that figure is more likely to increase than decrease.

Problem gambling is defined as behaviour related to gambling that causes harm to the gambler and those around them. The figures look small at face value: problem gambling is confined to 0.5% of adults, with 1.1% at moderate risk and 3.3% at low risk, according to one of the most robust estimates, the problem gambling severity index. Problem gambling is thus defined in that rather tight category, but it is more difficult to estimate gambling-related harms to society, because the term itself does not have a strict definition. The Responsible Gambling Strategy Board, the body that provides independent advice to the Gambling Commission, lists among the social costs of gambling-related harm loss of employment, health-related problems, homelessness and suicide.

Dr Poulter: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. Although according to the headline figure only a small percentage of the general population appears to be affected by problem gambling, the reality is that the harms that manifest in that group are widespread and cause both considerable economic damage to those people and their families and damage to wider society. As my right hon. Friend rightly said, to look at just those headline figures would be misleading.

Sir Hugo Swire: I hope that we will shortly hear from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who has done much work in this area, not least on fixed odds betting terminals, which are described as the “crack cocaine of gambling”. He will be better able than me to inform the debate.

I do not want to take up too much more time, other than to say that we have been debating the matter for many, many years and I do not believe that we have it right. It remains a huge problem that is difficult, but not impossible, to regulate. We want to hear from the Government how much more robust they can be.

I have just five quick points to put to the Minister. Will the Government treat gambling as a public health issue, as we do mental health? Will the Minister consider introducing tougher verification checks, which could ensure that young gamblers were not drawn online? Has she considered limiting gambling adverts during sports match breaks to one per break per company? We heard from the hon. Member for Inverclyde how online gambling organisations and organised sport are almost one and the same now. Will the Minister agree to conduct a full review of the social costs of gambling? For example, the Government have never estimated the cost to the NHS of gambling-related harm. Will the Minister ensure that gambling-related harm is included when health education is made compulsory in all state-funded schools, as part of teaching about mental wellbeing? My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) has already mentioned schools.

Almost daily, we hear and read about problems to do with mental health, and I am glad that we now talk about mental health in a way that we perhaps never have—it is one of society's hidden problems. However, I suggest that mental health issues in some cases—not all—can be, and are identified as being, exacerbated by

dependency on drugs, alcohol and, yes, gambling. Gambling can be a hidden form of dependency, because if you are online you can do it on your computer in your own room. It is not the gambling that people think about of 50 or 60 years ago, which was a social occasion, be it at the bingo or in a casino; it is a hidden form of playing with money and, often, with people's lives.

2.49 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on securing this important debate. Many hon. Friends present have campaigned vigorously for the stake on fixed odds betting terminals to be cut to £2. The blight of FOBTs was eventually acknowledged by the Government, and that stake will be reduced in April this year.

However, the harm caused by gambling goes far wider than FOBTs, as has become apparent to me and others over the months and years that we have been campaigning. For that reason, we have established a new all-party parliamentary group on gambling-related harm, which will be looking broadly at the many harms caused by gambling. It is important to say that we are not against gambling; we acknowledge that, for many people, gambling is a benign, fun activity. However, there are also many instances in which gambling becomes harmful, and it is important to ensure that the right protections and regulations are in place to protect the vulnerable and prevent harm.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work she has done on this issue. A constituent approached me recently whose mother had dementia and had gambled away about £50,000, even though the family kept going back into the betting shops to point out that she had this condition. Given what my hon. Friend is saying, does she agree that we should do more to protect vulnerable people, such as those with dementia, and that the industry should look closer at the legislation?

Carolyn Harris: I certainly do. It appears that we are able to protect the vulnerable only when we let the press know of such stories, because the industry refuses to take responsibility for its actions.

The first priority of our APPG will be to look at the harms caused by the growth of online gambling. According to recent reports on British gambling behaviour, the prevalence of problem gambling among those who gamble online—at the casino, the slots and the bingo-style games—is very similar to its prevalence among those who play FOBTs. Currently, there are close to 3 million problem and at-risk gamblers in the UK, and 10% of them play online casino, slots and bingo.

The size, scale and structure of the industry are driving the harms that are being caused. The APPG has heard that the remote gambling sector is being run in a way that is totally unsustainable; in some cases, online companies are actively seeking to drive harmful gambling behaviour and large-scale bets to ensure their own profitability. A recent PricewaterhouseCoopers report for the Gambling Commission found that 59% of the profits of remote gambling companies come from people with gambling addictions or problematic gambling behaviour. Those companies' models are based not on building long-term relationships with loyal customers,

but on extracting as much money as possible from people, particularly those who exhibit more risky behaviour and place large bets until they effectively run out of money. The companies then move on to find other customers, and they seek to incentivise their staff to do so. Their constant drive for profit and new customers means that they have no incentive to seek a reduction in problematic behaviour. Problem gambling and high-stakes play are entirely in their interests.

Those companies' frantic search for new customers and greater levels of spending has, in turn, led to a huge increase in gambling advertising. We have heard about cases of vulnerable gamblers being offered VIP status to encourage them to gamble and rack up huge losses. Equally, we have heard rumours about some operators not paying out to those who have rightly won money; they are happy to encourage those who regularly lose to gamble more, while restricting bets from more successful players. The message is clear: people should not go into online gambling with the expectation that they will win. The only customers that those companies want are those who lose.

There are now more diverse gambling products and experiences on offer than ever before, including live sports betting, in-play gaming and, more recently, mobile gaming. Those are relatively new products that differ from traditional bookmaking, and concerns have understandably been raised about player safety and protection, particularly for the vulnerable. Furthermore, the ease of deposit, the electronic nature of money spent, the slowness of withdrawals, the ability to reverse withdrawals, and the targeting of gamblers who win with offers to encourage further play all have the potential to create a harmful gambling environment.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech, and I commend her for the incredible work that she has done on problem gambling to date. Does she agree that the technology underlying a lot of these online games and gambling products is completely opaque? We have no idea how it is targeting people or how it works, and until we get to the bottom of that issue, much of this problem is going to be difficult to tackle.

Carolyn Harris: It has long been acknowledged that technology has left legislation way behind—in the dark ages, in some cases. Whereas there are clear limits on the maximum stakes, prizes and spin speed of gambling machines in betting shops and casinos, and big cash deposits are subject to fraud and money laundering checks, online gambling lacks similar limits. The APPG has met many times with Liz and Charles Ritchie, the incredibly courageous parents of Jack, who tragically took his own life in 2017 following an addiction that began on FOBTs. Jo Holloway's son, Daniel, also took his own life after becoming addicted to online gambling. Those are terrible tragedies, but they are just the tip of the iceberg. Every day, approximately 70 to 80 people contact me—as I am sure they contact colleagues present—to tell me how desperate a situation they and their families are in.

What should we do to improve things? The APPG is undertaking its inquiry and will make a series of recommendations—I am sure Members would be disappointed if it did not. We will be looking at the need

[Carolyn Harris]

for new legislation, as the current legislation is unable to address adequately the loopholes created by this relatively new part of the gaming industry, and we will be taking detailed evidence from key stakeholders. Our initial view, however, is that there should be far more stringent affordability checks by gambling companies. Banks also have a role to play in carrying out those checks; a number of challenger banks and traditional banks have already put such measures in place, but it is important that all banks and financial institutions follow suit and implement that feature.

Online gambling companies should commit to funding blocking software, and offer it for free to customers who self-exclude from their sites. The sector needs to adopt a more responsible approach to advertising during sports programmes, especially to protect children and the vulnerable. I welcome the whistle-to-whistle television ban, but in order for the advertising ban to be truly effective, those companies need to go further and include shirt and league sponsorship, as well as digital advertising around pitches. Otherwise, children and vulnerable adults will continue to be bombarded with gambling adverts throughout those events.

It is also worth bearing in mind that it is the broadcasters that have been most resistant to the clampdown on advertising. The TV companies have to take an important role and admit that this issue needs to be tackled. Serious consideration must be given to a statutory levy to fund harm prevention projects, support for those who have been harmed by gambling, and research into gambling and suicide. We must also stop the use of credit cards to gamble online; it is inconceivable that somebody should be able to rack up debt in order to gamble.

Above all, the industry needs to take responsibility for itself. Remote gambling is a growing industry, and it must learn the lessons of fixed odds betting terminals. It cannot be that time after time the Government must step in to prevent large and financially powerful industries from disregarding the harm they are doing to the vulnerable in society. The scourge of online gambling is becoming a matter of national urgency. We cannot sit back and let those problems continue, and I will not do so.

2.58 pm

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and I congratulate my friend the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on securing the debate—he is a fellow member of the all-party parliamentary group on gambling-related harm, and thus my honourable friend in this context. It is in order for me to follow the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), which is pretty much what I do all the time when it comes to this subject—I would not change that for the world.

This is a vital debate. All those years ago, the then Labour Government—this is not a party political point; I am simply making the point that they were in government at the time—were seduced by the idea that, by releasing gambling and removing pretty much all restrictions on it, we could somehow recreate and help communities. I remember that one of the great arguments was, “This will be a fantastic load of investment into communities,

because gambling will create jobs and produce a happier place.” I opposed it at the time. I set up the Centre for Social Justice, which looked into the matter. I said that an innate level of harm came from gambling and that deregulating it would be like saying, “We must increase drinking”, or, “It would be far better if we had more shops selling more drugs.”

The same idea applies with gambling, which ultimately is a harmful activity. I accept that is not the case for everyone, but it is harmful for some people, and “some people” is quite a large number. The latest figures I saw—I think they are understated, to be frank—show that 3 million people are what are called “problem gamblers”. I hate that phrase, because in every other area where there are such problems, we call them addicts. These are addicts. They are addicted to a course of action that in their right minds they would not pursue in the way they do.

Of course, the industry is smart. It has invested a lot of the extra money it has got—all those billions—into figuring out how people go about gambling. As the hon. Member for Swansea East said, we had this whole debate about fixed odds betting terminals, which were a problem. I am astonished that, given all the evidence, it took us so long to finally get movement, first from the Gambling Commission and finally from the Government. The onslaught from the gambling industry was a sight to behold. There was an onslaught of misrepresented figures and everything else. I will not go into the details, because I am sure that stands in history and testimony.

The issue is that a lot of money is at stake. That is what we are dealing with, but I prefer to look at the other side, which is that a lot of human beings are at stake, and they can little afford what is happening to them. Our single most important purpose as elected Members of Parliament, ultimately, is to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. In this case, it is those who have found themselves trapped in a devastating downwards spiral of addiction.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is making a characteristically powerful and passionate speech. He made an important point. This debate is about addiction. Millions of people across the country enjoy a flutter on the horses, for example. It is a pursuit that contributes to our economy and human enjoyment. The debate is about those who suffer from gambling addiction. The problem is not gambling per se, but addiction, and he is very correct to make that point.

Mr Duncan Smith: I am grateful for that intervention. I fully understand that gambling is enjoyed by numbers of people who enjoy it every now and again and do not get caught up in that spiral. They might go to the races or bet on the odd football match or something like that. I am a genuine believer in free choice—people make those decisions themselves—but we have to look at whether the way the industry goes about its purposes perverts that process so that individuals end up caught in that spiral. That was a helpful intervention, because I want to talk about the industry and what it is up to.

We had some fascinating work done to look at some of the behaviour, and I was astonished by what is going on. First and foremost, anyone watching the plethora of adverts that flood every sporting event on television will

see that they are all aimed at one particular type of person: young men. The adverts say, “You have to be smart, savvy, intelligent and clever. You are that kind of person because you beat the odds every time. You know what is going on. We give you special opportunities to do it, but you are so smart, you have to do it.” If someone is not gambling, the corollary is that they are not very smart and therefore incapable of doing it. The whole pattern of advertising is to drive people to gambling.

We then discovered that the way this works behind the scenes is quite scandalous. For example, bet365 has recently revealed that players who rack up huge losses are rewarded with weekly cash returns of up to 10% so that they can carry on playing. In training sessions for new staff, a bet365 worker gave an example to a reporter. They said:

“If they’ve lost, say, £15,000 in that week, then we’ll give them a weekly rebate, normally on a Tuesday, and we’ll give them maybe 10% of that back.”

That is quite sinister. We can see exactly what they are after: those who habitually gamble and lose. They are not really interested in those who win. In fact, they do not like it very much—I can understand the reason—if people actually win, so they do everything they can to discourage people who ever manage to win.

There are all sorts of delayed payments and other mechanisms. Sometimes people will not even be allowed to gamble again with a particular organisation. We are taking evidence on that in the all-party parliamentary group. It is clear that the gambling companies quickly pull away those who habitually gamble. They gamble almost by impulse, and thus they become incredibly profitable for the companies. They are induced to gamble even more, because they have this habit. The idea of targeting someone who has the habit is key.

The work done by the Centre for Social Justice, which I set up, shows that such targeting not only destroys the lives of those locked into the downward spiral of misery, but drags whole families into despair. We have already heard examples of people who have committed suicide and people who have lost all their family connections. Some have lost loads of money belonging to their families and are unable to carry on a normal life.

The hon. Member for Swansea East made much of the PwC report for the Gambling Commission, which found that 59% of the profits for a remote gaming company come from those with a gambling addiction or problematic behaviour. The model is based not on any long-term relationship with loyal customers, as would be common for most business models, but on sifting out those who gamble from those who fundamentally lose. When we watch the advertising process, we can begin to realise that the companies are going to that very selective targeting. My general view is that they are completely out of control. What has been going on for some time is a front. They are trying to pretend somehow that they are reasonable and are behaving well, but they are behaving appallingly. They have set out fundamentally in the pursuit of money, and they do not care if they destroy lives.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a characteristically powerful speech on a subject dear to his heart. Here we are: another week, another debate on online gambling, which only goes to show how important the issue is to us all. Does

he agree that a powerful start to righting some of the problems that the gambling companies have created would be a mandatory 1% levy on gross profits to fund decent research and help set up more gambling clinics?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my right hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* No? He is right hon. in my book. I agree with him, because what has happened so far is too much about the voluntary. I am not one for constantly regulating—far from it—but we see the level of harm and the lack of knowledge about how deep the harms go, and it is time for the Government to do something.

I want to pick up on loot boxes, which the hon. Member for Inverclyde talked about in his very good speech. Almost the most sinister thing going on at the moment is the inducement of young people—kids, really—to get into the habit early. They are locked into their rooms—often their bedrooms—often until quite late at night. Sometimes parents do not realise what is going on, but they get into this process where they are often gambling money, but not money as we might term it; it is an alternative form. Sometimes they are gambling for clothing, which eventually becomes a monetary derivative.

Interestingly, I saw a report by Macey and Hamari for the University of Tampere on participation in skins and loot boxes. Worryingly, the report concludes that almost 75% of those participating in gambling related to e-sports were aged 25 or under. What is going on is clear: it is highly addictive and very fast. People build up a box of prizes. They get used to a process of inducement when they go on to bigger gambling. They hear about a 10% gift or going to a fancy party somewhere and it becomes a part of their lives, because they understand it from the gambling process that they were engaged in in the gaming.

