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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 25 March 2019

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2017]

SIXTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 657

THIRTY-SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

House of Commons

Monday 25 March 2019

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Support for Veterans

1. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with military charities on improving support for veterans throughout the UK. [909987]

13. **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with military charities on improving support for veterans throughout the UK. [909999]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Last year we published the first UK-wide veterans strategy, which looks at what more we can do to support veterans. We engaged with service charities for ideas on how we can enhance support for our veterans.

Steve Double: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Vet Fest, an event that will be held in my constituency this summer, will be a celebration of camaraderie for our armed forces veterans and their

families and will raise awareness and money for three important charities: Combat Stress, the Royal British Legion and SSAFA. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating and thanking those who are putting on that event for their hard work and dedication, as well as all volunteers across the country who work to support our veterans?

Gavin Williamson: I join my hon. Friend in expressing thanks for what they do, and I encourage volunteers across the country to do likewise through such a great initiative. We are always grateful for the many thousands of volunteers who contribute so much to supporting our veterans community, as I know he does.

Victoria Prentis: I am sure the Secretary of State is aware of the Royal British Legion's excellent campaign to "Stop the Service Charge". Can he update us on what the Government are doing on the possible removal of visa charges for Commonwealth UK armed forces personnel and their families?

Gavin Williamson: I was delighted to visit the Heyford and Bicester veterans group with my hon. Friend just a few weeks ago and see the amazing work that it is doing to support so many of our veterans. The issue she highlights is vital. The Ministry of Defence continues to work with service personnel and their families to support them, and we are in discussions and working closely with our Home Office colleagues on that important issue.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): In the United States, an impressive military charity called Soldier On has established housing co-operatives to give homeless ex-servicemen an affordable place to live and allow them to help control the running of it. Would the Secretary of State consider such an approach here in the UK?

Gavin Williamson: That charity has also been looking at the United Kingdom. We are keen to work closely with it, to see how we can take the lessons learned from

the United States and the positive experiences that have been created and ensure that it can benefit people here in the United Kingdom.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Although I certainly endorse the gratitude expressed for the support that many thousands of volunteers give to veterans, is it not time we accepted that it should not be left to charities to look after people who have been injured in the service of their nation? It is not charities that send people into war; it is Governments. What representations has the Secretary of State made to his colleague the Chancellor to ensure that health services, local authorities and other public bodies are adequately resourced, so that the welfare of veterans can be funded from the public purse, rather than relying on charity and volunteers?

Gavin Williamson: This Government have put veterans and our service personnel very much at the heart of not just what the Ministry of Defence does but right across Government. Of course, devolved Governments play a vital role in delivering services. We all recognise the important role that charities play, and they provide a lot of services on behalf of Government, in order to be best able to reach out to people who have served in our armed forces.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I am the proud and entirely unworthy owner of a veterans badge, as my seven years were largely spent in the bar. Is there not an argument that people who truly deserve a veterans badge should have a much more visible symbol of their service, and that perhaps the title should be restricted more to those who truly deserve it, rather than people like me?

Gavin Williamson: We all think that you truly do deserve it; we certainly would not want to take it off you. We are looking—

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently say to the Secretary of State that, in order for him to take something off me, I would have to have it in the first place.

Gavin Williamson: Mr Speaker, we will have to see if we can get you one as well in the future.

We are constantly looking at how we can recognise those who have served. The veterans ID card is another important step forward in ensuring that there is true recognition of the service that so many people have given our country.

Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention

2. **Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve recruitment and retention in the armed forces. [909988]

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

Royston Smith: Having served in the Royal Air Force, I know how rewarding a life in the military is, and also how demanding it can be. I also know how difficult recruitment and retention is, particularly retention. Has my right hon. Friend considered free wi-fi for military personnel to help them and their families feel less isolated when they are serving away from home?

Mark Lancaster: We recognise the importance of connectivity for our personnel. I reassure my hon. Friend that for those serving on operations, the Ministry of Defence will pay for internet connection to enable them to connect with family and friends. For those on non-operational tours abroad, the wi-fi costs are also covered through a welfare package.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): One way to retain more Royal Marines is to ensure that their accommodation is of high quality. As Plymouth is no longer getting the superbase we were promised, could the Minister set out how the facilities at Stonehouse barracks will be increased, including making sure that all the accommodation blocks have hot water and good heating?

Mark Lancaster: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that a complex programme was announced through the better defence estate strategy. On the specific issue he raises, I am told that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), intends to visit shortly.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The chief executive officer of Capita says that it will lose a lot of money on its recruitment contract on behalf of the MOD. In that case, I presume that the Government have a strong legal case for simply terminating the contract without compensation and taking it back in-house and doing it properly.

Mark Lancaster: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has certainly made it clear that he has not ruled out the option of terminating the contract. However, in recent months we have seen dramatic improvements in the performance of that contract, partly because of the money that Capita has put in—its own money—to ensure that that is the case.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Every year my home town of Tain in the highlands hosts the Tain highland gathering. It has been a good number of years since I have seen any armed forces recruiting stands at the highland games. These stands have been very successful in the past—children and young people love them—but frankly, as has been said, Capita is not doing very well. May I encourage the Minister and the Secretary of State to get the stands set up again? In my own case, those people would be rewarded with a very large glass of our local amber nectar, Glenmorangie.

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for highlighting that recruiting opportunity. I might visit myself, given what is on offer. He makes a very sensible suggestion and I will ensure that it is fed into the system.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The size of the Army is in freefall under this Conservative Government. The number of fully trained regulars has fallen from 78,000 to 75,900 on this Minister's watch. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who has responsibility for defence people, is reported to have said that he will resign if that number falls below 70,000. What about the Minister for the Armed Forces—is he prepared to make that same commitment?

Mark Lancaster: I am certainly not prepared to resign from my role as a member of the Army Reserve, because that would really not help matters, would it? The hon. Lady over-eggs the pudding slightly by saying that the numbers are in freefall. Yes, numbers have fallen but, with the highest number of applications on record in January, we have already explained why we are confident that the numbers will increase. Crucially, the Army remains at 93% manning and can meet all of its operational commitments.

Nia Griffith: Does that not say it all? The Minister does not even have the courage to put his job on the line. Time and again, he comes here and bluffs his way through with empty rhetoric, but the simple fact is that he has failed completely and Army numbers are falling month after month. At best he is complacent; at worst he has junked the stated target of 82,000 and does not have the guts to tell us. When is he going to accept that it is his responsibility to end this failure and get a grip?

Mark Lancaster: I have been accused of many things in my life, but lacking courage is probably not one of them. If the hon. Lady knew anything about me, she would probably realise why that is the case. None the less, the issue remains a challenge and I am confident—as I have just said, recent figures show the highest number of applications on record in January—that the situation is improving.

Leaving the EU: Defence Industry

3. **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to support the British defence industry after the UK leaves the EU. [909989]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): The UK defence industry is globally competitive and creates and contributes to jobs across the United Kingdom. I am confident that it will continue to thrive in the future. The Government are seeking the best possible deal for UK industry after exit. We support European collaboration on capability development and are promoting the invaluable contribution of UK industry.

John Spellar: That was a standard complacent reply from the Minister. Ministers are still hanging on to the mythology that EU regulations prevent them from supporting British industry, most recently with the fleet solid support ships. Of course, no one else in the EU holds on to that view or, indeed, behaves like that. However, as leaving the EU looms, will the Minister now show some decisiveness and backbone, instruct his officials to scrap the old discredited dogma and start putting British industry first?

Stuart Andrew: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that we are trying to make our defence industry the most competitive in the world so that we win those international competitions. It would not be right for me to comment on the decisions taken by other countries on FSS, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, but I note that the EU Commission has publicly questioned the legality of applying article 346 to the procurement of support ships by other member states, so I am glad that we have behaved properly.

20. [910006] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that even after we have left the EU, members of the British armed forces will continue to be based in EU countries, contributing towards their defence, and that therefore it is not unreasonable for us to expect their Governments to support the British defence industry and the British Government as we finalise negotiations with the rest of the EU?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Of course our commitment to EU security, European security and working with our NATO colleagues will continue after we have left the EU. That is why we are working on ambitious future arrangements. People know that they can rely on the armed forces of the United Kingdom.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): The Minister knows that I am a huge advocate of the combat air strategy, and had the first debate on that in the Chamber. Given that we are about to leave the EU and Team Tempest is so far showing impressive signs of movement, when will we discuss a replacement for the Hawk so that we have a full package and a training aircraft, and can secure the jobs at Brough?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady is right about the future combat air strategy. We are in negotiations and discussions with other partner nations. When it comes to the issues around Hawk, we have done an enormous amount of work to try to get more orders for the Brough site. I recognise how important that is. I have visited Kuwait myself to try to get that order over the line. It is still a work in progress, but I hope that we will be successful.

25. [910011] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Clearly, one of the ways we can encourage the UK defence industry is through using new and emerging technologies. Will my hon. Friend comment on use of the transformation fund, particularly the £30 million for new military apps and the £66 million for robotic programmes that will encourage the UK industry to develop further?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is right to raise that. I went to see some of the small and medium-sized businesses that are working with our armed forces on some of the projects that have been funded through that, plus the innovation fund—the £800 million over 10 years that is encouraging as many businesses as possible, many of which have probably never worked with defence in the past, to come forward with their ideas.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Today, we saw the ceremony for confirming the move of the EU anti-piracy taskforce from Northwood to a new

location near Cadiz. All around us, we are hearing about the consequences of Brexit not only on the defence industry but on our security relationships. Despite there being a rather uncommon consensus in the House about the importance of those relationships, we have heard precious little from the Department. Not only our closest allies, but the defence industry, serving personnel and policy makers need clarity on the UK's grand strategy. Will the Minister stop hedging their bets and tell us about the defence and security relationship that the Government want with the EU?

Stuart Andrew: Part of the negotiations with the EU has heavily focused on our future relationship and the collaboration we want with EU nations. However, at the end of the day, the cornerstone of our defence is NATO, and those relationships, and our bilateral relationships with many other countries, will form the way that we do defence in the future.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): As the Conservative party plays political games and the Cabinet seeks to oust the Prime Minister, the huge uncertainty for our defence industry continues. The Prime Minister's Brexit deal has been rejected twice, so will the Minister accept that the Government must now do the responsible thing and work across the House to build a consensus for a better deal? Instead of treating this House with yet more disdain, will he confirm that the Government will work with MPs from across the House to determine the course of action?

Stuart Andrew: I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that this is defence questions. The Prime Minister will be making a statement shortly. Perhaps that question would be best put to her.

Support for Veterans

4. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve veterans' access to support services. [909990]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): With your permission, Mr Speaker, may I pair question 4 with questions 11, 12, 19 and 23?

11. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve veterans' access to support services. [909997]

12. **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of veterans' support services in Hull. [909998]

19. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve veterans' access to support services. [910005]

23. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve veterans' access to support services. [910009]

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) Is this a Whips' question?

Mr Ellwood: I am sure they are all very genuine. The support we provide our veterans is a genuine subject. We owe our veterans a huge debt of gratitude, but it is important that that gratitude is reflected in the practical support we provide. That is exactly why we are investing in a new veterans strategy, which will be fundamental to improving the co-ordination of that support.

Mr Speaker: It has been gently pointed out to me—not that one wishes to be pedantic, merely correct—that one might not be able to pair something, particularly when there are four. A grouping, on the other hand, is perfectly orderly. Mr Merriman, let us hear it man.

Huw Merriman: We were waiting for you to finish, Mr Speaker. [*Laughter.*] I know my place.

I thank the Minister for his answer. The charity sector plays an amazing role in enhancing support for veterans. What engagement has the Minister had with that sector?

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. It is so important that we engage as much as we possibly can. There are over 400 service-facing charities. They are co-ordinated by the Veterans' Gateway and Cobseo, forming themselves into clusters so we can provide the necessary support in the various areas required. Every second Monday, the Defence Secretary and I meet people from the charity sector. In the coming weeks, we will be meeting charities based specifically in the arts.

Henry Smith: Recently, a monthly drop-in service has been established at Crawley library for veterans to get advice on the services supported by the Royal British Legion and SSAFA, among others. May I have a commitment from the Ministry of Defence that it will continue to work with the voluntary sector, which provides such fantastic support?

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary underlined the importance of geographically locally based charities. It is so important that the message gets out that support is available to veterans. The biggest challenge we face is veterans not being aware of where to go for help, so I am very grateful for that work in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Emma Hardy: Veterans in Hull are very fortunate to have the support of incredible people like Steve from Hull Veterans Support Centre and Paul from Hull 4 Heroes. There is an ambitious plan to build a veterans village in Hull. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the best way that he can support it?

Mr Ellwood: I am always delighted to meet hon. Members who want to pursue and support veterans' initiatives. I would be delighted to visit. My mother-in-law lives just down the road from Hull, in Beverley, so perhaps I can tie in the two visits in one go.

Maria Caulfield: Some 60,000 armed forces veterans are currently suffering mental health problems, in prison or homeless. What more support can be given to personnel as they leave the armed forces to help reduce that number in future?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is right to focus on specific issues where we need to increase our support. One reason why we are putting together the veterans strategy is to understand where we can do more. The prison sector is one area. She touches on the transition process. It is so important that as people depart the armed forces they know where help can be provided. We are now getting back in touch with armed forces personnel and their families 12 months after they have departed to check on their progress.

Rachel Maclean: Ubi-tech is a business in my constituency made up completely of ex-service people. It is expanding fast and provides services to the MOD and others. It also provides resettlement training and is a supporter of the armed forces covenant. Given that, does the Minister agree that it is not surprising that the business regards the decision to prosecute soldier F after 47 years with absolute dismay? How does the Minister respond to that?

Mr Ellwood: The Northern Ireland prosecution service made an independent judgment on that. I think it would be wrong for us to make any judgment on the Government side. What my hon. Friend illustrates is another great example of veterans charities doing fantastic work on a local basis, and if there is an opportunity to visit her constituency, I would be delighted to meet it.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): On return from his tour of Afghanistan in 2007, my constituent, Robert Duncan, experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. It has taken this long to have a conversation—that is all he wants—with those under whom he served. Why can he not have that conversation?

Mr Ellwood: I do not know the circumstances of that particular case and I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady to see what more can be done. As I touched on before, we are now far more engaged with the individuals—all service personnel—who served in Afghanistan and Iraq to track their progress and to make sure that we are in touch to give them the support that they need. If there is a case for an individual to be looked at again, I would be more than happy to do that.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): While we know that the charity sector is doing a great deal of work, and we are extremely grateful for that, there is an absence of veterans-focused policies in areas such as welfare and employability. The transition to civilian life can be difficult, so does the Minister agree that the Government must be doing more in this area?

Mr Ellwood: I am pleased that the hon. Lady mentioned that the Government must be doing more. That is absolutely correct. The veterans board was established for exactly this mission—to make sure that it is not just the MOD that does its bit, but that all Government Departments recognise their duty to honour the covenant to ensure that they provide the support that we need to give our brave veterans.

Mr Speaker: We now come to Question 5. *[Interruption.]* I beg your pardon, Mr Hamilton wanted to come in on this question. *[Interruption.]* We do like him, but whether we like him or not, he has a right to be heard.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): I apologise to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) for intervening before he had the chance to ask his question. At Defence questions on 18 February, I asked the Minister about the black soldiers of the East Africa Force, formed in 1940, after an investigation revealed that they were paid only a third of the wage received by their white counterparts. On 13 February, Her Majesty's Opposition wrote to the Government about this issue and I wrote to the Minister on 28 February, but so far no replies have been received. The Foreign Office claims that this is a matter for the Ministry of Defence, but the Minister told the House last month that this was a matter for the Foreign Office. Will he please confirm that it is in fact his Department's responsibility, and may I ask him again when the East Africa Force veterans and their families might expect, at the very least, an official apology and compensation for this scandal?

Mr Ellwood: Perhaps it does feel like we are living an episode of "Yes Minister", and I fully understand that, with Departments trying to establish who has responsibility. We need to iron that out, and we absolutely need to get the answers that the hon. Gentleman deserves. Perhaps I can speak with him afterwards and we can move this issue forward.

Armed Forces: Social Mobility

5. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What progress his Department has made on promoting social mobility and equal opportunities throughout the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [909991]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Armed forces careers are built on merit, creating an environment where potential is defined by effort and talent and not by background. The skills, education and training that they get in the armed forces give many people the chance to achieve so much not just while they serve, but when they leave.

Michael Fabricant: With the appointment of Brigadier Janice Cook as head of regulation at Defence Medical Services in Lichfield and the very recent appointment of Sue Gray as Air Marshal, does this not demonstrate that there is no glass ceiling for women in the armed forces?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is no glass ceiling. He brings out two brilliant examples of where women in our armed forces can achieve so much and make such a difference. We all recognise that we need to get more women joining all three services. The contribution and value that they bring is enormous, and the opening up of all roles, including close combat roles, has been vitally important in doing so.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State must know that the British armed services used to be one of the greatest players in encouraging social mobility and equal opportunity. They used to be the greatest trainers in Britain in terms of quality, size and capacity. When will he go back to that mission of having a real training programme in the Army that is big, not tiny?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes a very strong point about maybe expanding our armed forces. We should feel proud that we are the largest employer of apprentices in this country—19,000 service personnel are currently in an apprenticeship—and that we continue to lead on this. The value that these apprenticeships bring is not just to the services; there is also the contribution to wider society, as service personnel often pursue a second career after they leave.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State once again for retaining 40 Commando in Taunton. It is a momentous decision and great for Taunton. That said, only 9% of British soldiers are female. Does he agree that opening up all combat roles to women will make a real difference to our armed forces? I look forward to the first ones joining the Marines.

Gavin Williamson: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who did so much in campaigning to keep the Royal Marines in Taunton; they play an important role in the local community. I very much look forward to the first female recruits joining the Royal Marines. I am sure they will be welcomed by the whole corps.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): In towns such as St Helens and Newton-le-Willows, the armed forces have always been a driver of social mobility and civic pride, but, like many places, we have lost our armed forces careers office. Would the Secretary of State consider reopening not just ours but others in many working-class communities across the country, upon whom the armed forces rely for their recruitment?

Gavin Williamson: One of the key drivers of recruitment is increasingly online, but we need always to look at how we reach out into local communities. I remember how the Green Howards often used to visit my school in Scarborough sending out the message of what an Army career could deliver. We need to look at how we can get service personnel out into the community recruiting.

Service Personnel: Statute of Limitations

6. **Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con):** If he will introduce a statute of limitations on prosecutions in order to protect servicemen and women. [909992]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): We take the prosecution of veterans very seriously. Our service personnel are of course subject to the law, but veterans should not have to face repeated investigations many years after the events in question. That is why we have a dedicated defence team looking at this complex issue. A statute of limitations, which presents significant challenges, is the subject of inquiry by the Select Committee on Defence, and we await its report with interest.

Mr Jayawardena: I recently met Field Marshal Lord Bramall, the former head of the armed forces, who is one of my constituents. Since last year when so many of my constituents signed the petition on this issue, how has my right hon. and gallant Friend been ensuring that the political context of the troubles, which Lord Bramall's book, "The Bramall Papers", describes, is taken into account in today's politically motivated witch hunts?

Mark Lancaster: Having served as Chief of the General Staff and then as Chief of the Defence Staff during the height of the troubles, Lord Bramall clearly brings a unique perspective to these difficult issues. The House will understand that prosecutorial decisions in Northern Ireland are taken by the Public Prosecution Service and that the PPS is independent both of the UK Government and of the Northern Ireland Executive. The Government recognise, however, that the current system for dealing with the legacy of Northern Ireland's past is not working well for anyone, and that is why the Ministry of Defence is working closely with the Northern Ireland Office on new arrangements, including to ensure that our armed forces and police officers are not unfairly treated.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Members of the Defence Committee were very pleased by the way Ministers set up the dedicated unit to look into this question and by the work the Attorney General has been doing. Have the proposals that are apparently to be brought forward in the Queen's Speech yet been finalised and accepted at Cabinet level?

Mark Lancaster: My right hon. Friend highlights—because he understands them—the complexities of this issue, not the least of which is that it transcends not just Northern Ireland but different judicial systems in the United Kingdom. We are making progress, and we have applied to bring the subject forward in the Queen's Speech, but we have yet to conclude this work.

Armed Forces Covenant

7. **Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab):** What steps his Department is taking to ensure the effective delivery of the armed forces covenant. [909993]

16. **Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con):** What steps he is taking to encourage more commercial organisations to participate in the armed forces covenant. [910002]

17. **Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** What steps his Department is taking to ensure the effective delivery of the armed forces covenant. [910003]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The armed forces covenant not only obliges Government Departments to recognise their duty to support armed forces personnel and veterans and their families, but encourages organisations and businesses across the country to do the same. I am pleased to say that there are now more than 3,300 signings, and we are signing about 25 companies or organisations each week.

Danielle Rowley: A recent Defence Committee report stated that

"some serving personnel, veterans and their families who need mental health care are still being completely failed by the system."