My apologies, Mr McCabe, if I have gone slightly over my time. I will conclude by saying to the Minister, for whom I have huge respect—no one is more pleased than I am that she is on the Front Bench—that the Government need to right a wrong. The wrong was that we opened the whole of the regulatory process to gambling. It does not matter which Government did it; it was done. Now we need to bring the beast back under control. I simply say to her that there are recommendations—I will not read them all out—from the all-party group, and I hope that she will give them full consideration. It is time now to demand more of an organisation of companies that derive profits and in too many cases cause harm. There are good people who gamble occasionally, but others are locked into a spiral of harm. We look to the Government to change their circumstances.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): To be sure of getting the final four speakers in, I will have to impose a five-minute limit.

3.11 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to participate in this debate on gambling-related harm, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on all the work he has done on this issue and on securing this debate. We can all agree that self-regulation of the gambling industry has not worked, and it will not work. We even see today in this Chamber that self-regulation does not work, which is why the six-minute time limit was completely ignored by other Members at the expense of their colleagues.

[Patricia Gibson]

I wanted to participate in this debate because in North Ayrshire, the majority of which I represent, the latest figures show that in the eight years from 2008 to 2016, £32 million was gambled. In a post-industrial area facing huge economic and social challenges, that level of gambling is a major cause for concern. Before I go any further, I wish to acknowledge, as others have done, that many people gamble in a responsible way and come to no harm—good luck to them—but that is not the focus of today's debate. Today we must focus on the adverse impacts of gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and wider society. Gambling affects relationships, mental and physical health and finances, and it exacerbates existing inequalities. There is a clear link to poverty and disadvantage. Gambling addiction destroys lives. There are believed to be 430,000 gambling addicts in the UK, with a further 2 million at risk, and gambling is linked to between 4% and 11% of suicides.

Gambling is a public health matter and words alone are not enough. We need to appreciate that individuals are embedded in communities, so effective action for reducing gambling harm will include not only protecting individuals and preventing them from harm, but mitigating risks to communities and families. We need to look more critically at the opportunities to gamble—the number of betting shops—in our communities. We must look at the level of social deprivation, which is also a risk factor. We must look at the use of advertising, and at the support available for those who are living with the addiction and those who are vulnerable to developing it.

With their limited powers, the Scottish Government have already committed to using planning legislation to address the proliferation of betting shops in specified areas. However, our task as a society must be to prevent and reduce the harm that gambling causes. I very much welcome the Government's action to reduce the stake on fixed odds betting terminals. I know there was great pressure from some Tory MPs and the betting industry itself, which has very deep pockets, to try to prevent that from happening.

The concern is that online gambling means that those who are vulnerable to addiction or already living with a gambling addiction find it increasingly difficult to escape what some might call the lure of gambling, so there must be greater regulation to ensure that there are proper and robust affordability checks in place and proper spending limits enforced. The motivation to take the bull by the horns is that doing so will offer benefits to us all. It will mean reduced health, welfare and employment costs, reduced homelessness, and potentially reduced criminal justice costs. The benefits to the families and communities of those with such an addiction are beyond price.

We are still not very far down the road in dealing with the issue. First, we need a proper, wider review of the impact of gambling on children themselves and we must identify what policy changes are needed. We need to do better. If the Government are not prepared to act and go further, and if they are going to allow themselves to be kept prisoner by gambling interests and lobbying, I urge the Minister to ensure instead that gambling policy is fully devolved to the Scottish Government and that they are given full powers to tackle the problem effectively. The UK Government have had generations to tackle the problem, and they have not done it yet.

3.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), a fiery lady who has put her viewpoint forcefully and correctly. I am pleased to support the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) in raising the public policy challenge presented by gambling harms. Last Wednesday, the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), who is in his place, had a short debate on the topic of online gambling protections. It is right that this House should continue to make gambling the subject of regular debates as we seek to improve the policy and practice around problem gambling.

In September 2017, *The Lancet* published a key editorial with the title, "Problem gambling is a public health concern", and it is. The editorial stated that online gambling had

"a potentially greater danger to health than other forms of gambling, particularly for those younger than 16 years of age."

It is a matter about which I have long been concerned, since I came into this House. In 2013, I sponsored an amendment to the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Bill to introduce a multi-operator self-exclusion scheme for online gambling. Indeed, with the help of the Labour party—particularly with the help of the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones), who is in his place—the House divided. We did not win that vote, but we were successful in the other place as the legislation was then changed. It is now up and running in the form of GamStop.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I am sure my hon. Friend will be as disturbed as I was to learn that last year Northern Ireland had the highest statistics for problem gambling, and the statistics prove that the problem was in areas of deprivation, so we need to do more to help people in those areas.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is right to call for more help. I am about to come to the figures.

It is absolutely right that GamStop applies in Northern Ireland, especially given that Northern Ireland has a higher problem-gambling rate than the rest of the United Kingdom. The figures are stark and real. Research published by the Department for Communities in 2017 found that 2.3% of those surveyed in Northern Ireland were deemed to be problem gamblers, with a further 4.9% being classed as moderate-risk gamblers. The figure for England at that time was 0.7% of the population. It is clear that we in Northern Ireland have a greater issue than elsewhere.

In April 2016, I led a Westminster Hall debate on FOBTs and we were able to work collectively. I particularly commend the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) for their endeavours on this matter. The maximum stake was then reduced, as we know, but unfortunately the £2 stake applies only to Great Britain. Ladbrokes in Northern Ireland has led the way in proposing voluntary action to reduce the maximum stake to £2, and other providers have followed, so we have had some success on a voluntary basis. I acknowledge the good work that Ladbrokes has done in the Province.

In the context of the problem gambling figure being so much worse in Northern Ireland than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom—2.3% rather than 0.7%—I suggest that, while Stormont is suspended, there is one other area in relation to which the gambling industry could step up in Northern Ireland. In her speech last week the Minister said:

“There are positive signs that the industry is stepping up to the challenge...but there is scope to go further. I want to see the industry meet GambleAware’s donation target of £10 million by April this year.”—[*Official Report*, 12 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 96WH.]

I fully appreciate that if the money was extracted through the statutory levy in the Gambling Act 2005, the relevant moneys would apply only to England, Wales and Scotland, because gambling is devolved to Northern Ireland, but there is no reason why it could not voluntarily also apply to Northern Ireland. I therefore ask the Minister: is there any possibility of some of that money coming to us in Northern Ireland to address the issue? Will she clarify whether any portion of that £10 million goes to projects to help problem gamblers in Northern Ireland?

I am conscious of the time. It is striking that there is voluntary action to support problem gamblers in Northern Ireland through GamStop and the reduction in the FOBTs stake. Again, those struggling with problem gambling need not only self-exclusion, but other means of support, which are currently offered through the voluntary contributions paid by gambling companies for research, education and treatment. Indeed, if the Government finally decide to go down the route of the levy, just as the FOBT reduction and GamStop are being applied voluntarily in Northern Ireland, that could happen for a mandatory levy. Problem gamblers everywhere need assistance, but today I make a plea for additional help for those in Northern Ireland, through the voluntary scheme and any future mandatory levy. I hope that they will receive some positive news from the Minister.

3.20 pm

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I want to say at the outset: is it not about time that those who win are not precluded from gambling, as seems to be the practice? That is something that the Minister should consider, immediately.

I thank the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) for securing the debate, which is part of an ongoing debate on the problem of gambling. I take the issue seriously and have strong views. We should look after the vulnerable, because the consequences of gambling can be serious. The debate has moved on over the years, and it needs to continue to move on, because technology, platforms and the gambling industry are evolving. There are new methods and types of gambling, into which people are drawn. Gambling has had a devastating effect on some people, and we must approach the issue responsibly and thoughtfully and not dismiss it.

I was interested to hear the comments of the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who spoke powerfully. To summarise, if I may, he said that the gambling industry was far too clever for its own good and was acting in a particularly pernicious way with respect to problem gambling. I would add that it almost replicates some of the practices used by the tobacco industry over 60 or 70 years. Although I hear other Members saying the opposite, I want to point out

that the thing about the tobacco industry that the gambling industry tries to replicate is making the issue a medical one, rather than a matter of precaution. The reason for that is that if it is a medical issue, and we talk about problem gamblers, we actually allow them to gamble and rack up debts—and we will sort the problem out afterwards. It is a simple and clever strategy, and we must be minded to see through it. We should operate on a precautionary principle. There is a reason why the gambling industry does not want us to do that, which is that it would mean acting before people engage in harmful gambling.

We have accepted the precautionary principle in the case of fixed odds betting terminals. I am delighted that the cap has been lowered to £2 and I congratulate those, including my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, who were in the vanguard of the campaign. Equally, going back to 2012, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will remember the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) who was one of the first people to raise the matter in this place. He expressed great concern, which I shared at the time, and I do not think thanks have been expressed to him in the debate.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): On the point about raising new concerns about gambling, is my hon. Friend aware of the use of loot boxes in video games, which many countries recognise as gambling? People aged under 18 who are using loot boxes sometimes rack up hundreds or thousands of pounds of debt, but the Gambling Commission does not view it as gambling.

Graham P. Jones: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which other Members have made in the debate, about children being drawn into gambling by derivatives of money or by tokens simulating money. That is a huge and significant concern and we must all be worried about it.

I appreciate that the gambling industry makes a contribution to the economy and provides employment, including in my constituency. I go into bookmakers, and am happy to work with the staff there. I recently went into William Hill in Accrington to support good causes. I do not in any way think there should be all-out war on bookmakers. We should have a reasoned argument about gambling, what to do about the considerable number of people who have been entrapped into gambling, and how to prevent others from becoming victims—if I may say that—of gambling products and the gambling industry in future. We must take a balanced approach.

According to official data on fixed odds betting terminals, which, as everyone knows, allow users to bet up to £100 every 20 seconds on the spin, the amount that British gamblers lost on them last year doubled. The last figure is for 2016 when it went up from £1 billion to £1.8 billion. That is a colossal amount of money to have been lost, and dividing it up by constituency allows us to appreciate how much. If the council tax collected by my local district council is compared with the amount spent in the same area by being pushed into fixed odds betting terminals, the contrast between the two figures is dramatic. Of course the amount that goes into FOBTs is far more significant.

The evidence for problem gambling is significant, too. The Gambling Commission has reported that there are some 430,000 gambling addicts, and 2 million vulnerable

[Graham P. Jones]

players at risk of developing an addiction. That takes me back to the point that we should not necessarily see the problem as medical—although for those who are addicted we should. We should never forget that we need to apply the precautionary principle. I want to finish with—

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. We have no more time, so I call Hannah Bardell.

3.26 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) not just on securing the debate but on his incredible, dogged work on the issue. He has pursued it with serious vigour and—as I am sure applies to other Members who have worked on the matter of fixed odds betting terminals—under huge pressure from betting firms.

I draw attention to what the Library briefing for the debate says about the statutory levy:

“Under section 123 of the 2005 Act, the Secretary of State can make regulations requiring gambling operators to pay an annual levy to the Gambling Commission.”

The reality is that there are powers. More needs to be done, but existing powers are not even being implemented. Many Members have given statistics and spoken about the challenges and issues, and the damage that gambling-related harm is doing to society and communities. I draw the attention of the Chamber to a study by Robert Lustig, who is a professor of paediatrics, with a focus on endocrinology, at the University of California, San Francisco. He is also the author of “The Hacking of the American Mind”. He told a conference on technology addiction that the brain reacts to technology similarly to the way it reacts to other addictive substances:

“Technology, like all other ‘rewards’, can overrelease dopamine”.

In 2017 we heard that the level of extreme internet use among UK teenagers is among the highest in the OECD. The think-tank, the Education Policy Institute, reported in 2017 that more than a third of 15-year-olds can be classed as extreme internet users—meaning that they use it for six-plus hours a day. If that is translated into online gambling and its proliferation we are heading for a serious crisis among young people—the adults of tomorrow.

Much has changed since I was an avid gamer, playing such games as “Sonic the Hedgehog” in search of gold rings. Loot boxes were not a thing. I have recently learned a lot more about them. I am the Scottish National party spokesperson on digital, culture, media and sport. The party takes online harms seriously and I have increasing concerns about them. I know that the Government want to get things right in the White Paper, but they need to speed up the process. There are clearly huge issues for young people—to do not only with gambling but with pornography. Loot boxes are clearly gambling, and we share the concern about them. They allow players of online video games—usually children—to pay money for an unknown prize. I read through some of the recommendations in ParentZone, which include measures such as not having credit or debit cards attached to children’s profiles.

Earlier I mentioned education, and a couple of weeks ago there was a Westminster Hall debate on the importance of sex education in school, and of not removing children from that. It was concerning to hear the number of Members who backed what, to my mind, was an ill-informed online petition. Many people said that parents should be allowed to teach their children about sex and teach social and religious education at home, but in reality many children and young people are vulnerable, particularly online, and their parents may not have the facilities and information to support them at home.

Loot boxes are used in the context of an uptake in gambling by young people, and it has been reported that 40% of 11 to 16-year-olds engage in gambling. Horseracing was mentioned earlier, and I was recently visited by Bill Alexander, who runs an organisation called Sportjumping. He had some concerning facts, which I will write to the Minister about. His view was that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport withheld information that levy contributions from the betting industry are offset as tax credits from the EU competition commission, and he queried state aid for the sport. Horseracing generates a huge amount of money and is very popular, but there are concerns about it, such as the fact that many jockeys suffer from osteoporosis, have to “sweat down”, or have depression as a result of weight loss, not to mention the number of horses that are killed. I hope the Minister will consider that issue.

3.31 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) for securing the debate. He has been an assiduous campaigner for the reform of gambling regulations since he entered the House in 2015, and I pay tribute to his work thus far.

This has been an excellent debate, with no fewer than 17 Back-Bench contributions from right hon. and hon. Members—a remarkable figure for Westminster Hall. My hon. Friend spoke about the consequences of debt due to gambling, such as relationship breakdown, anxiety and depression, and he spoke movingly about a young guy, Jack, who sadly took his own life. He spoke about the eye-watering profits of the gambling industry, which have increased by 65% since the Gambling Act 2005, and he touched on the relationship between sport and gambling, particularly in advertising—there is much more to be said on that, but that is probably a different issue for a different debate.

The right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) reflected on his time as a shadow Minister in 2005, and he spoke about the move to online gambling and his concerns about offshore regulation—concerns that I share. The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) is probably my favourite Labour MP in the House, and we rightly pay tribute to her work on the all-party group on gambling-related harm. I look forward to joining that group in its inquiries from next week onwards. She was right to say that we must consider the growth in online gambling. Sadly, legislation does not always keep pace with new technology, and it is important for the all-party group to consider that.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) also reflected on the 2005 Act. He was right that there is overwhelming evidence

about FOBTs, and it took the Government and the Gambling Commission a long time to address that issue. I hope that we will not see that again, although I will reserve my judgment.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson)—I think the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred to her as the “fiery lady”—rightly spoke about the need to move on from self-regulation. It is fair to say that it is no longer appropriate for the gambling industry to mark its own homework, and she made that point powerfully.