We have heard about engagement with charities and mental health support, but a local charity that is doing great work in Midlothian, the Lothians Veterans Centre, has confirmed the sentiment expressed by the Committee, and told me that charities helping veterans are under a huge burden and huge pressures. What are the Government doing to encourage service personnel to report mental

health problems without fear of reprisal, and to ensure that there is a greater focus on the provision of mental health care?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady has packed a lot into one question, and it is very important indeed. The critical aspect is removing stigma and enabling people to step forward and say “I’m not okay” without feeling that there will be reprisals, and, thanks to the mental health and wellbeing strategy of 2017, we are doing exactly that. It is taking a while to change the culture, but more people are now willing to step forward and say “Let me get checked out, let me get sorted, let me get back into the line” without fearing that doing so might damage their promotion prospects.

Bill Wiggin: Why should commercial organisations take this matter seriously when the Ministry of Defence has not yet managed to change its demand for British meat so that our armed forces can be fed the finest meat in the world?

Mr Ellwood: I understand that this issue dates back to a former armed forces Minister’s time many years ago. When we were back in office a couple of decades ago, we discussed it ourselves. I will certainly look into it, but I encourage all those organisations—despite their issues with meat—to sign the armed forces covenant and support our brave veterans and armed forces personnel.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The acute care for armed forces personnel who have had acquired brain injuries in the course of their duties is second to none—no one would doubt that—but the anxiety is that when they leave the forces, or sometimes even before they enter the forces, an acquired brain injury will go unnoticed and therefore untreated and uncared for, which is why so many veterans end up homeless and living on the street. What are we going to do about that?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the personal interest that he takes in this issue. He is absolutely right: people need signposts so that they know where to go. We are working far more closely with NHS England and the devolved Administrations to understand where the complex treatment services are, and to ensure that when people make the transition, they are handed across to the civilian agency that will look after them.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is wonderful for me, as the founder of the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant, to see an Order Paper that is full of those three words, which did not exist a few years ago. This is a conversation that is critical to the House. Will the Minister meet me to move forward the discussion about the creation of an armed forces covenant ombudsman, so that when the issues raised by colleagues get stuck and we cannot find a solution, we have a real authority to fix things?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that she has done on this issue as chair of the APPG. I should be more than delighted to meet her. It is important that we carry out the necessary scrutiny and are seen to be doing so, and that we do what is best for our veterans.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley), but does he not

agree that when 0.01% of the NHS budget is spent on veterans’ mental health care, we have a great deal further to go? Will he at least endorse fully the recommendations of the Defence Committee on the issue?

Mr Ellwood: I was delighted to address the Committee on this matter only the other day, and to discuss it. It is absolutely true that we need to follow the money. We know that £21 billion has been given to the NHS to cover the next 10 years, of which a proportion will go to mental health. The Prime Minister herself wants to see parity between mental and physical health and wellbeing, so let us make sure that we can identify where those funds are. I hope that I, or the Defence Secretary, will have a meeting with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as soon as possible to see what more can be done.

Capita

8. **Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Capita’s Army recruitment contract with his Department. [909994]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): The Army continues to work closely with Capita with multiple interventions now in place and the delivery of improvements. Regular soldier applications remain at a five-year high with this year’s “Your Army needs you” advertising campaign seeing over 15,000 applications in January alone. It will take longer to see increases to trained strengths due to the length of the recruitment and training pipeline.

Liz Twist: The Secretary of State has said he might re-examine the Capita contract in the next financial year, meaning we will have to wait another 12 months before any action is taken. All the while Capita is failing abysmally, with Army numbers falling year after year. Instead of endlessly kicking the can down the road, why do the Government not deal with the problem now: strip Capita of the contract and bring the service back in-house?

Mark Lancaster: I answered that question earlier and, with respect to the hon. Lady, she clearly did not listen to the answer I just gave her. Applications are up; there is the start of a process. One of the confusions the House has is that we talk about trained strength, which is the number—93% manned in respect of the Army—but that is after a very long process of going through not only basic training but, for example, for Royal Engineers also combat engineer training and then trade training. So this can take up to 18 months from the first time somebody puts a uniform on and considers themselves to be part of the Army. Those in training do not go home and say “I’m not in the Army because I am not fully trade trained yet.” There are some 5,000 soldiers now in that process who are wearing a uniform but are not included in the numbers; in time they will join the Army and we are seeing that uplift. It is the time lag that this House is not fully understanding, but I understand why.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): In terms of the effectiveness of recruitment, my right hon. Friend will know that we recruit many armed forces servicemen and women from the Commonwealth, but is he aware of the Royal British Legion campaign to eliminate the

current high costs of their applications for indefinite leave to remain, to which they are eligible after four years' service? This can cost almost £10,000 for a family of four; does my right hon. Friend agree it is time that this issue was tackled in order that we recruit more from the Commonwealth?

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend raises a very important issue and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is engaging with the Home Office in an attempt to solve it.

Korean Peninsula

9. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in the Korean peninsula. [909995]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): The security situation on the Korean peninsula has improved since North Korea adopted a self-imposed moratorium on missile launches. North Korea almost certainly wishes to avoid conflict; however the balance of hard military power on the peninsula has not altered substantively recently. North Korea needs to engage in meaningful negotiations with the United States and take concrete steps towards complete denuclearisation.

Kevin Foster: The failure of recent talks aimed at securing denuclearisation in North Korea was disappointing, although I welcome South Korea's attempt to revive them. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that UK Government support for any agreement reached in future would be dependent on a commitment by North Korea to complete denuclearisation?

Gavin Williamson: We have been absolutely consistent that there must be complete denuclearisation, and while it is disappointing as to where talks have gone we must remain hopeful that pressure can be applied for North Korea to come back to the table in order to be able to reinstate these discussions going forward.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): Will the Government make it clear that North Korea cannot play games, as it has done for more than 20 years, just wanting to get sanctions lifted or get economic support from outside and then reverting to its old policies, and that there will be consequences internationally if it does that?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I remember visiting South Korea with him back in, I think, 2010 or 2011 where we looked at this. It is vital that Britain stands shoulder to shoulder with our UN friends in terms of the imposition and enforcement of sanctions, which the Royal Navy has been leading on with our other UN partners.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Is or is not North Korea degrading its nuclear capability?

Gavin Williamson: We continue to monitor what is happening in North Korea. It is vitally important that we work with other allies, including the People's Republic of China, to put pressure on North Korea in order to reduce the amount of nuclear testing it has in the past been conducting.

Air Defence Radar Systems and Offshore Wind Sites

10. **Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that air defence radar systems do not constrain the development of offshore wind sites. [909996]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): The Ministry of Defence's first priority is always to guarantee that the UK is able to meet its national security obligations, which include ensuring that our air defence radar systems can operate effectively. The Ministry is supportive of the offshore wind sector deal, and we remain keen to work closely across Government and with the industry to support this.

Melanie Onn: Over half the new offshore wind sites that the Government have announced they will build will affect aviation radar systems. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), responded to a written question of mine on 20 February, saying that the solution is "challenging and requires upgraded or new technologies, which are not currently part of the equipment programme."

Does that not simply mean that the Government's ability to deliver on that sector deal is going to be hampered?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady raises an important point because the scale and size of the proposed wind farms are significant. I have been speaking to officials about how we might use the innovation fund, for example, to work closely with the industry to find a solution to this problem.

Defence Industry: Exports and Jobs

14. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to (a) support an increase in UK defence exports and (b) protect defence industry jobs. [910000]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): In 2017, the UK won defence orders worth £9 billion, making us the second largest global defence exporter. We work actively with the Department for International Trade to support industry, and recent successes include the export of the Type 26 to Canada and Australia, and the US Department of Defence awarding a further £500 million-worth of support work for the F-35 programme in north Wales.

Neil Parish: Supacat, the leading specialist in the design and development of high-mobility defence vehicles, is located in my constituency. If it wins a contract in Denmark, it has to offset 60% of that work in Denmark with supplying those vehicles to the Danish Government, yet that is not something that we do here. Will the Minister meet Supacat to discuss what more could be done to ensure that we secure high-skilled defence jobs in this country when defence contracts are lost to foreign companies?

Stuart Andrew: Of course I would be more than happy to meet my hon. Friend and the company in his constituency. The UK and many of our closest international defence partners do not use offset because it can distort the market and lead to reduced value for money, but we

look at alternative ways to encourage more inward investment. That is why we are working closely with Boeing and Lockheed Martin, and we are aiming for 60% of the Boxer programme to be undertaken in the UK.

24. [910010] **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It was a pleasure to see the Minister in Glasgow on Friday for the naming of HMS Tamar, which, when it was ordered, was classified as a complex warship. Now, under the national shipbuilding strategy, it is no longer considered to be a complex warship. Leaving that bizarre situation aside, given the precarious situation faced by numerous British shipbuilders such as Harland and Wolff, which is facing administration, the further job losses at Rosyth and the closure of the Appledore shipyard, what are the Government doing to ensure that the consideration of the bid for the fleet solid support ships contract will be weighted so that the UK economic prosperity consideration is factored into the awarding of that contract, so that the UK consortium will prevail?

Stuart Andrew: It was a pleasure to see the hon. Gentleman in Glasgow. That was a great event and I was happy to be there. He will know that we are trying to make UK industry as competitive as possible. That is why we are putting this out to international competition; it is not described as a warship. That said, I am delighted that there is a team UK, a consortium of UK shipbuilders, bidding into that competition. There will also be lots of opportunities for the supply chain, which has benefited from other competitions that went international, such as that for the military afloat reach and sustainability—MARS—ships.

Redundant Military Equipment

15. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the (a) transportation and (b) storage of redundant sensitive military equipment; and if he will make a statement. [910001]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): When defence equipment becomes surplus to requirements, the Defence Equipment Sales Authority disposes of it using compliant contractors or by direct sale to other Governments. Contractors who process or dispose of sensitive defence equipment are subject to a strict ongoing security assurance programme.

Norman Lamb: The Minister will be aware of the serious allegations relating to the transportation and storage of defence technology from Leonardo by Used Equipment Surplus and Storage Ltd—UES&S—in my constituency. Ministry of Defence police visited my constituents and told them that prosecutions were likely to follow and that they would receive a copy of the investigation report. My constituents are still waiting. Every request I have made for a meeting with Ministers has been turned down for more than a year. Will the Minister meet me and will he give me a copy of the report, because there are serious concerns that there is a cover-up going on here?

Stuart Andrew: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that there have been inspections at those premises and that nothing was seen to be of concern. However, I

understand the issues that the situation is causing his constituents, so I would be more than happy to meet with him and them.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is imploring me and has been sitting patiently in his usual statesmanlike fashion, so I want to hear from him.