The hon. Member for Strangford—my fellow season ticket holder for Westminster Hall—spoke powerfully about the situation in Northern Ireland. I confess that I was not aware of that difference between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK regarding FOBTs, and I suspect it has something to do with the Stormont Assembly not currently sitting. It would be good to see that issue move on. The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones) spoke about maintaining momentum and keeping up with the pace of technology, as well as the need to make gambling a medical issue, which I echo. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) said that powers to address problem gambling do exist but they are not currently used well, and I share that concern.

The liberalisation of gambling, which was exacerbated by the 2005 Act, has had a profound impact on my community and many of my constituents. Even today on Main Street in Baillieston, three bookies are lined up next to each other, separated only by a fast food shop—not exactly great diversity for a local high street. Many years ago a Channel 4 survey suggested that there were an average of six betting shops for every 100,000 people in an affluent area, but 12 in a more deprived area. My constituency has fewer than 100,000 people—there are around 70,000—yet we have in excess of 35 betting shops. Bookmakers and gambling firms disproportionately target areas of high deprivation, such as my constituency of Glasgow East.

As the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) said, many Members do not have a problem with folk who want to go for the odd punt on the horses. I had an enjoyable evening at a parent council fundraiser race night a couple of weeks ago, and we all accept that, when done in moderation, there is no problem with gambling. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde was right to say that we must focus on the harm caused by gambling, and the vulnerable people whom it impacts, and I am glad we are having this debate.

Public health, and particularly children’s health, must be given utmost priority in these matters, and urgent action should be taken if children are engaging in gambling. As Members have suggested, there is a risk that technology is developing at a pace that we in Parliament do not perhaps keep up with, and that is especially true when it comes to apps. As my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said, many mobile phone apps are designed to be stimulus-driven, and we know the impact that has on dopamine levels. Earlier this week, the all-party group on social media and young people’s mental health, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), produced a powerful report on the impact that social media and apps are having on young people, and some of the issues that we are discussing tie in with that.

Having added to the picture that has already been eloquently painted by hon. Members, I would like the Government to commit to radical action in this area, although the recent shenanigans with FOBTs reform lead me to conclude that they are reluctant to take more action on gambling. I would like that legislation to be devolved to Scotland, because I do not want this issue to get left behind. During the debate on FOBTs, I recall the bullying that Members of this House received from the Association of British Bookmakers, and on a public health issue such as this, it is important not to give in to bullying by big industry or lobbyists. We in this House should, quite rightly, tell the Association of British Bookmakers where to go.

I want the Government to take real action on this issue. I have a lot of respect for the Minister, whom I encountered when she was a Whip, as well as in her new role. She was there the day that the statutory instrument on FOBTs was passed, so I will reserve judgment and listen to what she has to say. However, if Westminster will not take action on the issue, my own Government at home in Scotland will. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran said, although we have limited powers to act on the issue, we have not been shy when taking action on the proliferation of FOBTs. If we go back and consider the liberalisation in the 2005 Act, and the problems we have been left with today, we should come to the conclusion that no action is no longer an option. There is cross-party support in this House to get something done, and we look to the Minister for that action.

3.39 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. All Members have made incredibly valuable comments. I especially pay tribute to the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) for securing this essential debate. As I am sure he is aware, the Labour party has been driving improvements in protections and care for gamblers, and I am pleased that there is cross-party consensus when it comes to reducing gambling-related harm. *[Interruption.]* I hope that his chuckle is in acknowledgment of that.

Gambling addiction currently affects 430,000 people in the UK. That many people could fill Wembley stadium four times over. Last year’s debate on fixed odds betting terminals showed us what can be achieved when politicians, experts and campaigners come together on such an important common cause. Despite opposition from the industry and, I am sorry to say, reluctance from some within the Minister’s party, we were able to achieve reform that will save lives, benefit communities and better regulate the market. I am proud that the Labour party was the driving force behind that reform.

We now need to go further. I am pleased that the fixed odds betting terminals all-party parliamentary group will continue its work under the new banner of the all-party parliamentary group on gambling-related harm. I am also proud that my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) is working with the hon. Member for Inverclyde and other parliamentarians to investigate the impact of gambling-related harm in our communities. The excellent work being done by campaigners such as Liz and Charles Ritchie at Gambling With Lives powerfully reminds us of what that harm means, and the deep destruction that it has on individual lives and families.

[Dr Rosena Allin-Khan]

Last year the Labour party published our review of problem gambling and its treatment. In that review, we cited the need for additional resources in treatment, and recommended achieving that by placing a mandatory levy on gambling companies that would allow for greater training, capacity and expertise in those services, and for the establishment of specialised regional gambling treatment centres. I am pleased that the case for a mandatory levy has been taken up by other parties and organisations, and I expect it to come into effect in the coming year.

However, we also need to have a real conversation about how the money from that levy would be best allocated and spent. The Labour party believes that the debate on gambling-related harm needs a stronger and committed public health focus. In our review, we called for the formation of a working group between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Health and Social Care to co-ordinate that, and we would want to see similar co-ordination with a gambling mandatory levy and other public health-related priorities.

At the moment, gambling harm is too often seen as a side issue to other parts of addiction and public health. We want it at the forefront of public health thinking and, crucially, seen as an addiction in its own right. In my professional capacity as an emergency doctor, I have first-hand experience of seeing families torn apart by gambling and mental health issues—families who have lost loved ones, and walked in on their child trying to commit suicide.

Two things will be needed moving forward: first, training for GPs and healthcare professionals, to ensure proper diagnosis of problem gambling; and secondly, more dedicated clinics opened across the country. Research has shown that problem gambling is linked to social deprivation, with the highest number of betting shops clustered in areas of Liverpool, Glasgow and Birmingham that have a higher rate of unemployment. Yet the only specialised NHS treatment clinic in the entire country is in London. Even with a new clinic in Leeds, clearly much more must be done. We need to go further when it comes to the exposure and influence of gambling.

In our review, the Labour party called for a change to advertising rules—namely, a whistle-to-whistle ban. Before Christmas we saw an industry initiative that proposed a ban but that, in reality, dealt only with TV advertising. That is meaningless when more than half of our football teams' shirts are sponsored by gambling companies, and there is rolling advertising on pitch-side billboards. The Labour party calls once again for a ban on shirt sponsorship by gambling companies.

I will conclude by looking forward to a new frontier of gambling-related harm: online gambling. Last month my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) gave a speech in which he outlined how online gambling can be better regulated, with limits on spend, stake and speed. Limits on how much internet gamblers can stake and spend online would be introduced under a Labour Government. Online companies have a responsibility to protect their customers from placing bets that they cannot afford, but too often operators have either neglected the care of their customers or have been too slow in their due diligence.

On spending, the Labour party would like affordability checks to be made a requirement before gambling takes place, so that people cannot lose huge sums of money that they cannot afford. Crucially, that requires a ban on credit card gambling. On stakes, the Labour party wants caps introduced on the amount that can be gambled on certain online products that are linked to harm. There was cross-party support for FOBTs stake reduction, and I hope that there will be similar support for that approach to online gambling. Labour would tackle the problems by creating a new category in the current legislation—the Gambling Act 2005—specifically for online betting, to introduce a system of thresholds placed on the spend, stake and speed of betting, giving safeguards to consumers.

The social cost of addiction, including treatment, welfare, housing and criminal justice, is as much as £1.2 billion a year. That does not even begin to cover the untold costs borne by the families and loved ones of those addicted to gambling. I know that the Minister values the lives of all those important families, who have had their lives ripped apart by gambling. I hope that she will take on board what has been said, and agree that we need to do more—indeed, that we must do more.

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Mims Davies): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on securing this important debate, and I thank all Members for their thoughtful and passionate contributions.

As I outlined to the House last week, reducing gambling-related harm is a priority for the Government. The Secretary of State and I are very clear on that. Millions of people enjoy gambling safely. It is a harmless social activity for many, whether in the form of a day at the races—I was at Cheltenham festival last week—or popping down to the pier on a holiday and enjoying time with family, as I do sometimes with my daughters. As we have heard today, for a small number of people who experience harm the consequences can be devastating, and Members have raised the problem of addiction. In response to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), the latest data that I have states that the estimated problem gambling prevalence rate among adults in Great Britain is 0.7%, which is approximately 340,000 people.

In my response, I will try valiantly to answer as many points as I can, but I will concentrate on two things: first, the protections that are already in place to prevent harm, and what we want to do more on and, secondly, how we are working with the Department of Health and Social Care. The hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) will be pleased to know that we have many ongoing policy workstreams across both Departments to ensure that we get the help to those who need it and learn from experiences.

Many Members mentioned the Gambling Act 2005, because it predates the current internet age. It is supported by the Gambling Commission, which is a regulator with broad powers to ensure that all forms of gambling are free from crime, are fair and open, and protect children, our young people and the vulnerable. However, we recognise the challenge regarding gambling online. Wherever an operator is based, it must have a licence from the

commission and must obey the conditions of that licence. The commission regularly checks that its requirements are still right, changing and updating them as needed.

In answer to the questions asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon and the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) about age verification and identity, the commission is consulting on strengthening the customer interaction and looking at credit cards and gambling. The Secretary of State and I also recently met banks and challenger banks on that.

The Government will intervene where there is evidence of harm. We did that on the B2 machine stakes in betting shops, and I am pleased that those changes will come into effect in two weeks. Let me be clear to any operator who thinks that that is the end of Government action that if there is evidence that a product is causing harm, we will act. Operators are simply mistaken if they think that we will not intervene.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) challenged me about Government action. As the gambling and lotteries Minister, I will not give in to any bullying tactics from big business when it comes to intervening where there is harm. I want to be very clear about the further work necessary to ensure that operators act in a socially responsible way: if we see signs that they are not intervening where there are problems, we will act. Where operators fail to protect customers from harm, the Gambling Commission has the teeth to act and has done so. I am sure that the commission will look at the all-party group's work with interest, as we do; I commend all those who are doing that work. Where operators may be giving incentives to gamble to those who suffer the highest losses, we are absolutely on the case. It is time for everyone to come to the table and be responsible.

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

Accountability for business, social responsibility and customer protection are key, as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). The industry has a key role in preventing harm. The Gambling Commission's rules are clear that operators must identify where people's gambling is putting them at risk. Responsible business is the only kind of business that I want to see in the sector—I have been clear about that ever since I took this job. The power to prevent harm is in also in the hands of businesses, as we have heard today. The Secretary of State and I are absolutely stepping up to the challenge of working with financial institutions, across Government and across sectors.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde mentioned loot boxes and gaming. We are aware of concerns that loot boxes could encourage gambling-like behaviour. Alongside the Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries, I continue to look at the evidence, and we will listen to the all-party group and work with the tech and gambling industries. GamStop, which was rolled out last year, can really help people with online problems. For the first time, we have seen some outcomes: it currently extends to 90% of the market, and I call on the rest of the providers to step up and ensure 100% coverage. I was pleased last week to meet Gamban, which I will soon visit at its Southampton base. It provides extra protection and has a background in understanding this challenge and using tech and all the devices that it can engage with to help people. Work is being done where people know the challenges and can respond.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde also raised concerns about gambling advertising. I reassure hon. Members that we have looked carefully at the review's evidence on advertising and will continue to do so. There are strict rules on adverts that target children and vulnerable people; guidance has been strengthened further as a consequence of the review, and the commission has toughened its sanctions for operators that breach the rules. The whistle-to-whistle ban has already been mentioned, and we have worked with GambleAware to launch the Bet Regret advertising campaign. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for Bet Regret.

The industry is also responding to public concern about TV adverts more broadly. From this summer, there will be a ban on betting adverts during sports events before 9 o'clock. That is a step forward, but as Minister for sport, I say directly to sports bodies that they must look very carefully at their responsibilities to their fans and followers, because they, too, can play a part in reducing the risks and in raising awareness of them. There are sports that have an overreliance on types of sponsorship that some could see as irresponsible. They know who they are—they need to take stock, think about their fans, including young children, and support the vulnerable.

Let me turn to concerns about suicide. Any suicide is a tragedy for so many families. As has been said today, we need robust understanding. GambleAware has commissioned new research, which will be published soon and will help us to work with health professionals in the sector. We want to continue to work with the Department for Education on stigma and on concerns about gambling problems. I agree that we need a better awareness of people's risks and problems from a younger age, so that we can direct help where it is needed. GambleAware and GamCare have some fantastic initiatives, including programmes for schools, to reach out to our young people. I intend to work with ministerial colleagues to see what advice we can give to parents, who absolutely need to know what is out there.

It is important that we continue to listen to those with lived experience, and I thank the Ritchies and Gambling With Lives for their important and ongoing work. We are also working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, and I am pleased that in our long-term plan for the NHS we committed to expanding specialist support for people with gambling addictions. As has been said, GambleAware is evaluating its current services and looking to increase access.

Health surveys show links between poor mental health, substance abuse and problem gambling—2.2% of people with probable mental health issues are problem gamblers—so we need to ensure that we understand the public health harms. Working with Public Health England to carry out a review of the evidence is our next step; the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board has also published a paper that sets out a potential framework for measuring harm. We want stronger evidence so that we can appropriately target our resources and, ultimately, our intervention.

Further research is needed on the factors behind suicide. I recently met the Minister for suicide prevention, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), to understand more about gambling as a factor in suicide, which is a key priority for her as well. I want to see a stronger evidence base. We heard today

[Mims Davies]

about some of the academics who are working in this important area, but I encourage more academics to do so and help us to understand the challenges of harm. Preliminary research on gambling-related suicide will be published soon, and we will work across Government so that we do not see any more tragedies in this area.

Let me focus on support. I assure those who are currently experiencing harm that help is there. There is an NHS clinic in London and there will soon be one in Leeds. GambleAware funds a national gambling helpline and a network of counselling services led by GamCare. It is open from 8 in the morning to midnight, seven days a week, and—for those tuning in—the number is 0808 8020 133. I met GamCare last week and heard all about what it has been doing for the past 20 years to frame frontline service provision. It shows that if people reach out for help, they can move forward and get out of the cycle.

GamCare's helpline is an essential starting point. It is doing all it can to raise its visibility among GPs, and it is working with GambleAware to ensure that appropriate resources are available for health workers, frontline staff and debt advisers—in fact, people often come to banks as their first line of help. That important work is funded by industry, and I encourage it to maintain and increase the support that it gives. We want the voluntary system to work, and the Gambling Commission is committed to reviewing and helping to strengthen it.

On the levy question, I remind all those who are watching or listening that nothing but responsible business is acceptable. The Government will act and make changes where evidence so directs, leaving open for consideration all funding options for future treatment.

I am glad that recognition of gambling-related harm has increased, as we have seen today. It is a serious issue and a lot of work is being done by a range of bodies, and it is important that we acknowledge their good will and commitment as well as recognising where we need to go further. Strong protections are in place and they are being further strengthened, but we continue to gather knowledge and evidence of harm. I look forward to working with the House, updating hon. Members and working with business on this area to ensure that only responsible practices and actions remain.

Ms Karen Buck (in the Chair): Ronnie Cowan, you have less than a minute, but that is enough for a brief comment.

3.59 pm

Ronnie Cowan: Thank you, Ms Buck; I also thank Mr McCabe, in his absence, for guiding us with a strong hand, and the Minister for her very comprehensive response, which I really do appreciate. I have sat down with her on previous occasions to discuss the matter, and she has proved very knowledgeable and sincere.

I am in debt to all hon. Members who contributed to the debate. When the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) mentioned deregulation, it struck me that we had opened a Pandora's box for bookmakers. When that happens, of course, all the miseries of the world fly out, but—as those who are familiar with the story will know—what is left behind is hope. I hope that today the Government are listening and will act accordingly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered gambling-related harm.

GP-Patient Ratio: Swale

4 pm

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the ratio of GPs to patients in Swale.

My constituents have a number of major concerns, including local roads, the level of housing in our area, and the ratio of GPs to patients. The three issues are intertwined, as I will explain, but to set the issue in context, I will explain a little about my area. The local authority district of Swale is on the north-east Kent coast. It covers the whole of my constituency of Sittingbourne and Sheppey and also includes part of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), whom I am delighted to see here today. However, the Swale clinical commissioning group area is not coterminous with Swale Borough Council. Instead, it has responsibility only for Sittingbourne and Sheppey. Faversham falls within the remit of the Canterbury and Coastal CCG.

Swale CCG is one of the smallest CCGs in the country, if not the smallest, because when CCGs were first set up, Medway CCG did not want to include Sittingbourne and Sheppey, nor did any of the east Kent CCGs, because my constituency has, historically, a number of areas with a high incidence of health deprivation. Life expectancy in Swale is the lowest in Kent. Within Swale itself, there is a huge, 10-year gap between the highest and lowest life expectancy. In some of the more affluent areas, life expectancy is 84 years, while in the more deprived areas, life expectancy is just 74 years.

A number of areas in my constituency have been identified as being in the bottom quintile on the national deprivation scale—a clear demonstration that not every area in the south-east is affluent—and there is an above-average incidence of obesity-related illnesses in my area. The number of people admitted to hospital in Kent because of health problems related to obesity has rocketed in recent years—around half of Kent's 1.5 million population is now overweight or obese—and the highest rate in Kent was recorded by Swale CCG, where 1,726 people per 100,000 were admitted to hospital due to obesity-related conditions. My constituency also has a higher incidence of lung-related disease than many other areas in the country. That is particularly true on the Isle of Sheppey.

Such health problems put huge pressure not only on our local hospitals, but on primary care, yet my constituency has the worst ratio of GPs to patients in the whole country. To give an idea how bad the situation is, in Rushcliffe, the ratio is 1:1,192; in Camden—hardly the most prosperous area in the country—the ratio is 1:1,227; and in Liverpool, it is 1:1,283. By contrast, in Sittingbourne and Sheppey, there is just one permanent GP for every 3,342 patients.

My local CCG recognises that the lack of doctors is a problem and managers are doing everything they can to improve the situation, but to succeed, they need to attract more GPs to our area, and to do that they need more help, and more money.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on a really important topic. My constituents also face

some difficulties getting access to a GP in my area of Swale borough, and also on the Maidstone side of my constituency, where in one practice the ratio of GPs to patients is 1:4,000. It is a real problem. I am concerned that there is not enough of a sense of urgency among some CCGs about fixing the problem. When the Minister sums up, I would be grateful if she could confirm the CCGs' responsibility, and what metrics they are held to account for, for access to GPs.

Gordon Henderson: I accept and understand my hon. Friend's concerns, but I would put on the record that Swale CCG is doing everything it can to resolve the problem, and does not fall into the category that she mentions.

I accept that Swale is not alone and that the shortage of GPs is a national problem, and that the reason for that shortage is complex. There is little doubt in my mind that successive Governments, including the Labour Government that was in power from 1997 until 2010, and the coalition Government that followed, which of course had to clear up the financial mess left by its predecessor, failed to invest enough in training the doctors we need today. Let us not forget that it takes 10 years to train a GP. To have them practising today, they would have had to start their training back in 2009.

Although there is a nationwide shortage, the problem is more acute in my constituency, and across Kent generally. Indeed, out of the top five areas in England with the worst GP to patient ratios, three of them—Swale, Thanet and Bexley—are in our county. That cannot be a coincidence.

Why is there such an acute shortage in Kent? I believe that the reason is twofold. First, doctors can earn more working in London than they can in Kent, because of the London weighting allowance. I would like to see the London weighting allowance extended to cover Kent, which would make it easier to recruit not only doctors, but also other public sector professionals, such as nurses, police officers, teachers, fire-fighters and prison officers, all of whom it is difficult for us to recruit.

Secondly, doctors undertake their training in London, so they tend to settle in the capital when they qualify. I am pleased that the Government have recognised that problem and a new medical school will be opening in Kent next year. We hope that doctors training in Kent will be more inclined to stay in the county once they have qualified. However, the reality is that any such newly qualified doctors who do decide to stay in Kent and go into general practice will not be available until at least the year 2030, by which time the need will be even greater because of other factors. That is where the two other concerns I mentioned at the beginning of my speech—roads and housing—come into the equation.

The roads infrastructure in my constituency is close to breaking point. We have continual problems of congestion, particularly on the M2, the A2 and the A249, and that congestion is creating ever higher levels of air pollution. As I mentioned, my constituency suffers from a high incidence of lung-related diseases. Ever more traffic congestion will produce ever more air pollution and increase the number of people who, in the future, will seek medical help. Their first port of call will naturally be a GP, putting even more strain on an already stretched primary care system. Something must be done to improve the strategic roads infrastructure in

[Gordon Henderson]

Sittingbourne and Sheppey in order to reduce congestion and air pollution, and that something must be done soon. Time is running out.

The second concern, and a major contributor to our poor GP to patient ratio, is the huge number of housing developments in my constituency over the past 20 years. The area has been transformed and is changing beyond all recognition. Housing numbers have already grown dramatically, and the housing targets being imposed on Swale Borough Council by the Government will see that growth accelerate. The reality is that we are facing the prospect of an ever-growing population at the same time as the number of GPs is diminishing, because the shortage that I spoke about earlier is being made worse by the number of doctors in our community who will retire in the next few years.

If the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government were represented here today, I am sure that it would insist that any future housing developments should have planning conditions placed on them to require the developers to provide health facilities such as a local health centre, as the Ministry has done in the past. What is the use of section 106 money and the community infrastructure levy if we fail to recognise an inconvenient truth: forcing a developer to build a health centre is all well and good, but without the necessary doctors to staff it, at the end of the day it is just another building? Somehow, we have to ensure that something is done to reduce housing targets in areas in which GPs are in short supply, such as my own, until such times as more doctors come on stream.

I appreciate that the Minister has no responsibility for either roads or housing, but I hope she will at least join me in lobbying her colleagues in the Department for Transport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide Sittingbourne and Sheppey with the help that is needed to solve the road congestion problem and reduce the planned level of house building. If we can do that together, we will go some way towards improving the health of my constituents and reducing the pressure on primary care in Sittingbourne and Sheppey.

4.11 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): It is a great pleasure to serve under your stewardship, Ms Buck, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) on securing this incredibly important debate. He speaks very passionately about his constituency and has raised a number of pressing issues that, to a greater and a lesser extent, I have responsibility for tackling. He has described the pressure that primary care is under in Swale very well. We know that Swale is not alone; I have received representations from other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), who raises very similar points about these pressures.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey talks about the impact of inadequate road infrastructure and excessive housing development exacerbating the challenges with GP accessibility, he could almost be speaking about my own constituency—it is like looking in a mirror in so many ways. I completely recognise the challenges he describes, because my

constituency faces almost identical issues with accessing GPs, inadequate roads, housing developments and trying to attract GPs to the area. The Government recognise that this is an issue that affects the care patients receive. We are working very hard to address it and are pushing harder than ever to grow the workforce by the extra 5,000 GPs to which we have committed.

A growing, ageing population and patients with long-term conditions are putting strain on the system. We need to look very closely at recruiting and retaining GPs, but that is not the whole story; we must also look at what GPs are telling us are the biggest issues, including workload, indemnity and risks associated with the GP partnership model. There are a number of tasks that we have to consider.

We recognise the importance of general practice, which is the absolute heart of our NHS. In 2015 we set the ambitious target to grow the workforce by 5,000; we are a long way from achieving it, but more GPs are now in training than ever before. The NHS long-term plan made a very clear commitment to the future of general practice, with primary and community care set to receive at least £4.5 billion a year more in real terms by 2023-24. That was followed by the new five-year GP contract, which will see billions of pounds of extra investment for improved access to family doctors, expanded services at local practices and longer appointments for patients who need them.

The new GP contract will address workload in general practice as a result of the workforce shortage that my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey so beautifully articulated. We need a culture change in the range of health professionals who people are prepared to see when they go and visit their local health centre. NHS England has committed to expanding community-based, multi-disciplinary teams, which will provide funding for 20,000 other staff in primary care networks, such as physician associates and social prescribers.

Gordon Henderson: I welcome the Minister's words and accept that the Government are doing something. I also accept that it is not just my area that has a problem. Does she recognise, though, that Kent has a particular problem? To give an example, somebody living in north Kent can travel 20 minutes up the A2 and get £6,000 or £7,000 a year extra. Although the Government are expanding the opportunities for the other professionals, we cannot even get them. It is not just doctors; it is all the professionals.

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I completely understand that places in the London catchment area can very easily lose key public sector professionals. It is very difficult to compete with the potential extra wages that they might be able to achieve by working in the Greater London area. It is important to acknowledge that diversifying the range of different medical professionals who people can see will immeasurably help general practice to cater for the additional number of patients. It means bigger teams of staff providing a wider range of care options for patients, which effectively frees up more time for GPs to focus on those with more complex needs.

I was very pleased to hear that the CCG general practice in Swale is already using the skills of a wider workforce, including pharmacists working alongside GPs and paramedics providing home visits. We are

training more GPs than ever before, and last year Health Education England recruited the highest number of GP trainees ever: 3,473. As my hon. Friend said, a new medical school is opening in Kent next year.

It has been made easier and quicker for qualified doctors to return to the NHS through the national GP induction and refresher scheme. Yesterday NHS England launched a new “Return to Practice” campaign, which is aimed at promoting the support that is available to GPs who have left practice, with a view to trying to tempt them and encourage them back. To bridge the gap while that training is ongoing—my hon. Friend rightly says that it takes a very long time to make a GP—NHS England’s international GP recruitment programme is bringing suitably qualified doctors from overseas to work in English general practice.

Helen Whately: I completely agree with what the Minister is saying about the importance of a greater range of healthcare professionals—it is not always about seeing a GP, so there needs to be a shift in expectations—and the plans to increase the number of GPs in the system, including through the Kent medical school, for which I campaigned very hard. I urge the Minister to come, if she can, to my point about an access metric. It would be really helpful to have a better way for patients to know what level of access they should expect. At the moment, we seem to have the proxy of a GP-to-patients ratio, but it is not good enough. It would be helpful if she could address that.

Caroline Dinanage: It is quite tricky. As my hon. Friend knows, general practices are independent contractors. Each general practice is required to meet the reasonable needs of their registered population, so there is no exact metric or recommendation for how many patients a GP should have, as the demand that each individual places on a GP can be significantly different. There is obviously much greater pressure on a practice in an area with a much older population—with more retired people and those with more complex needs—than on practices in other areas. That is where the complicating factors arise.

It is really important to work on innovative ways not only to bring in a new raft of GPs, but to hold on to the ones that an area already has. I understand that Swale CCG is working with GP practices across the area to improve retention. Supported by funding from NHS England, it is shortly due to launch a pilot GP recruitment and retention scheme. It is being proactive in recruiting the next generation of general practice staff and has been working with local schools and colleges to encourage local students to consider healthcare, and particularly primary care. I understand that three training practices in Swale offer placements for trainee medics, to give them the opportunity to experience general practice and consider general practice training. As of December, there were 11 direct patient care apprentices working in general practice across Swale.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey rightly made the point that three of the areas with the highest patient to GP ratios are in Kent. I have been advised that, alongside the CCG’s work, the Kent and Medway sustainability and transformation partnership has set up a primary care workforce group, and has secured £1.5 million from Health Education England and NHS England to implement its workforce transformation plan.

The range of other issues that deter medical graduates from general practice include the spiralling cost of purchasing professional indemnity cover, which is a major source of stress and financial burden. We have addressed that in the new GP contract and from 1 April this year, the new state-backed clinical negligence scheme for general practice will bring a permanent solution to indemnity costs and coverage. That will help drive recruitment and retention of GPs.

We recognise the huge contribution that the general practice partnership model has made to patients over the lifetime of the NHS, but we also recognise that increasingly that model faces challenges, as fewer young GPs want to become partners. An independent review, led by Dr Nigel Watson, reported in January and made seven recommendations on workforce business models and risk, to which we will respond shortly.

My hon. Friend made the point well that air pollution, road infrastructure and congestion contribute massively to the pressure on general practice. The Government recognise that air pollution poses one of the biggest environmental threats, particularly in the case of frail elderly people and young children. Removing congestion from roads is certainly one of the sure-fire ways to reduce some of the air pollution hotspots. My Department will always be happy to furnish him with data that he needs on the health impact of pollution, to support any of his activities for attracting the local road investment that will tackle the problem and help his constituents.

My hon. Friend also raised a concern that housing targets placed on Swale Borough Council by the Government put additional pressure on doctor’s surgeries. The national planning policy framework, which was published last year, makes it very clear that strategic policies must make sufficient provision for community facilities, such as health education and cultural infrastructure. As he says, it is not enough to build a building; we need staff inside it. The views of local clinical commissioning groups and NHS England must be sought with respect to the impact of any new development on health infrastructure and demand for healthcare services.

Examples of primary care being delivered in an innovative way can be found across the country, for example using other professionals to deliver care or GP practices grouping together to work more collaboratively. That is exactly the kind of innovation and co-operation envisaged in the long-term plan, which seeks to change the balance in how the NHS works by shifting more activity into primary and community care. That is enabled by expanding multidisciplinary team working. The NHS long-term plan also commits to the recruitment of 1,000 social prescribing link workers by 2020-21. I encourage my hon. Friend to have a conversation with Swale CCG to see if any of those innovative measures could be introduced to help his constituents.

Gordon Henderson: I assure the Minister that I meet my local CCG regularly—I have done since it was set up and will continue to do so.

Caroline Dinanage: That was never in any doubt as far as I am concerned, but sometimes CCGs may not have thought of some of the more innovative ideas that are used in other parts of the country. I am sure that my hon. Friend, in his highly esteemed role in the local community, is best placed to raise that issue with the CCG.

[Caroline Dinenage]

The Government are well aware that recruitment and retention of GPs is a huge issue. We know that there are problems and we are doing everything that we can to tackle them. We will keep my hon. Friend updated and I thank him for his contribution to the debate and for raising this very important matter.

Question put and agreed to.

4.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

Civil Service Compensation Scheme

4.30 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the civil service compensation scheme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—I chair the Public and Commercial Services Union parliamentary group. I want to raise the important matter of the civil service compensation scheme, and will first outline how we have got to the present situation.