Defence Manufacturing: Employment Trends

18. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of employment in defence manufacturing. [910004]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): The Ministry of Defence spent £18.9 billion with UK industry in 2017-18, directly supporting 115,000 jobs across the country.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Minister for that response. He will be aware that Dowty Propellers, one of the world's largest propeller manufacturers, had an unfortunate fire in my constituency four years ago. Owned by an American company, GE Aviation, it could have rebuilt the factory anywhere, but it has chosen to build it in my constituency, thereby securing 350 jobs. I thank the Government for their contribution through the digital propulsion scheme, which will contribute to the success of the company.

Stuart Andrew: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his work in this area and welcome the fact that GE Aviation's investment is creating this new propeller facility. It will form part of the defence industry's massive contribution to the south-west and provides the jobs on which many people rely.

Topical Questions

T1. [910012] **Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): In this, the 50th year of the continuous at sea nuclear deterrent, the MOD is proud to continue to protect the security and stability not only of our nation, but of our allies. I will be attending the commemoration service at Westminster Abbey on 3 May, and I hope that many colleagues from both sides of the House will also be able to commemorate this important milestone.

Wes Streeting: In response to the Defence Secretary's speech to RUSI on 11 February, particularly his remarks about the deployment of HMS Queen Elizabeth to the South China sea, George Osborne described it as a throwback to an era of "gunboat diplomacy" and Lord Dannatt described the Defence Secretary as wanting to "use defence as a platform to develop his own career".

Will the Defence Secretary therefore take this opportunity to explain exactly what he means by that deployment and to say whether he has managed to have discussions with the Chancellor about the finer points of international diplomacy and trade?

Gavin Williamson: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, we are the second-largest investor in south-east Asia. We have strong and deep links with many allies,

including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and, of course, the United States. It is therefore perfectly natural and expected to continue to operate and exercise alongside our allies.

T2. [910014] **Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): How does my right hon. Friend score his Department on its agreement with the Treasury to release land now considered surplus to the MOD's requirements to the housing market?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): My right hon. Friend is right that we need to release land that is surplus to requirements. The MOD owns 2% of Britain, and it is important to have a programme of disposal that works with local communities to free up land for important housing.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am sure that the entire House was distraught yesterday to hear press reports of injuries sustained by UK special forces in Yemen and will join me in wishing a speedy recovery to those affected. I appreciate that the MOD does not comment on special forces operations, but the news certainly illustrates the engagement of UK forces in that part of the Arabian peninsula. Will the Secretary of State make a statement to the House to ensure that we and our constituents can know more about the UK's ongoing role in that desperate, devastating conflict?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): As the hon. Gentleman knows, we neither confirm nor deny the use of our special forces.

T5. [910019] **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): As a proud member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I have been privileged to visit a number of servicemen and women around the world. Does the Secretary of State agree it is a fantastic career for women, as well as men? Can he update me on what more he is doing to encourage more women to join our armed services?

Gavin Williamson: As was touched upon earlier, we are very much showing and leading by example with the promotion of many women into some of the highest roles within the Army, the Navy and, of course, the Royal Air Force. We have been looking at how we do our advertising and how we reach out to encourage more women to understand there is a very positive career in our armed forces.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Normally it takes three years to train an RAF pilot. Will the Minister explain why it is now taking up to seven years?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): We accept there have been issues with this contract, but we are working very closely with industry to try to resolve it and to make sure there are the training facilities needed for the people who want to take up that career.

Wayne David: That is a very interesting response, but is it not the case that there is this problem because there are shortages of planes and instructors, and that things are so bad that the MOD is paying a private contractor for phantom courses that never take place? On current

estimates, it will take another 20 years before the RAF has enough pilots, so how does the Minister propose to remedy this totally unacceptable situation?

Stuart Andrew: As I said a moment ago, I recently met industry and spoke to, for example, the chief executive of BAE Systems. I want those industries to work together to come up with a solution, which is the challenge we are giving them.

T6. [910020] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Having hitherto restrained EU military ambition, why are we now seeking to be its vanguard?

Mark Lancaster: Of course, the reality is that NATO is the cornerstone of our defence. Although in the past we have participated in EU missions such as Operation Atalanta and Operation Althea, we will only do so in future if it is in our national interest.

T3. [910015] **Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Our defence manufacturers are based in every corner of this country, many of them making a vital contribution to local and regional economies, but small and medium-sized enterprises have told me they feel disadvantaged because they cannot get down to London for many of the procurement briefings that take place. Will the Minister crack open the gates of Whitehall and get civil servants out around the country to see the brilliant work of manufacturers across our country?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and that is exactly what we are doing. I was very pleased to host an SME forum in Belfast, and the next one will be in Wales. We have officials all over the country engaging with SMEs, because we recognise the massive contribution they can make to the defence needs of this country.

T7. [910021] **Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): In England, one in six people report or experience a common mental health problem in any given week. In both the Ministry of Defence and in service veteran communities there is an additional stigma that prevents individuals from seeking help. What steps is the Department taking to reduce the stigma and to support military charities such as the RAF Association that are actively supporting these individuals?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend touches on such an important issue. If we are to retain people in the armed forces, we need to provide the necessary support on mental health issues. The Prime Minister herself has said that she wants to see parity between mental and physical health, which is exactly what the 2017 mental health strategy seeks to secure.

T4. [910017] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): In reply to a recent written question, I was told that the United Kingdom Government can deploy armed military forces on UK soil only at the request of, for example, the appropriate police force. Have responses to such requests been considered as part of the post-Brexit contingency plans?

Gavin Williamson: We have long-established rules on military assistance to civilian authorities, and local authorities, police authorities and all Government Departments understand that. We always respond in any way we can to support and help.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: A very senior parliamentary celebrity, Sir Edward Leigh.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): If RAF Scampton is to close, which everyone in Lincolnshire naturally opposes, in deciding where the Red Arrows should go, will the Secretary of State bear in mind that we have three excellent airfields—Waddington, Coningsby and Cranwell—and, above all, wonderful airspace, and that we should not move the Red Arrows to an inferior county like Yorkshire?

Gavin Williamson: I very much appreciate the strong campaigning that my right hon. Friend has been undertaking to keep the Red Arrows in Lincolnshire. We will certainly be listening closely to all arguments.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): As satisfaction with—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I understand the air of excitement and anticipation of important matters, but the question from the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) is important and must be heard.

Mary Glendon: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As satisfaction with pay and pension benefits is at its lowest level ever recorded, does the Minister accept that seven years of below-inflation pay rises have had a severe effect on the morale of our armed forces?

Mr Ellwood: We take the continuous attitude survey very seriously. We are concerned that there has been a fall in morale. I am pleased to see that the Chancellor is in his place, as I hope he will recognise that when the spending review comes around for allocation.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): In our spend on defence, it is important that our armed forces get the best, and in respect of naval propulsion systems that means the low-vibration motors produced by GE Energy in Rugby. Does the Minister agree that it is important to maintain that capability in the UK?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend has raised this issue a number of times. I, along with the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), who has responsibility for defence procurement, have also met him on this. We are working closely with GE to do everything we can to support the business going forward and this includes the enormous work that has been put into securing export orders as well.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): No one in Broxtowe wants the British Army to leave the Chetwynd barracks, especially as we are so proud of our association with the Sappers—the Royal Engineers—but we understand that the land must be sold off. What we are concerned about is the delay in the sale. I would be grateful if the Minister would be agreeable to a meeting so that we can see how we can best dispose of the land for housing.

Mr Ellwood: I would be delighted to meet my right hon. Friend in order to discuss this. I know she has been passionate about this issue and we will see whether we can resolve the matter.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We must now move on to the statement from the Prime Minister.

European Council

3.32 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on last week's European Council. Before the Council, I wrote to President Tusk to seek formal approval for the legally binding assurances on the Northern Ireland backstop and alternative arrangements agreed in Strasbourg on 11 March. I reported your statement, Mr Speaker, which made it clear that for a further meaningful vote to take place, the deal would have to be

“fundamentally different—not different in terms of wording, but different in terms of substance”.—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 782.]

I explained that, as a result, some right hon. and hon. Members were seeking further changes to the withdrawal agreement, and I requested a short extension to the article 50 process, to 30 June. I regret having to do so—I wanted to deliver Brexit on 29 March—but I am conscious of my duties as Prime Minister to all parts of our United Kingdom and of the damage to that Union that leaving without a deal could do when one part of it is without devolved government and unable, therefore, to prepare properly.

The Council formally endorsed the legal instrument relating to the withdrawal agreement and the joint statement supplementing the political declaration. This should increase the confidence of the House that the backstop is unlikely ever to be used, and would only be temporary if it is. But the Council also reiterated, once again, its long-standing position that there could be no reopening of the withdrawal agreement. So however the House decides to proceed this week, everyone should be absolutely clear that changing the withdrawal agreement is simply not an option.

Turning to extending article 50, this has always required the unanimous agreement of the other 27 member states. As I have made clear before, it was never guaranteed that the EU would agree to an extension—or the terms on which we requested it—and it did not. Instead, the Council agreed that if the House approves the withdrawal agreement this week, our departure will be extended to 11 pm on 22 May. This will allow time for Parliament to pass the withdrawal agreement Bill, which is legally necessary for the deal to be ratified. But if the House does not approve the withdrawal agreement this week, our departure will instead be extended only to 11 pm on 12 April. At this point, we would either leave with no deal, or we would

“indicate a way forward before this date for consideration by the European Council”.

If that involved a further extension, it would certainly mean participation in the European parliamentary elections.

The Council's conclusions were subsequently turned into a legal decision, with which the UK agreed and which came into force last Friday. So although the Government have today laid a statutory instrument, which will be debated later this week, to reflect that decision in our own domestic legislation, the date for our departure from the EU has now changed in international law. Were the House not to pass the statutory instrument, it would cause legal confusion and damaging uncertainty, but it would not have any effect on the date of our exit.

I continue to believe that the right path forward is for the United Kingdom to leave the EU with a deal as soon as possible, which is now on 22 May, but it is with great regret that I have had to conclude that, as things stand, there is still not sufficient support in the House to bring back the deal for a third meaningful vote. I continue to have discussions with colleagues across the House to build support, so that we can bring the vote forward this week and guarantee Brexit. If we cannot, the Government have made a commitment that we would work across the House to find a majority on a way forward.

The amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) seeks to provide for that process by taking control of the Order Paper. I continue to believe that doing so would set an unwelcome precedent, which would overturn the balance between our democratic institutions, so the Government will oppose the amendment this evening. But in order to fulfil our commitments to the House, we would seek to provide Government time in order for the process to proceed. It would be for the House to put forward options for consideration and to determine the procedure by which it wished to do so.