It would be fair to say that the civil service compensation scheme has had a troubled recent history. Having run smoothly and been untouched for decades, since 2010 it has been the subject of much change, acrimony and litigation, leading to three judicial reviews. The first judicial review was in 2010, when the then Labour Government introduced changes to the scheme that would cut the redundancy terms of civil servants. PCS launched a legal challenge to those changes, and on 10 May 2010 the High Court ruled that the judicial review had succeeded and that amendments to the civil service compensation scheme were to be quashed. In essence, Mr Justice Sales concluded that the Superannuation Act 1972 provided that the agreement of PCS was required in order for any changes to proceed. The Court quashed the changes because they had not been agreed by the union.

There was a further judicial review in 2011, when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition established primary legislative changes to implement cuts to the civil service compensation scheme. The legislation was amended to the effect that the obligation to reach an agreement with the union on any changes was replaced with an obligation to consult with a view to reaching agreement. The proposals were agreed by the FDA, GMB and Prospect trade unions, but they were rejected by PCS, the Prison Officers Association and Unite the union.

At the time there was another legal challenge by way of judicial review. The primary grounds for the challenge were that the changes to the civil service compensation scheme constituted unlawful interference contrary to the rights of civil servants under article 1 of protocol 1 of the European convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In essence, the argument was that civil service compensation scheme terms were its members' possessions and that depriving them could not be justified. Mr Justice McCombe ruled that the scheme terms did constitute possessions under the convention, but that the state could interfere with them within a margin of appreciation. The Government cited deficit reduction as the reason for the changes, so the Court ruled that the interference was reasonable and the judicial review application was dismissed.

At that time, the coalition Government made some commitments. The then Minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude, said that

“constructive negotiations with the unions can work and the result is a package that is fair for civil servants and fair for other taxpayers.”

He went on to say:

“From the start, we said we would do everything we could to engage with the unions on the best way to reform a scheme, which was unaffordable and way out of line with private sector and...public sector schemes.”

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): By imposing changes and failing to consult the relevant trade unions, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government are left wide open to challenges from hundreds, if not thousands, of public sector workers?

Chris Stephens: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, because that is exactly what happened. I will come on to that later.

Gus O'Donnell, the then head of the civil service, echoed Francis Maude's comments, stating:

“It was important that we achieved a scheme which is sustainable, affordable and fair.”

However, those were hollow words, as just five years later the Conservative-majority Government elected in 2015 decided to proceed with further cuts to the civil service compensation scheme. On 8 February 2016, the Cabinet Office launched a consultation on reforming the scheme. During the consultation, it took the extraordinary step of debarring the trade unions that refused to agree cuts as a pre-condition for talks.

PCS balloted its members on the final offer and it was overwhelmingly rejected. Unsurprisingly, PCS again took the matter to the High Court. The primary argument was that, by debarring the union from talks, the Cabinet Office had breached its obligation to consult the trade unions with a view to reaching agreement. Mr Justice Sales and Mrs Justice Whipple agreed. They held that:

“The Minister could not lawfully exclude the PCSU from the consultation which ultimately mattered in terms of his statutory duty”.

They added that he

“was not entitled to impose additional entry conditions above and beyond those stipulated in the 1972 Act for participation in that consultation, in the form of the pre-commitments he required the unions to make.”

Accordingly, the Court quashed the changes. That was a significant victory for civil servants, which forced the Government to restore the terms of the scheme so that many members achieved higher payments and the pace of job cuts in some Departments slowed.

Not content to leave it there, the Government announced in September 2017 a further consultation on reforming the scheme. It is believed that the consultation is another attempt to make cuts. The Government's position will worsen even the proposed 2016 scheme terms that PCS members overwhelmingly rejected in a ballot and that were overturned by the High Court. Nevertheless, the trade unions engaged in talks with the employer.

PCS has been clear that there is no case for changing the terms of the scheme that were reinstated by the High Court. Notwithstanding that, it is engaging to protect its members' interests, as would be expected. It is participating in talks alongside other unions—the GMB, the Prison Officers Association and Unite the union, which have also adopted the position that there is no case for cuts in the scheme. Those unions represent the overwhelming majority of trade union members affected by the scheme, and they have been in detailed discussions with the Cabinet Office since late 2017. The objectives of the negotiations are fair: to secure maximum

protection for the lowest paid; to secure maximum protection for the greatest possible number of members—more often than not they are the lowest paid—and for those who want to remain in a job, thereby prioritising compulsory redundancy terms over voluntary exit and voluntary redundancy terms; and to eradicate the age discriminatory aspects of the current scheme.

I was sent a note by the Prison Officers Association, and I will reiterate its concerns. After prison officers are injured in the line of duty, how they are treated appears to be a lottery. In some cases, if the injury is judged severe enough—by outsourcers and privateers, naturally—they will be issued with a medical retirement, at which point they are entitled to their accrued pension. However, they can instead be issued with a medical inefficiency, which can have severe financial consequences. To be clear, we are talking about the same scenario: officers being so severely injured by prisoners that they cannot return to work. In one case they can retire and keep their pension, sometimes along with permanent injuries, while in the other they are often left in a position where they cannot even afford the urgent medical care they need.

The Prison Officers Association believes that the planned cuts to that scheme threaten to make an unfair situation even worse, by limiting further the number of weeks that critically injured prison officers can receive pay. That literally adds insult to injury, and this Government must act to make sure those brave men and women are not further penalised for working in such dangerous conditions while they diligently protect the public.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems that runs alongside this and most pension issues is a total lack of communication? A constituent who is affected by the changes contacted me; once my office got involved, it took four months to get any clear answers, excluding the amount of time that my competent constituent had spent trying to fix the problem on her own. There is a complete blame game between Departments, rather than an attempt to resolve things.

Chris Stephens: That is certainly my experience from some of my casework relating to the scheme. I hope that the Minister takes cognisance of my hon. Friend's remarks about how we should try to fix these issues.

The Minister should be under no illusion that the crisis unfolding in our prisons is anything less than a health and safety emergency, with violence against staff not only at a record level but rising at a record rate. According to Ministry of Justice figures, there were more than 10,000 assaults against officers in England in the past 12 months—an average of 28 each and every day.

It is perfectly reasonable to argue that these days many roles and professions, from shop worker to firefighter, unfortunately involve some exposure to violence, and that there is nothing unique about prison officers facing assaults at work. That is true, and I wish to see proper pension protection for those workers too, but prison officers work in a uniquely violent environment. According to their trade union, which will hold a march and a rally on this issue at Westminster tomorrow, it is the most violent and dangerous workplace in western Europe.

Beyond the chaos and carnage that the Government unleashed by sacking 7,000 prison officers, which opened the gates to unseen levels of violence, we must accept

[Chris Stephens]

that prisons are inherently violent institutions. They are places where hundreds of criminals, many of them guilty of violent crimes, are held against their will using the threat—and sometimes the application—of force. That makes prisons unique workplaces. We expect the brave men and women who serve inside them to confront violence when necessary. When prison officers are injured in the line of duty, protecting the public from dangerous criminals, we as a society have a special responsibility to protect them. Quite simply, if they are too badly injured to return to work, we must not add insult to injury by leaving them in financial as well as physical peril.

I turn to the current talks and the counter-proposal that the trade unions have sent the Government. After a year of talks, during which the 2010 terms remained in place, to the benefit of civil servants, the Government took the position that they could bring the negotiations to a close unless the unions made a counter-proposal. The trade unions agreed to submit a counter-proposal to the Government's plans, in line with their negotiating objectives.

The unions' proposal seeks to redistribute the scheme so that those affected by office closures and other redundancy situations—those who require the compensation the most—receive the most from the scheme. In other words, they argue that people being forced out of their jobs against their wishes should be prioritised. The trade unions met the Minister on 6 February to present their counter-proposal. He undertook to consider those representations and then to respond formally. As I am sure he will tell us, a further meeting is scheduled for next week.

The onus is now on the Government. It is expected that the Minister will soon come to a conclusion about his approach. I ask him to take cognisance of the following key factors before he does so. First, the commitments given by Francis Maude following the 2010 changes should hold firm. Reneging on those commitments now would only lead people to conclude that the commitments of Conservative Ministers count for nothing.

Secondly, there is no majority in the House in support of the Government's proposed changes; all parties, bar the Conservatives, oppose them. That includes the Democratic Unionist party, which—unsurprisingly, given the dangers that loyal, hard-working civil servants have been exposed to in its part of the world—supports the trade unions in this campaign and recognises that those workers should not be treated with contempt.

Thirdly, the counter-proposal put forward by the trade unions delivers the Government's stated objective of producing significant savings for the taxpayer, while ensuring that those most in need of the scheme derive the most benefit from it. That is in line with the Government's stated objectives of helping those who are just about managing and preventing excessive pay-outs at the top.

Fourthly, low-paid civil servants who work in towns and cities subjected to office closures will find it harder to obtain work. Take, for example, the office closure programme of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. In many towns, HMRC is the largest employer. The highest-paid civil servants will be able to obtain other employment in the public sector, but it will be more difficult for those at the lower end, who will see the largest employer move out of the area, to obtain other work.

We call on the Minister to hold good to previous commitments and not to proceed with cuts to the civil service compensation scheme. Failing that, we call on him to adopt the counter-proposal put forward by the trade unions. I look forward to his response.

4.45 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Thank you for calling me to speak, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) on securing the debate.

Here we are again, debating the negative impact of this Government's policies on workers. Debates in Westminster Hall or in the main Chamber that lay bare the real consequences of the Government's austerity agenda seem to be an almost daily occurrence, yet the Government very rarely recognise the need to address the problems caused by austerity. I suspect that this debate will be no different, in spite of the clear consequences of the Government's proposed reforms to the civil service compensation scheme.

Civil servants have been fighting a continuous battle against reforms to the compensation scheme for years with successive Governments. The battle started in 2009 with the Labour Government, who sought reforms to the scheme that they believed would help control costs. Civil servants and their trade unions, particularly PCS, mobilised against those reforms and launched a successful judicial review against them in 2010. After the 2010 election, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats tried to cap payments for voluntary and compulsory redundancies, but the civil servants and their unions fought back, which resulted in higher caps.

This Government are continuing the trend of attempting to reform the scheme, but they are doing so by undermining the trade unions. The Government pursued a consultation process in all but name, imposing conditions on trade union participation. In the 2017 judicial review of the consultation, the High Court found that the Government's reforms were illegal as a result of their failure to engage in proper consultation. However, an appeal has since been lodged against that decision, and we await the outcome from the Court of Appeal. Regardless of the outcome, let me put on the record that I will always stand alongside civil servants and their trade unions in opposing the Government's attempts to railroad through reforms to the scheme without meaningful consultation. I will be out supporting them again tomorrow.

It is clear to me that the real intention behind the Government's reforms is to erode the terms and conditions of our civil servants. Just look at the differences between the 2010 compensation scheme terms and those that the Government seek to introduce. Civil servants are guaranteed a tariff fixed at one month's salary per year of service in both voluntary and compulsory redundancies. The Government seek to reduce that fixed tariff to just three weeks per year of service. The maximum amount payable to civil servants in a voluntary redundancy is 21 months' salary. The Government seek to reduce that to 18 months' salary. In a compulsory redundancy, the maximum amount payable currently stands at 12 months' salary, but the Government wish to reduce that to nine months' salary. Notice periods are generally around six months, but the Government seek to reduce that to just three months for new starters.

The Government continue to pursue these reforms in spite of overwhelming opposition from the 3,000 respondents to the consultation, who were told by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office that the 2010 compensation scheme terms were both “fair” and “right for the long term”.

These reforms must be opposed by all of us in this House who value workers, value good terms and conditions, and value our public services.

While I am speaking in support of civil servants, let me say that it is time the Government treated our civil servants with respect and dignity. Civil servants are dedicated, professional and hard-working, just like all those who work in our public services, such as doctors, nurses, teachers and, as my good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow South West mentioned, prison officers. However, they continue to be denied a fair pay rise as a result of this Government’s ongoing decision to limit civil service pay rises to between 1% and 1.5%. Civil servants received one of the lowest pay increases in the public sector in 2018-19. I call on the Minister to scrap the cap and give our civil servants a proper pay rise. They deserve much more than they are getting from this Government.

4.49 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Buck. I am not sure if it constitutes an interest under the legislation, but I am a member of the Public and Commercial Services Union. In the interest of full disclosure, I am happy to declare that before I begin my remarks.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) in bringing forward this motion and I associate the third party with the body of his remarks. I have some additional points. First, it is really not a good look for the United Kingdom Government that three times over the last nine years, under three different Governments of different political complexions, the Government workforce has found it necessary to take its employer to court, and on two out of those three occasions the workforce has won. That does not speak well about good will and industrial relations inside the civil service, or about relations between the Government and those on whom they depend to implement their policies. Something is awry and it needs to be put right.

That is even more true when we consider what is about to befall the public sector, if Brexit goes ahead. The degree of upheaval, change and restructuring that will be necessary to cope with leaving the European Union will undoubtedly require the good will and support of the workforce. I implore the Minister to try to do what he can to diverge from the attitude and the work of his predecessors.

I support the principles that underline the trade unions’ counter-proposal on the compensation scheme. I do not want the Minister to disclose his negotiating hand—it is proper that he responds to the trade unions directly on 25 March—but will he indicate whether these principles find support with him? I am minded to support them—not just the provisions that focus compensation towards those on the lowest incomes or those who are being made compulsorily redundant, rather than opting for voluntary severance, but most of all the idea that compensation should be related to the status of the employee who is being made redundant.

After all, we are talking about not a bonus or a pension scheme, but compensation for losing livelihoods. Therefore, compensation ought to take into account the consequences for the individual and their ability to survive after they leave the civil service.

In that regard, although I cast no aspersions on such people as workers, a distinction has to be made between a relatively high-paid civil servant working around the corner in Whitehall who is made redundant in the centre of the capital city and who has the experience and opportunity to readily seek alternative employment, and someone working at a basic administrative grade in Gateshead or somewhere else where there may be more challenges in the labour market. I commend that principle to the Government in their approach.

Finally, as with so many other things, I ask the Minister to look north for inspiration and see what is happening across the border in Scotland. Scottish civil servants, if they are working directly for the Government, are under the auspices of the same scheme, but they constitute only a small part of the public sector national workforce in Scotland. With regard to the rest, the Scottish Government are undertaking a consultation about severance arrangements in the public sector more generally. In Scotland, they have proceeded on the basis of consultation. The Government are not being taken to court and there is not an imminent dispute with the civil servants’ trade unions. If this can be done correctly in Edinburgh, perhaps the Minister can take inspiration from that and make sure it is done correctly in Westminster.

4.54 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I do not intend to detain the Chamber for too long; I am sure Members are more interested in hearing what the Minister has to say.

I pay tribute to my good friend, the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens). One reason why I do not need to speak for too long is that he gave such a clear exposition of the problems faced by workers in the civil service, and members of the PCS and other trade unions, because of the changes to the civil service compensation scheme. The matter has been particularly prominent recently in the area that he represents because of the changes to benefits offices and jobcentres, as a result of which low-paid workers are being offered jobs that may be many miles away from their settled workplace. They cannot take those jobs, and the only option available to them is to take a pay-off under the civil service compensation scheme, which is now being cut.

I do not want to go into too much of the excellent detail that the hon. Member for Glasgow South West set out, but I will make two points. The first point was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney). If this change were being made on its own, it would be a matter of sadness and there would be some hope that perhaps an agreement could be reached with the trade unions. Unfortunately, however, it appears to be part of a pattern when it comes to how the Government and the senior management of the civil service deal with their members.

In 2010 the Government implemented a two-year pay freeze, which was followed by a six-year pay cap of 1%. During that period, average salary levels in the civil service fell in value, in comparison with inflation, by

[*Christian Matheson*]

between 8.8% according to the CPI calculation and 15.2% according to the retail prices index. Average pay in local government, health and education—all areas that we know have suffered from Government cuts and depressions in pay—has seen increases higher than those in the civil service; the Government have capped civil service pay rises at between 1% and 1.5%.

The Government spending review, which we are currently looking at, has set departmental budgets until 2020. The chief executive of the civil service recently told union negotiators that for 2019, funding for pay increases was 1%. He said that Departments could negotiate higher pay increases by sacrificing terms and conditions. An example of this approach arose in the Ministry of Justice last year. The management proposed a pay increase of 11% over five years, in exchange for a longer working week, cuts to overtime and cuts to sick pay. I make those points about civil service pay because my concern is that a pattern is emerging where, to put it bluntly, civil service management—or, dare I say it, Ministers—seem to have an agenda of driving down terms and conditions across the civil service.

Chris Stephens: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. Does he agree that the changes to civil service pay, civil service pensions and the civil service compensation scheme are a triple whammy for civil servants, many of whom are low paid? Is it not ironic that the directors of all these UK Government Departments have agreed that there should be a 1% pay rise for civil servants, and does that not make a mockery of the 200 different sets of pay negotiations in the civil service?

Christian Matheson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He mentioned the civil service pension changes, which complement and add to the pattern of behaviour that I am identifying. It gives me great concern that there is an agenda out there of driving down civil service pay. Suffice it to say that the official Opposition hope that an agreement can be reached with the trade unions. I remind the Minister that trade unions represent many tens of thousands of Government employees. They have a legitimate role in representing their members.

We keep being told that we are coming out of the tunnel after 10 years of depression, that austerity is over, that the Government are being extremely successful in their management of the economy and that sunlight is beaming down through the dark clouds. If that is the case, now is the time to start treating the Government's own employees more fairly and, in the context of this particular debate, acceding to the requests of the trade unions that represent the Government's own employees. That means sorting out this dispute—it is, dare I say it, a needless dispute—on the civil service compensation scheme and giving those civil servants a decent pay rise. That decent pay rise will be a percentage of a much smaller amount than it would have been, because their pay has been depressed for so long, but I urge the Minister in the meeting on 25 March to take this matter seriously, to take his employees the civil servants seriously and to give them a fair settlement.

5 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow

South West (Chris Stephens) on securing this debate, and welcome the opportunity to respond to the points he has made.

Further to the point raised by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), I want to put on the record right from the beginning that of course the trade unions have a valuable and important part to play in debates around civil service terms and conditions. Indeed, I have met them frequently—both PCS and the other principal unions, Prospect and FDA, as well as GMB and others.

I know that in his role as chair of the PCS parliamentary group, the hon. Member for Glasgow South West takes a close interest in these matters, and I pay tribute to him. Whatever our political differences, I know he is a strong and effective advocate for the trade unions and for PCS, and he has demonstrated that again today. In my experience both as a Minister in the Cabinet Office and in my previous time working at 10 Downing Street, I have worked with some of the most committed, talented and hardworking public servants in our country.

At a time when the nation faces significant challenges, those public servants' work is more important than ever, so I am happy to join hon. Members, in particular the hon. Members for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) and for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) in paying tribute to them. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh East said, we need their skills more than ever at this time, as we face Brexit.

I certainly share hon. Members' belief that all civil servants should be rewarded for the work they do, so that we can attract the best and brightest into the heart of Government. This debate relates principally to the compensation package available to civil servants when they are made redundant, but since hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for City of Chester, have raised the question of pay I want to address that briefly before addressing the rest of my remarks to the substance of the debate. The hon. Gentleman raised the point about the Government's fiscal position and the spending backdrop against which we are making these decisions. I am glad he has recognised that the Government have made considerable progress in reducing the deficit. He is right that we have made a lot of progress: the deficit is down by four fifths since 2010, from about 10% of GDP to about 2%. None the less, the Government are still borrowing more than £40 billion every single year, so the pressure has not gone away and we must still take some difficult decisions.

The reason we must take those difficult decisions is that we spent over £50 billion on debt interest last year. That is more than we spend on schools, and more than we spend on our police and armed forces combined. There is still a strong countervailing pressure from the need to continue to bear down on expenditure. Pay forms a large part of Government expenditure, so pay has to be part of that mix.

The overall approach taken to pay is that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has made it clear that the overall cap has been lifted, but given the financial constraints within which we are operating, which is what the chief executive of the civil service was alluding to, it remains the case that central Government Departments have pencilled in—in fact, penned in—their funding. It

is very clear from the Treasury how much budget has been allocated for pay rises, and in the coming financial year that is 1%.

That does not mean that Departments cannot go beyond that, but if they do, they must find efficiency savings to do so. In respect of all delegated levels of pay—that is to say, below the senior civil service—the process for determining pay awards is that it is up to each different Department to determine its pay award.

Chris Stephens: I am hoping to secure a separate debate on civil service pay, but since we have touched on it, I am sure the Minister remembers, as he was on the Front Bench, that we debated this last year and he agreed to look at the situation of having 200 separate pay negotiations across UK Government Departments. I think he is sympathetic to my view that that is a bit foolish. Given that permanent secretaries have agreed a joint position, as I understand it, of 1% to 1.5% across Departments, is it not better to have one pay negotiation for the whole civil service?

Oliver Dowden: I should say from the outset that no decision has been taken or agreed by permanent secretaries. There is a very clear process for this, which is that for delegated pay, which is that for civil servants below senior civil service level, the framework is set by the Cabinet Office in conjunction with the Treasury and then it is up to each individual Department to make individual decisions.

On the point about co-ordination, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and I want to ensure that we have a proper process of engagement with the principal trade unions as we set the delegated framework, but it is important to say that that is not a pay negotiation. We need to understand their position, but the individual pay negotiation must be done by each individual Department. I think having each Department make its individual determination is the right approach, but I am keen to ensure that we engage with the trade unions and others as we consider the overall approach to delegated pay. As I understand it, correspondence is ongoing with the trade unions on the best way of doing that.

Beyond the delegated framework, there is also potential for further efficiency savings to allow for higher pay rises. I have signed them off as a responsible Minister; for example, the Foreign Office recently agreed a two-year pay deal funded by efficiencies, allowing for a 6.4% average uplift for non-SCS staff. It is possible, through smarter ways of working, to fund higher pay awards. I hope that gives hon. Members an overall sense of the approach the Government take to pay.

Christian Matheson: Can the Minister describe some of the smarter ways of working that helped to encourage the signing off of that particular pay rise?

Ms Karen Buck (in the Chair): Order. May I encourage the Minister not to stray too far from the subject matter of the debate in responding to that intervention?

Oliver Dowden: Thank you, Ms Buck; I will take that injunction seriously and, if I may, I will write to the hon. Gentleman to set out the policy in more detail, so that I do not detain Members any longer on this point. Following your lead, Ms Buck, I turn to the substance of the debate.

The Government have a responsibility to ensure that the civil service is both efficient and cost-effective, and that includes the compensation scheme to support civil servants when exits are necessary—the hon. Member for Glasgow South West outlined the overall history. Important steps towards this goal were taken in 2010 when Lord Maude, then Minister for the Cabinet Office, introduced important reforms to modernise redundancy arrangements in the civil service. A revised civil service compensation scheme was launched in December 2010; at that time, Lord Maude set out his hope and intention that it would be a fair settlement for the long term. I fully acknowledge that point.

However—this is the key point—over the years since 2010, it has become apparent to the Government that those reforms did not fully deliver on their aims. If hon. Members will allow me, I will set out the reasons for that. Part of the rationale for the 2010 reforms was cost savings, and it has become clear that the expected cost savings did not fully materialise. The average compensation entitlement under the 2010 scheme is considerably higher than was intended when the scheme was first introduced. In 2010, the average compensation entitlement for voluntary exits and voluntary redundancies was expected to be £33,754, but by 2017 it was estimated to be £40,513.

More widely, it has become clear that other aspects of the scheme were not appropriate. To give an example, the compensation scheme provisions for early access to pensions for staff aged as young as 50 enable them to retire and draw all of their civil service pension without a reduction for early payment. That is often very expensive for the employer and is increasingly out of line with the Government's wider aim of encouraging longer working lives.

In recognition of those concerns, the Government introduced new civil service compensation scheme terms in 2016, which, as the hon. Member for Glasgow South West highlighted, were challenged by way of judicial review in 2017. It is important to point out that the court accepted the Government's reasons for making the reforms, but it found that the Government had not fully met their obligations with regard to how the consultation process was carried out. The 2016 terms were accordingly struck down and the 2010 terms reinstated.

Although the Government of course accepted the court's judgment—as we must—we still believe that the 2010 compensation scheme reforms have not fully met their objectives, and that there remain good reasons for reforming the scheme. Accordingly, we launched a new consultation on reforming the civil service compensation scheme in September 2017, which set out the Government's objectives. Principally, the objectives are to align with the principles of the compensation scheme reform expected across the wider public sector; to support employers in reshaping and restructuring their workforces to ensure that they have the skills required for the future; to create significant savings on the cost of exits and ensure the appropriate use of taxpayers' money; to ensure that any early access to pensions remains appropriate; to ensure that efficiency compensation payments are appropriate for the modern workplace; to support the flexible use of voluntary exits; and, where possible, to implement a set of reforms that are agreed by the trade unions.

The consultation also set out a proposed new set of civil service compensation scheme terms that the Government believe would deliver on those objectives.

[*Oliver Dowden*]

In summary, those are a standard tariff of three weeks' salary for a year of service, voluntary exit and redundancy payments of up to 15 months' salary, compulsory redundancy payments of up to nine months' salary, employer-funded pension top-up payments allowed only from the age of 55, increasing in line with the state pension age, and that the efficiency compensation tariff should align with the compulsory redundancy tariff.

The Government took the view that those terms would meet the objectives set out in the consultation document, and considered that the scheme would offer a good level of support to civil servants to bridge the gap until they found new employment or entered retirement, and would provide the flexibility needed to support employers in reshaping and restructuring their workforces to meet the challenges that they will face. It will also be fair to taxpayers, who ultimately fund the cost of civil service exit payments, as Members know.

I recognise that this is an area in which trade unions rightly have strong views. The Government are therefore carefully consulting with unions with the aim of reaching an agreement if at all possible. The consultation has already stretched for more than 18 months—a very long period—and has included numerous meetings between my officials and union representatives and between my predecessor and union representatives, and I myself have now held two rounds of meetings with union representatives, which have been extremely useful in helping me to understand the unions' positions on the proposed reforms.

I am pleased to say that throughout the process PCS and all the other unions engaged openly and constructively with the consultation, notwithstanding their overarching position, which I acknowledge, that the Government should not be reforming the compensation scheme. I place on the record my thanks to all the unions—Prospect, FDA and PCS—for their work in engaging constructively with the process.

As well as engagement through meetings, unions have also put forward detailed counter-proposals setting out their alternative vision of what a reformed scheme should look like. As has been highlighted by hon. Members—particularly the hon. Member for Glasgow South West—those proposals are detailed and well thought through and reflect the considerable effort that has clearly gone into their preparation. Again, I thank the unions for that constructive engagement.

As a result of the meetings and counter-proposals, I am left in no doubt as to the unions' positions. I understand the areas that they consider priorities for reform, their concerns about the Government's proposals and their preferred alternative reforms. Contributions to the debate have further increased my understanding of the position of PCS and the other unions it is working with on this consultation. I am very grateful to hon. Members for their contributions.

Chris Stephens: The Minister has been most generous in giving way. If the trade unions put forward a counter-proposal that met the Government's expected savings target, would the Government be more sympathetic?

Does he understand the principles behind what the trade unions have put forward, including looking after those who are lower paid rather than those at the top?

Oliver Dowden: I certainly understand what the trade unions are trying to put forward and I completely understand their concerns about lower-paid workers. However, it should be noted that there is already provision for a minimum payment that covers lower-paid workers, although a discussion about the level at which to set that forms part of the consultation.

I do not want to pre-empt my final determination, but I am concerned about the scale of the cost savings. At the moment, I still have significant questions about whether what has been proposed by the trade unions meets the cost-saving requirements of the reform that we have set out. That is one principal consideration that will affect my final determination. However, I am very much conscious of the arguments that have been clearly put forward by the trade unions on these points, particularly on help for the lower-paid.

As I have said in recent meetings with union representatives, I am now genuinely carefully considering the counter-proposals that all unions have made. I remain keen to reach agreement with the unions if at all possible, and I am considering whether the Government's proposals can be adjusted to help to facilitate that, while remaining consistent with our overall objectives for reform. As Members have noted, I intend to make a decision on any amendments to the Government's proposals shortly. Following that, my intention is then for a period of further consultation with the unions, in advance of the Government's making a formal offer of revised terms to the unions in the hope that they are accepted.

I conclude by repeating that the Government greatly value the work of civil servants. We are keen to reach agreement on a set of compensation scheme terms. I believe that the consultation proposals are fair and provide a good level of support to civil servants, while recognising the need for continued reforms and savings. I once again thank hon. Members for their contributions and I hope I have set out the Government's approach clearly.

5.17 pm

Chris Stephens: I thank the Minister for his detailed response. As many supporters are likely to be elsewhere at the moment, I hope the Minister does not underestimate the support across the House for civil servants. Given their pay and pensions policies, the Government should not want to make a mistake in relation to the civil service compensation scheme. As has been said, this issue has been to court three times. I hope that, on Monday 25 March, the Minister will positively engage with the trade unions' counter-proposals, to ensure that civil servants are treated fairly if they are made redundant or have to suffer a voluntary exit.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the civil service compensation scheme.

5.18 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 19 March 2019

EDUCATION

Technical Education Reform

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): Today, I am pleased to launch the first stage consultation on the post-16 review of qualifications at level 3 and below in England.

This review, alongside the development of T-levels, is central to building a world class technical education system. Our ambition is to develop a qualifications system for all, in which every student benefits from high quality study that helps them realise their talents and achieve their career ambitions. It is vital to addressing our country's productivity and skills gaps and achieving the international competitiveness on which our future prosperity depends.

The current qualifications system at level 3 and below is complex, with around 12,000 qualifications. Some of the qualifications are well recognised and valued, but as the Wolf and Sainsbury reviews identified, too many are poorly understood and poor quality, weakening their currency and value for individuals, employers and the economy as a whole.

The review aims to simplify the landscape, ensuring that every single qualification is necessary and has a distinct purpose, is high quality and supports progression to positive outcomes. At level 3, we want A-Levels and T-Levels to be the qualifications of choice for students choosing classroom-based study, and for more students to study and achieve at level 3. Subject to the review and the outcomes of our consultation, we expect that where a qualification at level 3 overlaps with a T-Level or A-Level, it would not, in future, be approved for funding for 16 to 19-year olds.