I must confess that I am sceptical about such a process of indicative votes. When we have tried this kind of thing in the past, it has produced contradictory outcomes or no outcome at all. There is a further risk when it comes to Brexit, as the UK is only one half of the equation and the votes could lead to an outcome that is unnegotiable with the EU. No Government could give a blank cheque to commit to an outcome without knowing what it is, so I cannot commit the Government to delivering the outcome of any votes held by the House, but I do commit to engaging constructively with the process.

There are many different views on the way forward, but I want to explain the options as I understand them. The default outcome continues to be to leave with no deal, but the House has previously expressed its opposition to that path, and may very well do so again this week. The alternative is to pursue a different form of Brexit or a second referendum, but the bottom line remains that if the House does not approve the withdrawal agreement this week and is not prepared to countenance leaving without a deal, we will have to seek a longer extension. This would entail the UK having to hold European elections, and it would mean that we will not have been able to guarantee Brexit. These are now choices that the House will have the opportunity to express its view on.

This is the first chance I have had to address the House since my remarks last Wednesday evening—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must calm itself. The Prime Minister is addressing the House and must be heard. Colleagues know, from the record, that they will have a full opportunity to question the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I expressed my frustration with our collective failure to take a decision, but I know that many Members across the House are frustrated too, and we all have difficult jobs to do. People on all sides of the debate hold passionate views, and I respect those differences. I thank all those colleagues who have supported the deal so far, and those who have taken the time to meet with me to discuss their concerns.

I hope we can all agree that we are now at the moment of decision, and in doing so we must confront the reality of the hard choices before us: unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen; no Brexit must not happen; and a slow Brexit that extends article 50 beyond 22 May, forces the British people to take part in European elections, and gives up control of any of our borders, laws, money or trade is not a Brexit that will bring the British people together. I know that the deal I have put forward is a compromise—it seeks to deliver on the referendum and retain trust in our democracy, while also respecting the concerns of those who voted to remain—but if this House can back it, we could be out of the European Union in less than two months. There would no further extensions, no threat to Brexit and no risk of a no deal. That, I believe, is the way to deliver the Brexit that the British people voted for. I commend this statement to the House.

3.40 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for the advance copy of her statement and for the meetings that we have had in recent days.

The Government's approach to Brexit has now become a national embarrassment. After two years of failure and broken promises after broken promises, the Prime Minister finally accepted the inevitable last week, voted to extend article 50 and went to Brussels to negotiate. Last week's summit represented another negotiating failure for the Prime Minister. Her proposals were rejected and new terms were imposed on her. We now have an extension until mid-April, or 22 May, but despite the clearly expressed will of this House, we still face the prospect of a disastrous no-deal Brexit. This is even more remarkable given that the Minister for the Cabinet Office told this very Chamber that

"seeking such a short and, critically, one-off extension would be downright reckless".—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 566.]

This failure has been compounded by the Prime Minister's attempts last week to pin the blame for this debacle on others. It was wholly inappropriate, last Wednesday, for her to try to pit the people against MPs—elected MPs doing their duty to hold the Government of the day to account, which is what Parliament exists for. In a climate of heightened emotions where MPs from all parts of the House have received threats and intimidation, I hope that she will further reflect and think again about making what I believe to be such dangerous and irresponsible statements.

Every step of the way along this process the Government have refused to reach out, refused to listen and refused to find a consensus that can represent the views of the whole country, not just those of the Conservative party. Large parts of our country continue to be ignored by this Government. It is no wonder that so many people felt compelled to march on the streets or to sign petitions over the weekend. Even the most ardent of leavers think that this Government have failed. It is easy to understand the frustration at this chaos—it exists in this House, in Brussels, and across the country.

The Government have no plan. For them, it is all about putting the Conservative party before the country. Given that the Prime Minister has admitted that she does not have the numbers for her deal, will she accept

today that her deal is dead and that the House should not have to waste its time giving the same answer for a third time?

The Prime Minister has succeeded in unifying two sides against her deal. The CBI and TUC's unprecedented joint statement last week demanded a plan B that protects jobs, workers, industry and communities. Does the Prime Minister have a plan B? The Government have failed, and they have let the people down whether they voted leave or remain. The country cannot afford to continue in this Tory crisis. It is time for Parliament to take control, which is why, later today, we will be backing the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin).

You made it clear last week, Mr Speaker, that, for the Prime Minister to bring back her deal, there must be significant changes. There are none. Rather than trying to engineer a way to bring back the same twice-rejected deal, will she instead allow plans—rather than fight plans—for indicative votes? She cannot accept that her deal does not have the numbers and also stand in the way of finding an alternative that may have the numbers. It is ridiculous to suggest that Parliament taking control is "overturning democratic institutions". It is not; it is Parliament doing its democratic job of holding Government to account. Will the Prime Minister agree to abide by the outcome of these indicative votes, if they take place on Wednesday?

The Labour party will continue cross-party discussions to find a way forward, and I thank Members who have met colleagues of mine and me to have those discussions. I believe that there is support in this House for a deal—one that is based on an alternative that protects jobs and the economy through a customs union, provides full single market access, and allows us to continue to benefit from participation in vital agencies and security measures. If the Government refuse to accept this, we will support measures for a public vote to stop no deal or a chaotic Tory deal.

The Government have had more than two years to find a solution, and they have failed. It is time that we put an end to this, move on from the chaos and failure, and begin to clean up the mess. It is time for Parliament to work together and agree on a plan B. If the Prime Minister is brave, she will help to facilitate this. If not, Parliament must send a clear message in the coming days. I hope that where the Government have failed, this House can and will succeed.

The Prime Minister: Once again, the right hon. Gentleman said that we still face the prospect of no deal. As I said earlier, the House has rejected no deal twice now and could very well continue to reject it, but the only way of actually putting that into practice is to support a deal. He also talks about reaching out. I have reached out to party leaders and other Members across the House, and my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union have held a number of meetings with Members across the House and with party leaders.

The right hon. Gentleman ended by saying that it is now time for the House to decide. The point is that, up to now, the House has not decided. [*Interruption.*] Yet again, Opposition Members say that they have not had a chance. The House has had many chances to table

[*The Prime Minister*]

amendments. The House has voted twice on the right hon. Gentleman's plans for the future and rejected them, it has voted to reject no deal and it has also voted to reject a second referendum. The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the Government would commit to abide by the indicative votes. As he accepted, I gave him advance notice of my statement and I then read that statement, in which I clearly said:

"I cannot commit the Government to delivering the outcome of any votes held by this House."

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): That's not good enough.

The Prime Minister: The shadow Foreign Secretary shouts, "That's not good enough." Let us just think about this for a moment. First, we do not know which options will be tabled. Secondly, we do not know which amendments will be selected. But there is another important point: no one would want to support an option that contradicted the manifesto on which they stood for election to this House. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be opening the debate this afternoon, and will refer to the processes of the House that will be involved.

The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition said that it was important that MPs were elected here to take responsibility and make decisions. But the MPs elected to the House at this time have a duty to respect the result of the referendum that took place in 2016. Attempts to stop the result of that referendum being put in place or to change the result of that referendum are not respecting the voters and they are not respecting our democracy.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the fact that a number of people had marched on the question of a second referendum. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The House is in a very agitated state, but we are at an early stage in the proceedings—calm.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that a march for a second referendum took place. It is, in fact, the right hon. Gentleman's policy, and I noticed that his deputy went on the march. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman normally jumped at any opportunity to go on a march, but he was not actually there on this occasion; I can only assume that he was involved but not present.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): What would the Prime Minister say to a leave voter who wants us to leave on 29 March and thinks that indicative votes are a waste of time because, as she rightly says, the options on offer have already been rejected once or twice in this Parliament?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that the options that appear to be on offer have already been rejected by this Parliament. I would have to point out, of course, that for reasons that I explained in my statement—in relation, particularly, to the Governments of parts of the United Kingdom—we have requested the extension to article 50, so the 29 March

date is no longer there. But I would say to a leave voter: we can guarantee Brexit and leaving on 22 May, as the Council conclusion suggests, by supporting the deal that has been put forward. That is the way to guarantee Brexit; anything else does not guarantee Brexit.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement.

We are in a crisis, but one of the Prime Minister's own making. Her ill-judged speech before she departed for Brussels concluded that everyone is to blame but herself, trying to put herself on the side of the people and blaming parliamentarians. It was Trumpesque. We do not need such raw populism at a time like this—it is truly flabbergasting. Will she now apologise for blaming parliamentarians in the way that she did?

The Prime Minister needs to be reminded: she is supposed to be leading a country. No one on these Opposition Benches thinks she can deliver. Her Back Benches do not think she can deliver. People right across the United Kingdom do not think she can deliver. Prime Minister, time is up. Today is about parliamentarians taking back control. People at home are watching, and they are ashamed of this Parliament, ashamed of this Government, ashamed of the embarrassment that British politics has become. Today, Parliament must move to find a consensus. We must come together and protect the interests of citizens across Scotland and all other parts of the United Kingdom. I say to Members: we still have a choice.

I want to ask the Prime Minister now, with all sincerity—will she respect the will of Parliament and reject no deal? While she is telling us that our votes do not count, Privy Counsellors are being given briefings by her Government, and those briefings are talking about catastrophe and the real risks that there are to the United Kingdom. It is the Prime Minister who is threatening the people of the United Kingdom with no deal, and a no-deal exit that this Parliament has already rejected. What is the point of us all sitting in this Chamber and voting in debates when the Prime Minister thinks she can ignore parliamentary sovereignty? What a disgrace—what an insult to this place; if our votes do not count, then frankly we may as well just go home.

If this Prime Minister is telling the people of Scotland that our votes did not count when we voted to remain, well, we know what the answer is: the day is coming when the people of Scotland will vote for independence and we will be an independent country in the European Union. So will the Prime Minister tell us, do our votes count? Are they binding on the Government or is this just a puppet show? If that is the case, this is the greatest assault on democracy inflicted by any Prime Minister. If Members of Parliament are prepared to tolerate that, then shame on them—shame on them. Scotland will not be dragged out of the European Union by this Prime Minister. From the very beginning of this process, Scotland has been ignored, and now we learn that Parliament will once again be ignored.

At the weekend, I was proud and privileged to take part in a historic march in London. I was proud to stand with the people, alongside Scotland's First Minister, and demand that the Government listen to the people. Let me tell the Prime Minister this: she said that no deal is the alternative; well, we on these Benches will move to

revoke, because Scottish parliamentarians have made sure that we have that power, and we will stop her driving us off a cliff edge. Over 1 million people marched to have the chance to vote again to stop this chaos. Prime Minister, why are you not listening? The Prime Minister must end this madness. Put it to the people—let us have a people's vote.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman put forward a number of proposals for the way forward in the speech that he has just given in response to my statement. There was one point at which he said Scotland would vote to become an independent country in the European Union. Of course, what was perfectly clear in the independence referendum in 2014, when Scotland rejected independence and decided to stay—

Ian Blackford: Gie it a rest!