At level 2 and below, qualifications should enable progression to a higher level of study for those that are able to do so; and for those who are not, there should be high quality qualifications that lead to a good range of employment options and opportunities to study at a later stage.

To drive up quality and ensure fairness in the system at an early stage, in August 2020 we will withdraw approval for funding for older qualifications, where there are newer, more robust versions that have been re-developed to meet performance table rules.

We recognise that qualifications in scope of this review are taken by a range of learners, including adults and those with additional needs, such as special educational needs and disabilities. A 'one size fits all' approach will not work. We want to be confident that the qualifications available work for all students, irrespective of their specific needs.

It is important that we take the time to get these changes right and listen carefully to the sector's views. This is why we are consulting in two stages. We are looking first at the principles that should guide the review before moving on in the second stage consultation to detailed proposals for change, which we will bring

forward later in the year. I strongly encourage everyone with an interest to contribute to the debate, so that we can work together to build the world class technical education system that our students deserve and that our country needs.

[HCWS1426]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

March EU Environment Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I attended the EU Environment Council on 5 March in Brussels. I wish to update the House on the matters discussed.

Strategic EU long-term vision for a climate neutral economy—policy debate

The presidency invited member states to give their views on the Commission's draft long-term strategy on climate, "A Clean Planet for all", following an initial exchange of views at the Environment Council on 20 December 2018. The presidency asked for views on the challenges and opportunities arising from the transition to a climate-neutral economy and the enabling framework required to stimulate investment, especially private sector investment, in technology, education, and training.

Member states' interventions focused on four main areas. First, a number of member states gave their views on the EU's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets for 2030, and the proposed target of net-zero GHG emissions in the EU by 2050. Some welcomed the ambition of the Commission's proposed 2050 target, while others cautioned against any revision to the EU's 2030 targets. Secondly, many argued that the strategy must recognise and enable a socially fair and just transition recognising the different impacts across member states, regions, and sectors of the economy. Thirdly, a number spoke of the need to frame the strategy positively, as the transition to a low-carbon economy presents opportunities including for competitiveness, employment, public health and the environment. Fourthly, the transition should be acceptable to citizens and businesses to give investors' confidence in the direction of travel, given that both public and private investment will be crucial to the transition.

I intervened to welcome the Commission's strategy as a positive response to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's special report on global warming of 1.5 degrees published in October 2018. I spoke of the need to ensure that all sectors of the economy take action to tackle climate change while at the same time managing the impact on those sectors disproportionately affected. I referred to the benefits of clean growth and that both technological and nature-based solutions must play their part in reducing emissions, including carbon capture usage and storage, and natural carbon sinks, such as mangrove forests. I emphasised that private sector investment and green finance will be integral to financing the transition and highlighted the UK's funding for low-carbon innovation. In closing, I underscored that the United Nations' Secretary General's climate summit in September would be an important milestone, and that the UK intends to play a leading role on climate resilience at the summit.

Drinking water directive—general approach

The presidency invited member states to agree the proposed general approach, stressing debate should focus on article 10a and 10b, (materials and substances in contact with water) and article 13 (access to water). The Commission urged member states to agree the text, noting that they would reserve their position due to concerns on article 10a.

The UK, along with a number of other member states, fully supported article 10a and 10b. Others expressed concern, but noted that ultimately they could accept the proposed text. These member states also called for further work to help understand the impacts of the proposal and to clarify the text. Latvia, Estonia and Austria were unable to accept the general approach due to article 10a.

On article 13, member states noted the delicate Council position and agreed that the presidency text provided a good compromise. The UK highlighted concerns regarding subsidiarity, drawing attention to the UK Parliament's reasoned opinion but confirmed that it could accept the compromise text.

The presidency concluded the general approach had been agreed. The Commission noted that more work was needed on article 10a and it would issue a formal declaration outlining its concerns.

Greening the European semester—exchange of views

The Council exchanged views on the greening of the European semester and post-2020 investments (6260/19) with member states stressing the importance of the environmental dimension. A group of member states recognised the importance of taking the Paris agreement into account.

EU framework on endocrine disruptors—policy debate

The Commission stressed the need for a coherent approach based on scientific advice, and the need to follow the precautionary approach where the science was inconclusive. It announced a cross-cutting fitness check on endocrine disruptors (with the aim of concluding findings in early 2020) and a new comprehensive forum to engage stakeholders.

Member states welcomed the Commission communication, with significant differences between the levels of ambition expressed. A small number of member states led a group calling for more concrete actions including a ban on endocrine disruptors in toys and consumer goods. Others, including the UK, were more cautious, stressing the need for further research and emphasising the importance of risk-based measures.

AOB items

The following items were also discussed under any other business.

1. Global data collection system for ship fuel oil consumption

Council noted the information from the Commission on the proposal to revise the regulation on the monitoring, reporting and verification of carbon dioxide emissions from maritime transport. The aim of the proposal is to reduce the administrative burden for ships having to report under both EU regulations and the global data collection system for fuel oil consumption, established recently by the International Maritime Organisation.

2. Better EU enforcement of the EU phasedown of hydrocarbons

Council noted the information from the Commission.

3. Tackling greenhouse gas emissions through aviation pricing

Council noted the information from the Belgian delegation concerning its proposal for a fair, European pricing system on aviation. This information was previously presented at the Economic and Financial Affairs Council on 12 February by the Dutch delegation. Some member state delegations intervened in support of further work on this. The Commission stated that it will consider existing policy instruments and assess whether there is a need to make a legislative proposal.

4. Strengthening the coherence between EU free trade agreements and the Paris climate change agreement

Council noted the information from the French, Spanish, and Luxembourgish delegations, proposing that ratification of the Paris agreement should be an essential clause of the EU's trade agreements with third countries, and that the Council should be able to suspend trade agreements following breaches of the obligations under the Paris agreement. Other member states expressed a degree of caution on the proposed approach. The Commission noted that such a proposal would need to be operational.

5. Outcome of the intermediary sessions of the parties to the Espoo convention and to the protocol on strategic environmental assessment (SEA) (Geneva, 5 to 7 February 2019)

Council noted the information from the presidency and the Commission regarding the work of the EU and member states. It also noted the decisions adopted at the meeting of the parties to the Espoo convention and the protocol on SEA, which the UK, other member states, and the EU attended. Lithuania stated that they considered that further steps were needed concerning the case of the Ostrovets nuclear power plant in Belarus.

6. Environmental protection policies to combat depopulation in rural areas and to improve quality of life

Council noted the information from the Spanish delegation and the difficulties between population and conservation efforts. Other member states intervened to show their support and outline their own nation's struggles with depopulation.

7. Preparation for the 21st meeting of the contracting parties to the Barcelona convention for the protection of the marine environment and the coastal region of the Mediterranean (Naples, 2 to 5 December 2019)

Council noted the information from the Italian delegation. There were limited interventions around this AOB.

Additional engagement

In the margins of the Council, I met with counterparts from member states and the European Commission to reassure them of our intention to continue working closely on these global environmental issues, and to highlight the UK's bid to host the 26th conference of the parties (COP26) to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC).

[HCWS1425]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and Social Care Update

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): Today, I am updating the House on the Department for Health and Social Care's plans for the continuity of reciprocal healthcare arrangements in the event we exit the EU without a deal.

Under current EU-based entitlements, the UK pays for the healthcare costs of 180,000 UK nationals, mostly pensioners, in health systems across the EU. There are around 50 million UK tourist visits to the EU annually; the European healthcare insurance card (EHIC) is used in around 0.5% of these visits. Moreover, approximately 50,000 posted workers are protected through the current arrangements.

The current EU healthcare arrangements operate on a reciprocal basis. The UK, EU member states and EFTA states (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) reimburse each other for the healthcare of those who remain covered by their respective social security schemes when living in, working in or visiting each other's country. These arrangements are a function of EU membership that also applies to the EFTA countries, and are an exception to the arrangements that apply to the rest of the world. As a result, extending these functions in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal is subject to agreement and cannot be done by the UK alone.

Separately, the UK and Irish Governments are committed to continuing to facilitate access to healthcare services within the common travel area (CTA). Discussions to continue reciprocal healthcare arrangements are under way between the UK and Ireland and both Governments are taking legislative steps to enable us to implement these arrangements by exit day. Additional guidance for those living and working in the CTA has been published on the gov.uk website.

While EU reciprocal healthcare is funded and administered on a UK-wide basis, the devolved Administrations have responsibility for healthcare provision in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are working closely with all parts of the UK on our approach.

My Department has published country specific guidance on gov.uk and nhs.uk about healthcare arrangements if the UK leaves the EU without a deal and has been working closely with EU member states and EFTA states to protect existing healthcare arrangements for these and other groups.

The UK Government's proposal

Subject to Parliament ratifying the withdrawal agreement, in a deal scenario current reciprocal healthcare rights will continue during the implementation period until 31 December 2020. The withdrawal agreement and EFTA agreements also give longer term reciprocal healthcare rights to those who are living in or previously worked in the other country on exit day.

We have proposed to EU member states and EFTA states that we should maintain the existing healthcare arrangements in a no-deal scenario until 31 December 2020, with the aim of minimising disruption to UK nationals and EU and EFTA state citizens' healthcare provision.

This would mean that we will continue to pay for healthcare costs for current or former UK residents for whom the UK has responsibility who are living or working in or visiting the EU and EFTA states, where individuals are not covered by the EFTA citizens' rights agreements. We are hopeful that we will reach such agreements.

We have brought forward legislation to enable us to implement new reciprocal healthcare arrangements. The Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill was

introduced in Parliament on 26 October 2018 and passed Report stage in the House of Lords on 12 March 2019. It will provide us with the power to fund and implement comprehensive reciprocal healthcare arrangements after we leave the EU. We have also laid three statutory instruments which will give us the specific legal basis to implement our proposal.

Minimising disruption in the event of no deal

As outlined above, we want to work with EU partners to protect existing healthcare arrangements beyond exit day. If that is not possible, healthcare arrangements in many EU member states would revert to those which apply to the rest of the world. Whenever travelling abroad, individuals are always responsible for ensuring they have travel insurance. It is already the case that we advise people to obtain comprehensive travel insurance when working, studying or travelling to the EU and the rest of the world. This will remain our advice in all circumstances.

Many people rely on EHICs. In a no-deal scenario, these may no longer be valid in EU member states (and in EFTA states for those visitors not in scope of the EFTA citizens' rights agreements and travelling after exit day). UK nationals living in or travelling to EU member states should check up to date information gov.uk and nhs.uk and ensure they have taken the necessary steps to prepare.

Although we are hopeful that we can agree reciprocal healthcare arrangements, as a responsible Government we have developed a multi-layered approach to minimise disruption to healthcare provision to UK nationals currently in or travelling to the EU member states and to those UK nationals not covered by the EFTA citizens' rights agreements:

1. We welcome action from those EU member states who have prepared their own legislation for a no-deal scenario. EU member states such as Spain have made public commitments that they will enable resident UK nationals and visitors to access healthcare in the same way they do now.

2. As noted above, the UK and Irish Governments are committed to continuing to facilitate access to healthcare services within the common travel area (CTA). Discussions to continue reciprocal healthcare arrangements are underway between the UK and Ireland and both Governments are taking legislative steps to enable us to implement these arrangements by exit day. Additional guidance for those living and working in the CTA has been published on the gov.uk website.

3. The UK Government have already agreed with Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland (EFTA) to protect citizens' rights. This means that UK nationals already living in EFTA states and vice versa will be able to access healthcare as they do now. However, in line with the arrangements we are seeking with EU member states, we would like to protect the healthcare cover of visitors not in scope of the citizens' rights agreements travelling between the EFTA states and the UK after exit day to enable them to continue to be covered for needs-arising healthcare (currently facilitated under the EHIC system).

4. The UK Government have committed to fund healthcare for UK nationals (and others for whom the UK is responsible) who have applied for, or are undergoing, treatments in the EU prior to and on exit day, for up to one year, to protect the most vulnerable. The statutory instruments introduced on 11 February would also enable some UK residents to recover costs if they are charged. For UK nationals who are visitors, we will refund costs directly. For UK nationals who are resident in another member state, this commitment requires us to reach an arrangement with individual EU member

states. We are hopeful that they will remain willing to treat patients and accept reimbursement and are in discussions to seek such an agreement.

5. We have published guidance profiles on gov.uk and nhs.uk and will update the guidance with further developments.

6. Should UK nationals face changes in how they can access healthcare, they may use NHS services if they return to live in the UK. As is currently the case, UK nationals living in the EU will have an entitlement to NHS services as soon as they take up ordinary residence in England. We will continue to work closely with the NHS in England and across the devolved Administrations in the UK to ensure returners can appropriately access NHS services. A British citizen who moves to the UK can be considered ordinarily resident upon arrival if it is clear that they are here to reside on a properly settled basis for the time being. British citizens who return to live in the UK part way through their treatment will be able to access NHS services.

7. Those who have their healthcare funded by the UK under current EU arrangements and are resident in EU member states on exit day can use NHS services in England without charge when on a temporary visit to England.

8. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has advised that travel insurance policies will cover emergency medical treatment costs as standard that could have been reclaimed through the EHIC, although some routine treatments would not be covered. People should be aware that there are a small number of policies in the market that state they will only provide cover if you have and use an EHIC. The ABI have advised that all individuals should check their current travel insurance thoroughly to ensure they have the correct amount of cover for their requirements. Additional guidance has been published on the ABI website here.

Advice for citizens of EU member states and EFTA states

We have confirmed that, in a no-deal scenario, we will protect the healthcare rights of citizens from EU member states and EFTA states, who are living lawfully in the UK on exit day, and this includes their entitlements to NHS cover.

Advice for UK nationals

In the event that we cannot reach an agreement with EU member states and EFTA states for those nationals not in scope of the EFTA citizens' rights agreements, it is not possible for the UK Government to guarantee access unilaterally to healthcare abroad, beyond the situations set out above. We will be employing a small number of overseas healthcare advisers in UK missions across Europe who will be able to provide advice where individuals have particular need for support. However, it is vital that all UK nationals who are currently or planning to reside in, travel to, work or study in EU member states and EFTA states take the following actions now:

Residents: The UK Government have published advice setting out options to access healthcare under local laws in EU member states and EFTA states and what people can do to prepare. We have analysed 31 countries and strongly advise that all affected UK nationals check the latest country specific guidance on gov.uk and nhs.uk.

Substantial numbers of UK nationals will already be eligible for or enrolled in the relevant health authorities locally, either because of their residency, benefits or employment status. There is no reason to think that a no-deal scenario will affect these arrangements where EU countries offer equal access to healthcare.

For some people it may be advisable to register their healthcare entitlement with their relevant health authority locally. This may mean that they will need to join a social insurance scheme and contribute as other residents do. Others will need to buy private healthcare insurance.

Visitors: The Government always advise UK nationals to take out travel insurance when going overseas, both to EU and non-EU destinations. UK nationals, including those with pre-existing conditions, planning to visit an EU member state or EFTA states on or after exit day should continue to buy travel insurance.