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says, “Give it a rest!” He stands up here proclaiming the benefits of democracy and yet tells me to give it a rest when I point out that the people of Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. He talks about coming together. This House has a duty to deliver Brexit. That means, I believe, delivering a Brexit with a deal that enables that smooth and orderly exit. He asks whether his vote counts and votes in this House count. Of course votes in this House count, but so do the votes of 17.4 million people who voted to leave the European Union.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The statutory instrument for the extension of time was laid one hour ago. There is grave concern that there was no lawful UK authority for the decision on 22 March to extend the exit date. Did the Prime Minister seek the Attorney General's advice beforehand, as clearly required by both the ministerial code and the Cabinet manual, and will she publish that advice? Why did she not invoke the commencement order for section 1 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, repealing the European Communities Act 1972?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend talks about the decision to extend article 50. This House had supported an extension of article 50. Yes, the Council took a different decision in relation to the length of time that that extension could take place for, but the House was clear—people are saying to me, “Listen to the House and respect the House”—that an extension of article 50 should be sought, and an extension was agreed.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister has told the House that if her withdrawal agreement is not approved by this Friday, the extension we have been granted will last only until 12 April. If the Prime Minister currently does not intend to bring her deal back for another vote, she will then be faced with only two choices: doing nothing, in which case we will leave with no deal on 12 April, or applying for a further extension. Given the crisis that is facing our country, the public have a right to know which of those two options the Prime Minister intends to choose. Prime Minister, could you please tell us?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right that I said that, as things stand, I did not believe there was support for bringing back a meaningful vote, but I also indicated that I was continuing to talk to colleagues across this House. I would hope to be able to

bring back a vote in this House that enables us to guarantee Brexit, because the one way of guaranteeing Brexit is to abide by the decision that was taken last week and ensure that we leave on 22 May.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does the Prime Minister welcome the comments of the Taoiseach over the weekend that he believes that there are special arrangements that could be put in place to maintain an invisible border on the island of Ireland, even in the event that the UK leaves without a deal?

The Prime Minister: We have, as my right hon. Friend knows—she has been involved in some of these discussions—been looking at the alternative arrangements that could be put in place, and further work is required, but I would also draw her attention to, I believe, a release by the European Commission today, in which it makes clear that, in all circumstances, all EU laws would have to be abided by.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Those of us who were among the 1 million on Saturday naturally regret that both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were too busy to join us. Does she agree with the observation of her Chancellor that such a referendum is a “perfectly coherent proposition”?

The Prime Minister: Virtually every time the right hon. Gentleman stands up when I have made a statement or am opening a debate in the House on this subject, he asks me about a second referendum. My view about a second referendum is very simple. I was not on the march not because I was too busy, as he says, but because he and I hold a different opinion about a second referendum. I believe it is important that this House, rather than talking about and wanting to pass the decision back to the British people again, says to them, “We will abide by the instruction you gave us in the referendum in 2016.”

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): The cost to the British people and the amount of money that will be payable under the deal that the Prime Minister has put forward is between £34 billion and £39 billion. What do the Government estimate is the cost to the United Kingdom of no deal?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend asks an important question. We have published economic analysis that shows the impact of no deal. Over £4 billion is being spent by the Government on preparations for leaving the European Union with or without a deal. As I say, there is economic analysis that shows the impact of no deal over the coming months. My own view is that, over time, we would be able to address the issues that arose, but there would be an immediate impact on the economy.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister said that she is prepared to provide for indicative votes and to engage constructively with the process, but she has also many times—she appeared to again today—ruled out supporting a customs union. If a customs union is supported in indicative votes, is she ruling out the Government attempting to negotiate a customs union with the European Union?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady has asked me on a number of occasions about a customs union, and I have made my view on a customs union very clear. A number of alternative ways forward in relation to a deal have been suggested over time in this House, but there are a number of questions that Members need to ask themselves. When she talks about a customs union, what rules would she see us abiding by? Would it involve abiding by state aid rules? In some of the proposals, there is a real question whether free movement would continue to be abided by. I stood on a manifesto that made reference to a customs union because I and the Labour party both believed we should be able to have an independent trade policy. It continues to be my view that we should have an independent trade policy in the future.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): The European Commission said today that all preparations for no deal had been completed, and last week the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), made it clear in response to the urgent question that good progress had been made by the UK on preparations for no deal. So it is a bit surprising to hear from the Prime Minister that Northern Ireland is “unable” to “prepare properly” because it does not have devolved government. Which areas of Government activity present a problem, and when will they be resolved?

The Prime Minister: The Northern Ireland civil service does not have the powers to take the decisions that would be needed if the UK left the European Union with no deal. It is possible to address those issues, but had that not been done by 29 March, the question about the impact on Northern Ireland, where there is no devolved government, would be an important one. It is absolutely right that the Government took the view that it was not appropriate to allow no deal to go ahead at a time when the powers were not in place to ensure proper exercise of the decision making necessary in a no-deal situation.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): On that last point, the Prime Minister and the House have known for some considerable time that 29 March was the target date, so why have appropriate preparations not been made? Why do we need another two weeks? What will happen in another two weeks that could not have happened up to now? This is a fundamental lack of preparation, and the Government are entirely responsible for that if it is the case. This is an entirely new argument that we are hearing for the first time about why we need an extension.

The former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers)—who has great experience, having served for four years in Northern Ireland—has pointed out that Leo Varadkar has made it clear that, in terms of no deal, he is very confident that there will be no border checks. [*Interruption.*] The Prime Minister shakes her head, but that is what he said. Michel Barnier and Angela Merkel have said the same. The reality is that this backstop problem has been elevated. I would like the Prime Minister’s views on this: why does the EU insist on it when, in the case of no deal, there do not need to be any checks? Why did the Prime Minister ever agree to this backstop in the first place when it is the thing that bedevils her agreement?

The Prime Minister: Today is not the first time that the position of Governments about Northern Ireland in a no-deal situation has been raised. It was raised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the debate on no deal, which took place nearly two weeks ago. I simply say to the right hon. Gentleman that a number of statements are made and have been made by individuals about the situation in relation to the border in Northern Ireland. If we look at the detail of what the European Union has said, we see that it has made it clear that European Union law would need to be adhered to in any circumstance in which there was no deal. We ourselves have said, and the right hon. Gentleman is aware of this, that we would ensure that we were moving towards a period of time—because of the legal situation it could only be for a temporary period—of minimal checks with exceptions, but the legal position is different, given the necessity to be able to have certain checks taking place. The European Union has been clear that EU law would need to be applied in all of these circumstances.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Further to that point, is the Prime Minister suggesting that in order for Northern Ireland to be ready to leave with no deal, there would need to be some form of direct decision making by us in this House in the absence of a Stormont Government?

The Prime Minister: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. If there is no Stormont Government and if powers and ministerial direction, which are not currently available to the civil servants, are needed, that would require some form of direct application of powers from Westminster.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The Prime Minister appears to have ruled out bringing back her deal for an indefinite length of time, and yet we have only two weeks before we crash out without a deal. She has said that she will not necessarily take notice of this House’s indicative vote process, and she has also said that she will not continue as Prime Minister if we remain in the EU beyond 30 June. The situation seems to be pointing directly to a prime ministerial dash for no deal. Will she say that that is not what she wants and tell us when she is going to abandon her deal rather than keep postponing the vote on it?

The Prime Minister: I have always been clear that I want us to leave the European Union. My preference is for us to leave the European Union with a deal. But I have also always been clear—it is a very simple, logical fact—that it is not possible for hon. Members simply to say that they do not want no deal. If they are going to leave the European Union, we have to have a deal if we are not going to leave without a deal.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Given that the deal that is on offer now is exactly the same as the deal that was on offer a week ago, why does the Prime Minister think that you, Mr Speaker, would allow it to be voted upon in this Session?

The Prime Minister: I am very clear about the strictures that Mr Speaker gave when he made his statement last week, and were we to bring forward a further motion to this House, we would of course ensure that it met the requirements he made.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Sometimes it is hard to believe what one hears in this House these days, but we have it written in black and white that the Prime Minister said this afternoon that she cannot commit to delivering the outcome of any votes held by the House. Does she realise that that makes a mockery of parliamentary democracy? Will she reconsider, and commit to holding a binding vote to avoid a no-deal Brexit?

The Prime Minister: It is a very simple position—an indicative vote is exactly that: an indicative vote. Members of this House cannot expect the Government simply to give a blank cheque to any vote that came through. For example, the SNP position is that they would like to see the House voting to revoke article 50; the Government's position is that we should deliver on the referendum result of 2016 and deliver Brexit.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Prime Minister, you have told us from the Dispatch Box on 108 separate occasions that we would leave the EU on 29 March. You have told the House that the date is now 12 April, but you have not changed your mind about ruling out a second referendum, unlike your Chancellor, who on “Sophy Ridge on Sunday” yesterday, effectively opened the door to it. Have you said anything to the Chancellor about this, or has collective responsibility on your watch completely collapsed?

The Prime Minister: I think the Chancellor of the Exchequer made the point that this was one of the propositions. It is indeed one of the propositions that has been put forward. Members from across the House have referenced that already, but I assure my right hon. Friend that I have not changed my view about it. As I indicated earlier, I believe we should deliver on the result of the first referendum.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Prime Minister speaks of the frustration felt by MPs. Does she accept that it is born out of her intransigence, which is the greatest barrier to getting a deal? Following on from the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), if we do not get a deal through Parliament by this Friday, in 18 days—by 12 April—we will have to decide whether we want a longer extension or to crash out without a deal. Given that Parliament has voted twice already not to leave without a deal, will the Prime Minister confirm that, by 12 April, she will seek that longer extension and abide by Parliament's wishes?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is right about the result of the Council meeting that took place last week. If we can guarantee Brexit by agreeing a deal this week, we will leave on 22 May, and we have been clear about the commitment to facilitate seeing whether there is a majority in the House for anything. However, the Government cannot be expected simply to say that we will accept anything that comes through. We all stood on manifestos; we all have positions in relation to our duty to deliver on the referendum. I think that that is important and we should keep it in our minds.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): The Prime Minister has accepted that the House will have so-called indicative votes to try to find whether there is a majority for a way forward, but she has twice declined to commit

the Government to giving effect to a majority in the House, citing the fact that she stood on a manifesto, which she thinks should guide things. May I remind her that that manifesto appeared only halfway through the election campaign? I do not think that it was discussed in Cabinet. It was not circulated to the candidates, who were already fighting their campaigns, and nothing on Europe in that manifesto played any part in the general election. We are all being asked to show pragmatism and flexibility and to put the national interest first. May I ask my right hon. Friend to be prepared to bend from her commitment to the manifesto, apart from the one proposal that she dropped fairly promptly when it first appeared?

The Prime Minister: First, I do not accept the entire description that my right hon. and learned Friend set out. I say to him that, during the whole process of negotiation, there has been compromise. He was a respected and long-standing member of previous Governments. If he were standing at the Dispatch Box, prior to the possibility of indicative votes—and we will have to see; the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will give a further explanation of the Government's position later this afternoon, but if the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) passes, those indicative votes will take place—I do not think he would give a blank cheque. I think he is indicating his assent to what I am saying.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said once again that the European Union is not going to, under any circumstances, look again at the withdrawal agreement, so I agree with her that indicative votes are a nonsense, because, in the end, they are talking about the future relationship and not the withdrawal agreement. Why will she not start to prepare properly for what I do not call a “no deal”? It is not a no deal; it is a different type of deal that would take us out. [*Interruption.*] It is a World Trade Organisation deal. Why will she not continue to prepare for that, and to ensure that, in the end, what really matters is the people's vote, not what this Parliament says?

The Prime Minister: I think and hope I have expressed my belief that we should be delivering on the result of the 2016 referendum. We continue to prepare for no deal. Those preparations are being continued.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I have heard many colleagues on the Opposition Benches say that they oppose the deal not because they do not support the terms of the withdrawal agreement—in fact, many of them are at pains to say they do support the terms of the withdrawal agreement—but because they have problems with the political declaration. Has the Prime Minister considered providing the House with the opportunity to have votes on the terms of the withdrawal agreement and then on the political declaration, to enable us to come to a view on whether the terms of our departure are acceptable to a majority of the House?

The Prime Minister: Throughout the debates we have had, one of the concerns that many people across the House have raised relates to the political declaration and the fact that it was not legal text. They were concerned to, if you like, tie it down further, which is

[*The Prime Minister*]

what we did in our discussion with the European Union. I am sure my right hon. Friend has also seen the terms of the Council conclusions, but we have always worked to ensure that the political declaration could be firmed up—if one likes to describe it as such—to give greater confidence in that sort of future relationship.

Mr Speaker: It is very good indeed to see the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) back in his place and manifestly in rude health.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Pitching Parliament against the people undermines parliamentary democracy and feeds the far right. Does the Prime Minister regret her use of words last Wednesday?

The Prime Minister: First, may I echo Mr Speaker's comments and say how good it is to see the right hon. Gentleman back in his place?

I was trying to make a very simple point last week, which is that this is a moment of decision for Parliament. We gave the people the choice. The people gave their decision. Parliament needs to deliver on that decision. The time has come for Parliament to decide.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I very much agree with my right hon. Friend that this is the moment for Parliament to decide. While I would very happily vote for the withdrawal agreement and the future declaration for a third time, other colleagues will not. Will my right hon. Friend give us a bit more information about how the Government are going to enable the House to come to a solution for a plan B, so that she can go back to the EU and make sure that we deliver on what all of us in this House said we would do—what the main political parties said they would do—and deliver Brexit with a deal?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. The opportunity will come for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in the debate that follows this statement, to set out in a little more detail how the Government see the processes going forward over the next few days. It is of course the case that the European Union Council has made it clear that the withdrawal agreement remains closed and will not be reopened. It is against that background that Parliament would look at any options it brought forward.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): I can say on behalf of a lot of right hon. and hon. Members that I was proud to march with the People's Vote—the 1 million people from all over the United Kingdom, of all backgrounds and all generations, who came to London on a precious Saturday because they want this matter to go back to the people. The people of this country are crying out for leadership and businesses are crying out for certainty, but in this Prime Minister they are not getting either of those things. She has been asked twice now by hon. and right hon. Members on this side of the House: come 12 April, if her withdrawal agreement has not been passed by this House, what is her plan B? She still has not told us. Is it going to be no deal or a lengthy extension? Prime Minister, just answer the question.

The Prime Minister: I point out to the right hon. Lady that she talks about the response of business, and business was very clear that it wanted the House to support the deal—[*Interruption.*] Yes, business was very clear that it wanted the House to support the deal. When we get to the point—[*Interruption.*] Some right hon. and hon. Members are saying to me, “The Government should say now what you will do on 11 April”. Others are saying, “Listen to the House and do whatever the House says on 11 April.” These two are not entirely compatible.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Has the Prime Minister noted the fourth section of the European Council conclusions, which states:

“Any unilateral commitment, statement or other act should be compatible with the letter and the spirit of the Withdrawal Agreement”?

In noting the words “any” and “should” and the tense of this conclusion, does the Prime Minister conclude with me that it would be legally enforceable and allowable for the United Kingdom to give further interpretation on a unilateral declaration to reassure colleagues on our ability to exit the backstop?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that conclusion. There are certain unilateral commitments that we have made—unilateral commitments in relation to Northern Ireland. We have indicated that we are prepared to make those unilateral commitments. He has raised before the question of the application of international law, and we are looking again at how we can reflect that properly in any papers that are brought forward.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Prime Minister's deal has been rejected twice and no deal has been rejected twice by this Parliament, yet she stands here today threatening that we leave with no deal on 12 April if her deal is not approved this week, and saying that she will whip her colleagues tonight to vote against the very process for which the EU has granted that extension. We are now in the levels of the theatre of the absurd. A million people stood in Parliament Square demanding their right to be heard. If MPs can have three votes in three months, why can the people not have two votes in three years?

The Prime Minister: There are two ways in which the extension has been granted by the European Union Council. The first, of course, is for us to exit on 22 May with a deal, if this House were to agree a deal this week. The second is to provide for a possibility of the United Kingdom going forward to the European Union with some plan to take forward if the deal has not been agreed. I indicated in my statement why the Government will be whipping against the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). There are elements about this issue of Brexit, but there are also elements about the precedent that that sets for the future—for the relationship between this House and the Executive.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I have voted for the withdrawal agreement before and I will willingly back the Prime Minister and vote for it again, but I owe it to my constituents, if that should not pass, to have the opportunity to debate in full the alternatives.

The Prime Minister urges us against the so-called Letwin proposal tonight, but says that the Government will make time for alternatives to be considered. Can I press her again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) did, to say if that is to be the case, when?

The Prime Minister: I hope my hon. Friend will have a little more patience, because the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will soon set out more detail on this, but we stand by the commitment he gave in the House: if we do not get a deal through, the Government will, in the two weeks after the EU Council, facilitate that opportunity for people to consider other options.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): The Prime Minister accused MPs of wasting time and playing games. Can I remind her that it was not MPs who made her sign article 50 before she was ready for the negotiations, that it was not MPs who made her call a general election in the middle of the article 50 process, that it was not MPs who made her burn through three Brexit Secretaries in two years, and that it was not MPs who made her set red lines that could never pass this House? She has spoken consistently about compromise, but what she has really meant is capitulation. If she is now really in the mood for compromise, can I urge her to meet with those of us truly trying to find a compromise that can work for her and this place?

The Prime Minister: As I have said in the House before, I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and other Members—[*Interruption.*] I have been meeting them. As the Leader of the Opposition indicated, I met him earlier this afternoon. I also remind the hon. Gentleman—[*Interruption.*] I have indicated that I am happy to meet Members to discuss these issues, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that the House voted to trigger article 50 and for the general election.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Can the Prime Minister confirm that it is not the Government's intention to hold European parliamentary elections? My constituents in Redditch, who voted to leave the EU nearly three years ago, would find that completely unacceptable.

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. People would ask what on earth we were doing if, having voted to leave the EU nearly three years ago, they then found themselves electing Members to the European Parliament. The way to ensure that we do not have to do that, however, is to ensure that we leave the EU by 22 May, and that is only possible if a deal is agreed this week.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Like many other Members, I was proud to walk alongside the more than 1 million people on the streets on Saturday. At one point, I walked alongside two youngsters and their family carrying a banner that said: "Votes: PM—three; people—one". This is a fundamental point. Can the Prime Minister explain to the millions of young people up and down the country why she gets to have multiple votes on a deal that has been rejected by the House and is not supported by the country, but the people do not get a chance to say whether they want to go ahead with a deal that the House can agree on?

The Prime Minister: The House votes many times on many different issues. It voted on whether to ask the people of this country whether we should leave the EU. The people made that decision. At the time, the Government said they would abide by it—that it was not an advisory decision but effectively an instruction to the House—and that it was the duty of the House to abide by it. That is what we should do.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Does the Prime Minister understand that, by taking no deal off the table at the behest of this Remainer Parliament, she has just put the final torpedo into her own deal and any real prospect of Brexit, and that her statement will represent the most shameful surrender by a British leader since Singapore in 1942?

The Prime Minister: I said in my statement that the House had voted twice to reject no deal and may very well continue to vote to reject no deal and attempt to ensure that no deal cannot take place. The SNP has already indicated that it will be moving a vote to revoke article 50, which would reverse the referendum result. I might point out to my right hon. Friend that Opposition Members have been complaining that I have refused in my answers to take no deal off the table. The reality is that the House has shown its intention to do everything it can to take no deal off the table. If we are to deliver Brexit, we all need to recognise that situation.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Prime Minister, the current difficulty that you face hangs around the withdrawal agreement and the way in which Northern Ireland has been pulled into these discussions. This weekend the Irish Government made it clear that the whole premise of the withdrawal agreement is based on a foundation of sand. There will be no checks along the Irish border; therefore there will be no threat to peace in Northern Ireland; therefore there will be no disruption to the island of Ireland. Today we are told that this is because Northern Ireland is not prepared, yet all the preparations that are made by central Government apply to Northern Ireland. When are you going to stop using Northern Ireland as an excuse, and do you realise that the importance of this agreement to delivering Brexit, and also to the Union of the United Kingdom, is such that we will not be used in any scare tactics to push this through?

The Prime Minister: What I have genuinely been trying to achieve through everything that I have been doing is ensuring that we respect the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland, and that we respect Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. It is the case, as I have said, that the remarks about the border have been made—I think I am right in saying—by the Taoiseach and others previously, and have then been contradicted by the European Commission in terms of what might be necessary. I merely say that the situation in relation to the European Union's proposal is that it has been very clear about EU laws and the necessity of those laws being applied.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have no wish to distract Members from the importance of these matters, but there has been quite a lot of naughty behaviour this afternoon, including the behaviour of the right hon. Members for

[Mr Speaker]

East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) in repeatedly using the word “you”, which is unparliamentary. I am looking to a custodian of our fine traditions of parliamentary courtesy, and I need look no further than Victoria Prentis.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Well, Mr Speaker, I do not know about you—[Laughter]—but I think that the 2017 Conservative manifesto is possibly not bedtime reading in many households, so let me remind the House of it briefly.