As with any policy, UK nationals are advised to make sure they understand the terms and conditions of any travel insurance policy and that the policy is sufficient to cover healthcare needs. Most travel insurance policies will cover emergency treatment as standard but we advise all travellers to check their policies as some treatments may not be covered in the countries they are visiting.

Any questions regarding individual travel insurance policies should be directed to the relevant insurance companies or refer to guidance published on the ABI website here.

If we do not reach an agreement with EU member states and EFTA states for those nationals not in scope of the EFTA citizens' rights agreements, EHIC may no longer be valid after exit day. ABI advice is that, while almost all insurance policies will remain valid, some insurance policies may be affected. There are a small number of insurance policies which are dependent on having an EHIC, so if you have purchased one of these policies it is recommended you speak to your provider to ensure you are fully protected before you leave the UK.

Workers: We have published country specific guidance on gov.uk and nhs.uk to help UK workers make the necessary preparations for a no-deal scenario. We strongly advise that workers ensure they have comprehensive healthcare insurance for the full period of their stay.

Students: Currently, students residing in the UK who are going on a placement abroad are entitled to a UK-issued EHIC to cover healthcare costs for the duration of their placement.

We cannot guarantee that this will continue for all EU member states in the event of a no-deal scenario where the existing arrangements are not extended. We strongly advise that students check the country specific guidance that we have published on gov.uk and nhs.uk and make the necessary preparations for a no-deal scenario.

The EFTA citizens' rights agreements protect the rights of UK nationals who are studying in an EFTA state over exit day, and who are entitled to a UK EHIC, to continue to benefit from the EHIC scheme for the duration of their course.

Returners: As is currently the case, UK nationals who return to live in the UK and meet the ordinarily resident test will be able to access NHS care on the same basis as other UK residents. If these people return to live in the UK partway through their treatment, they will be treated by the NHS in a fair and equitable way.

UK nationals who have their healthcare funded by the UK under current EU arrangements and are resident in the EU on exit day can use NHS services in England without charge when on a temporary visit to England.

UK nationals who are resident in an EU country, who do not have their healthcare funded by the UK under current EU arrangements and who do not wish to return to the UK, should seek to formalise their current residency status if they are eligible. Guidance has been made available on gov.uk and nhs.uk.

The UK is taking steps to protect individuals whose healthcare it is responsible for under current EU arrangements, but who are not UK nationals. Where this paper refers to UK nationals, it includes non-nationals for whom the UK is responsible.

[HCWS1429]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Places of Worship: Protective Security

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): The UK stands shoulder to shoulder with New Zealand against terrorism and we will not falter in our commitment to uphold the values of tolerance, religious freedom, and democracy.

I have discussed with police and religious leaders further measures we can take to protect our mosques and communities from any threats here in the UK.

The police have increased the number of reassurance patrols around mosques and are increasing engagement with communities of all faiths, including giving advice on how people and places can protect themselves.

This Government recognise that our communities remain anxious. We are committed to working with faith groups and engaging them on existing measures that fund and protect all places of worship. We will be working with groups including the anti-Muslim hatred working group, Tell MAMA and those representing other faiths to review what more can and should be done to protect faith institutions. This engagement will start immediately.

The Government are committed to acting quickly in response to these concerns. We are therefore announcing today an uplift of funding for the next year of the places of worship protective security fund to £1.6 million. This is double the amount awarded last year. The fund will provide financial support to places of worship for the purchase of physical protective security measures such as fencing, lighting and access control. We will make it easier for places of worship to apply, reducing the administrative burden whilst widening the criteria so places no longer need to show they have already experienced hate crime. Our focus will be on helping those who are vulnerable to hate-fuelled attacks.

Physical security measures are only part of the solution. That is why the Government are also announcing a new £5 million fund over three years to provide security training for places of worship. We will be working closely with communities and faith leaders to develop this new scheme and will, as soon as possible, be opening up a competitive process.

We are proud of all our faith communities and we are absolutely committed to ensuring they are able to worship and live their lives in safety, and free from fear.

[HCWS1428]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Troubled Families Evaluation

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Today I am pleased to announce publication of the latest Troubled

Families programme national evaluation reports. The programme 2015-20 aims to improve outcomes for families and reform services. The national evaluation looks at how well the programme is achieving those aims. The reports published today provide the most significant evidence to date, bringing together findings from the latest analysis of national and local datasets, a cost-benefit analysis, case study research and staff survey research.

The latest evidence is encouraging. While many families continue to face challenges, which is to be expected given the complexity of needs of families on the programme, this evidence shows that the programme is improving outcomes for families across a number of measures. When comparing families on the programme with a matched comparison group, analysis indicates that the programme has had a positive impact, reducing the proportion of:

Looked after children by 32%

Adults going to prison by 25%

Juvenile convictions by 15%

Juveniles going to custody by 38%

Jobseeker's allowance claimants by 10%

In addition, 20,000 families on the programme include one or more adults who have moved into work. The evaluation results also suggest local services are being reformed and the programme has been successful in driving this change.

The Troubled Families programme supports families with complex, interconnected problems such as antisocial behaviour, mental health problems or domestic abuse. Rather than responding to each problem, or single family member separately, assigned Troubled Families keyworkers engage with the whole family. Through this approach they co-ordinate support from a range of services to identify and address family issues as early as possible rather than merely reacting to crises. The full set of national evaluation reports published today together with an evaluation overview policy report can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-troubled-families-programme-2015-to-2020-findings>.

[HCWS1430]

JUSTICE

Personal Injury

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): The Damages Act 1996 ("the Act") requires the Lord Chancellor to start a review of the personal injury discount rate within 90 days of and including the date on which the amendments made to the Act by the Civil Liability Act 2018 came into force, which occurred on 20 December 2018.

The Act requires that the Lord Chancellor conducts the review and determines whether the rate should be changed or kept unchanged within 140 days of and including the day on which the review starts. It also requires the Lord Chancellor, in conducting the review, must consult (a) the Government Actuary and that this consultation must start within 20 days of and including the start of the review; and (b) the Treasury.

In accordance with these statutory requirements, I have decided to start the review today (19 March 2019) with the consequence that I must conduct the review and make the determination about the rate on or before 5 August 2019.

I will start my consultation with the Government Actuary no later than 7 April 2019 and will start my consultation with the Treasury at the same time.

I have placed copies of the Terms of Reference that I propose to issue to the Government Actuary and the Treasury for their respective consultations in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

I will make a further announcement on the completion of the review.

[HCWS1427]

TRANSPORT

Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): The UK is in the early stages of a transport revolution. For much of the past half century, many of the improvements to transport have been gradual and incremental, focused on increasing the capacity of existing infrastructure to meet growing demand. Yet today important new technologies are emerging that will transform transport and travel. Zero tailpipe emission cars are replacing those powered by fossil fuels. Self-driving vehicles have the potential to allow people with mobility issues to enjoy far greater freedom to travel, and advances in data production and use are already improving the way that transport services are devised, planned and delivered.

If they are properly managed, the transport technologies of the future will not just make journeys faster; they will also make them safer, easier, more comfortable and more affordable. They will make our towns and cities quieter and less polluted, and they will give us the option to see mobility as a service, integrated and accessible to all.

But this transformation potentially offers huge industrial opportunities as well, including new high quality jobs, new investment and increased national productivity.

The Government have put the future of mobility at the heart of their industrial strategy in an effort to take full advantage of these extraordinary opportunities.

With a long history of transport innovation, a world-class research base and many established technology leaders, the UK is well placed to harness its domestic expertise and to profit from a growing market for cleaner, safer and more efficient transport.

Such fundamental change in transport within a relatively short period of time, and across so many different technologies, is unprecedented. The sector is at a point of inflection. The window of opportunity is currently open; but for how much longer it will be so, no one can say.

Today the Government are publishing their “Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy”. This sets out their approach to working with innovators, companies, local authorities and other stakeholders in order to harness the developing benefits of new urban mobility technologies.

In the “Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy”, the Government have:

- Outlined the benefits they want mobility innovation to deliver, and the principles by which to achieve them;

- Launched an ambitious regulatory review;

- Established a wide programme of work to meet the grand challenge.

Alongside this document they have:

- Launched a £90 million competition for cities to deliver future of mobility zones, which follows £60 million awarded to 10 cities across the UK via the transforming cities fund;

- Published a response to the last mile call for evidence they conducted in summer;

- Outlined next steps on the e-cargo bike grant.

As a country, our approach to these technologies will need to adapt over the coming decades. The Government will need to gather and respond to evidence of the impacts of new mobility technologies and services as they emerge. They will also need to set out their thinking on the future of rural mobility in due course, to explore how the benefits of transport innovation can be enjoyed by everyone, wherever they live.

We have an extraordinary opportunity here—to put this country at the heart of the next mobility revolution, and deliver a cleaner, greener, more productive and more inclusive country for future generations.

I have laid a copy of “Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy” in the Libraries of both Houses.

The attachment can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-03-19/HCWS1424/>.

[HCWS1424]

Petitions

Tuesday 19 March 2019

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

A national carers strategy for unpaid carers

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom ,

Declares that unpaid carers require a National Carers Strategy; further that the Department of Health and Social Care asked unpaid carers for evidence for a Carers Strategy in 2016 and have failed to produce that Carers Strategy; and further notes an online petition (209717) on this subject has received 2,124 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to produce National Carers Strategy to support unpaid carers with wider changes to benefits, employment and health and care systems that unpaid carers need, resulting in recognition and valuing of unpaid carers contributions to society.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Barbara Keeley , *Official Report*, 27 November 2018; Vol. 650, c. 210 .]

[P002298]

Observations from the Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage):

On 5 June 2018 a written ministerial statement: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2018-06-05/HLWS712>, was issued in the House to inform all parliamentarians about the publication of the Carers Action Plan.

Towards the end of 2017 Ministers took the decision not to go forward with publishing a National Carers Strategy so that carers could be considered as part of the forthcoming Green Paper on care and support. The Green Paper will be published at the earliest opportunity and will include a focus on how we support carers as part of a sustainable health and care system. In the meantime, in order to demonstrate how the Government was continuing to support informal (unpaid) carers, we published a Carers Action Plan on 5 June 2018. The Carers Action Plan sets out a cross-Government programme of targeted work to support carers over the next two years.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Save Romiley Greenbelt

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the revised Greater Manchester Spatial Framework should avoid the residential development of 250 units on the greenbelt at the site of Hyde Bank Meadows in Romiley; notes that the proposed site contains well—used community facilities of Tangshutt

fields including, playing fields, three football pitches, a children's play area, and outdoor gym; further notes the proposed site is adjacent to Tangshutt Meadow, popular green space, a nature reserve, community orchards and allotments, which are all hugely valued by local people; further declares concern about insufficient road access and increasing traffic levels, endangering child safety by blocking a section the 'Safe Route School', loss of sports and exercise facilities for both individuals and teams, and loss of community event space which unites two areas of existing housing; further declares such a loss of this green space would be damaging to the local environment, the community, and the health and wellbeing of local people; and further notes the petitioners oppose plans for a new residential development on Hyde Park Meadows as set out in the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework—Revised Draft (2019).

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons that the House of Commons urges the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government not to support plans of this development.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr William Wragg , *Official Report*, 12 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 313 .]

[P002437]

Observations from the Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):

The Government are aware that the planning authorities of Greater Manchester are preparing the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework and have recently consulted on a draft Framework.

The Government are clear that Green Belt land is highly valued and in 2018 published the revised National Planning Policy Framework which continues and increases the very high level of protection that Green Belt land has against inappropriate development.

The Government are also clear that the country has a housing crisis and that as a country we need to provide the housing that is needed. To assist with this the Government have set out a national method for determining the level of housing need for each local area and we have set a target of delivering 300,000 homes a year from the mid-2020s.

Local Plans are an essential planning tool to determine how and where development and infrastructure needs should be planned for and delivered. As the name suggests, these are local tools which local planning authorities prepare, with the appropriate engagement of their local communities. Furthermore, whatever proposals local planning authorities make in their local plans, these will be tested, following consultation, by an independent Planning Inspector (or panel of inspectors) at a public examination of the local plan.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has a quasi-judicial role in the planning process. Therefore, while recognising that local people will have strong views on these matters, the Government do not make any specific comment on the proposals contained within the draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, but would urge people to participate in the consultation and engagement activities that are either underway or will be established for any future consultations.

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 19 March 2019

EDUCATION

Sixth Form Curriculum

The following is an extract from Education questions on 11 March 2019.

Vicky Ford: Given that the UK has one of the lowest levels of women engineers anywhere in Europe, what steps are being taken to encourage girls to study physics as well as maths at A-level?

Anne Milton: It is extremely important that girls and women have exactly the same opportunities and are represented at all levels, not only in engineering. We know that 44% of our STEM ambassadors are female, and we are investing in programmes such as the advanced maths support programme and the stimulating physics network, both of which help to increase participation, particularly among girls. I have seen lots of apprentices over the past week, and interestingly, more than a quarter of the apprentices in STEM subjects are women.
[Official Report, 11 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 2.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford).

The correct response should have been:

Anne Milton: It is extremely important that girls and women have exactly the same opportunities and are represented at all levels, not only in engineering. We know that 44% of our STEM ambassadors are female, and we are investing in programmes such as the advanced maths support programme and the stimulating physics network, both of which help to increase participation, particularly among girls. I have seen lots of apprentices over the past week, and interestingly, **8.9% of** apprentices in STEM subjects are women.

School Funding: Distribution

The following is an extract from Education Questions on 11 March 2019.

Dr Allin-Khan: I am here on behalf of Balham Nursery School and Children's Centre in my constituency, which knows that it has guaranteed funding until 2020, but is deeply concerned about what will happen going forward. The people there do an incredible job bridging the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, so what assurances can the Minister provide them with today?

Nick Gibb: Everything about this Government is about closing that attainment gap, and we have closed the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers by 13.5% in the primary sector—in early years and primary schools. The hon. Lady will know that we have awarded an extra £60 million funding to recognise the higher costs of maintained nursery schools. We are working with the sector as we prepare for the spending review.

[Official Report, 11 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 13.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for School Standards:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan).

The correct response should have been:

Nick Gibb: Everything about this Government is about closing that attainment gap, and we have closed the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers by 13.5% in **primary schools**. The hon. Lady will know that we have awarded an extra £60 million funding to recognise the higher costs of maintained nursery schools. We are working with the sector as we prepare for the spending review.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Integrated Care Regulations

The following is an extract from the debate on the Amendments Relating to the Provision of Integrated Care Regulations 2019 on 18 March 2019.

Stephen Hammond: It is important to recognise that NHS England has taken measures to build a clearer narrative around integrated care. The long-term plan, which will be backed by £20.5 billion extra by 2023-24, will introduce integrated care for patients in England over the next decade.

[Official Report, 18 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 878.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Health:

An error has been identified in my contribution to the debate.

The correct information should have been:

Stephen Hammond: It is important to recognise that NHS England has taken measures to build a clearer narrative around integrated care. The long-term plan, which will be backed by **an extra £33.9 billion in cash terms** by 2023-24, will introduce integrated care for patients in England over the next decade.

ORAL ANSWERS

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**not later than
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