“We want to agree a deep and special partnership with the European Union. This partnership will benefit both the European Union and the United Kingdom: while we are leaving the European Union, we are not leaving Europe, and we want to remain committed partners and allies to our friends”.

Does the Prime Minister think that any of the indicative votes that we may be able to cast on Wednesday—aside from the meaningful vote on the withdrawal agreement—will be covered by that manifesto? If so, will she whip us to vote in any particular way?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is tempting me to indicate what we might do. We do not know what the options are. We do not know which options will be chosen, or the sequence in which they will be chosen. However, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that we stood on a particular manifesto. We stood on a manifesto to honour the result of the referendum, and the Labour party stood on a manifesto to honour the result of the referendum. I think that there is a way to honour the result of the referendum, and it is a pity that we have not been able to agree that.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister talks of frustration with Parliament. She has also said today, on a number of occasions, that today is decision time. But given that she is not putting her deal to another vote, and she is preventing the House from having indicative votes, will she advise us on how we are to express our decision?

The Prime Minister: Actually, what I said was that “as things stand”, I was not bringing back the meaningful vote, but

“I continue to have discussions with colleagues across the House to build support, so that we can bring the vote forward this week and guarantee Brexit.”

The process that will take place in the absence of a meaningful vote and in the absence of agreeing the deal this week will be referred to by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the debate that will take place after this statement, and, of course, there is the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), which gives an indication and a timetable that would operate were that amendment to be passed. I will be whipping against the amendment, for the reasons that I set out earlier.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): If we go to indicative votes and we look at other options, the issue of free movement is likely to feature. I strongly agree with the Prime Minister that the public want us to end free movement, but must we not recognise that immigration into this country from outside the EU is now running at a 15-year high of 261,000? That is more than the

population of Ipswich and Colchester combined. Should we not therefore have some candour and say to the public that if we end free movement immigration is unlikely to fall but will simply come from much further afield?

The Prime Minister: Over time, the Government have taken a number of actions to ensure that we can deal with introducing more control into our immigration system. One of the advantages of ending free movement is that we can put an entirely new immigration system in place that enables it to be skills-based rather than based on the country somebody comes from. But I also believe that for many people what underpinned their vote and decision to leave the EU was a desire to see free movement end and that is why it is absolutely right that the proposals the Government have put forward would indeed do that.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The fact that the Prime Minister had to ask EU leaders for an article 50 extension last week was a highly predictable outcome from an inflexible Prime Minister who has consistently sought to sideline Parliament and the country over the last two years. So further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), if through indicative votes this House votes, for example, in favour of a Norway-based deal or a customs union, will the Prime Minister shift her red lines in line with the will of this House, or will we come out of this process and her “constructive” engagement to find that nothing has changed?

The Prime Minister: In my statement, I set out the Government’s position in relation to the indicative votes and that remains the Government’s position.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), does the Prime Minister agree that there is perhaps a majority across this House for the withdrawal agreement on its own, given that there needs to be a bit more work on the terms of the backstop, and that the political declaration is very close to the manifestos of both the Conservative and the Labour parties in 2017 and, again, with a bit more work there should be a majority, with good will across this House, for the agreement?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that there are those across this House who obviously have continuing concerns with the withdrawal agreement, but there are many across the House who do not have those concerns in relation to the withdrawal agreement but who do have concerns about the certainty of the future in the political declaration. The political declaration provides for a spectrum of options in relation to our trading relationship. We certainly stood on a manifesto commitment to have that independent trade policy. We want to see that delivered in the agreement we have with the EU, but others in this House also stood on a basis of having that independent trade policy, and moving into a permanent customs union does not deliver on that independent trade policy.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Ind): May I press the Prime Minister a little further on this notion that she may scuttle any outcome of indicative votes

because perhaps they are not negotiable with the EU? She knows, because the Chancellor told her so yesterday, that a confirmatory referendum—a people's vote—is a perfectly viable proposition. I want to know, and I do not wish to interrupt her while she is on her phone, but if she wouldn't mind—*[Interruption.]* Well, she was on the phone, Mr Speaker. I would like her to answer specifically: if this House agreed a confirmatory referendum, would she also not abide by that particular outcome? Yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman; just a bit of female multitasking was trying to take place there. In terms of the concept of the confirmatory vote, that is often attached not just to being a confirmatory vote but to having remain on the ballot paper, so that it is effectively a second referendum on whether or not we should leave the EU. As I indicated earlier, I believe we should be leaving the EU because that is what people voted for in the first referendum.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): We must leave the EU, but to do so without a deal would decimate agriculture in North Dorset, which is why I have supported the Prime Minister's deal on both occasions and will do so again whenever she asks me to. She has indicated that the statutory instrument to confirm the extension of the withdrawal period has been laid before the House. Can she advise me when it will be debated and voted upon?

The Prime Minister: It will be debated and voted upon later this week. I would be happy to inform my hon. Friend outside this statement when I have checked which day it is, but it will be one day later this week.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Prime Minister said in her statement that she could not commit the Government to delivering the outcome of any votes in this House. So, if her deal again fails to get through and if we hold indicative votes and a majority of MPs vote for an alternative to her deal, is she really saying that she is going to ignore the democratic will of this House? Would she prefer to crash out without a deal rather than respect the will of the House?

The Prime Minister: First, if the hon. Lady will permit me, I have just checked and I can say that the statutory instrument will be debated on Wednesday. In answer to her question, the House has passed motions saying that it does not want no deal, and it may very well pass more motions saying that, but if it is going to deliver on ensuring that we do not have no deal, it will have to agree a deal. That is very simple; it is not enough simply to say that the House does not want no deal.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): The Prime Minister inadvertently failed to answer the second part of the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). Will she please tell us when the commencement order will be made under the provisions of section 25(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018? As she will know, this is a matter of particular importance.

The Prime Minister: I apologise for not answering my hon. Friend the Member for Stone's question. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) will permit me, I will confirm that point and come back to them both when I am able to do so.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): In the light of the political crisis that the Prime Minister faces, does she think it might be better if the Cabinet met in public, given that all the details are being diligently leaked to the media on every single occasion? Does that not suggest that the Cabinet is also in deadlock and that the only ways to break the impasse are either a second referendum or a general election?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has heard my answers to the question on a second referendum on many occasions, and I continue to believe that it is not in the best interests of this House. It is in the best interests of the House to agree for us to deliver on Brexit, to do it in a smooth and orderly way and not to go down the route of either a second referendum or a general election.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I voted for the withdrawal agreement twice before, and I would do so again, but I welcome my right hon. Friend's move towards indicative votes, because I think that they will be helpful. Can she confirm that there will be a full range of workable options, including the European Free Trade Association, so that we can debate and decide on them in this House?

The Prime Minister: The purpose of any such votes is to determine the views of this House, and I think it is appropriate for this House to bring the options forward that it wishes to be debated.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): It is time we recognised that, beyond those in this place and outside who are polarised, the overwhelming number of Members across the House and members of the British public want us to come to some sort of compromise and to move on and move forward. For some people, no deal will ever be good enough: those who want to crash out with no deal and those who want to overturn the referendum. It has already been said that, in many parts, there is agreement with the withdrawal agreement but concerns about the future relationship in regard to trade and security. Can the Prime Minister assure the House today that, if we agree to the withdrawal agreement—I have voted for it once because I think it is the right thing for my constituents and the country to move on—in the next stage, when we get into the detailed discussions on trade and other matters, this House will be able to explore those options in detail, debate them and vote on them?

The Prime Minister: First, I agree with the sentiment expressed by the right hon. Lady that most members of the public want to see this situation resolved and want us to be able to move on. In relation to the future relationship, there are differences of opinion around the House about the nature of the future trade relationship, but I have already indicated that there will be greater involvement for Members in the next stage of the negotiations than there was in the first stage.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I have not yet met a constituent who envies the Prime Minister's task of trying to deliver our leaving the EU responsibly. However, quite apart from the concerns of manufacturing and farming and the clear view of this House, does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the absence of a political

[Richard Graham]

agreement between the parties of Northern Ireland to govern that country, it would be irresponsible for any Government to push ahead with no deal? If she does agree, is that absolutely clear to all Members of this House, especially those on the Government Benches, so that we can focus on the advantages of her proposals?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is about the responsibility to ensure that we do have appropriate governance in a no-deal situation, where significant decisions would need to be made, and it is entirely right and proper that the Government have taken the position that they have in relation to that matter.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The Prime Minister has told this House on numerous occasions that she is committed to delivering on the will of the people as it was expressed almost three years ago. However, given that 1 million people took to the streets at the weekend, that more than 5 million have signed a petition, and that anyone who has ever sat on these Benches knows that the will of the British people can change, does the Prime Minister not agree the time has come to check whether the will of the people has in fact changed and whether they want something different from what they wanted two and a half years ago?

The Prime Minister: I have now answered that question on a number of occasions, so I refer the hon. Lady to the answers I gave earlier.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): If the Prime Minister's deal is not to come back before the House, it is vital that this House has the opportunity to consider what it can agree on a cross-party basis. The Prime Minister kindly indicated that parliamentary time will be given over for that process but, notwithstanding that we will be getting a statement from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, will she as Prime Minister indicate by when those votes will take place?

The Prime Minister: Although I have indicated that we would whip against the amendment from my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), if it were to pass it would lead to some votes taking place on Wednesday. The commitment that the Government have made is that there would be opportunities over this week and next week. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster indicated that we would facilitate the opportunity for the House to make those decisions in the two weeks following last week's European Council.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): As someone who is not a member of the DUP or the ERG or from a leave-voting seat, I thank the Prime Minister for the "Dear colleague" letter she sent me, which includes the offer of a meeting. When she came to Ealing Central and Acton in 2017, my majority was 200 and she had hopes of taking the constituency back. Today, in that same seat, more people have signed a petition to rescind article 50—never mind supporting a people's vote—than voted Conservative in that same election. If she is serious, will she meet me to thrash out

a way forward so that London is not lost forever? If not, it will seem that she just listens to the same old voices all the time.

The Prime Minister: As I indicated in answer to an earlier question, I have been meeting Members from across the House and am very happy to do so to discuss such matters.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Having spent time in my constituency over the weekend speaking to constituents, I need to tell the Prime Minister that many of them took her at her word when she said that we would be leaving the EU at the end of March and now feel disappointed, disillusioned and even betrayed that that is not happening. Will she reassure my constituents that she is absolutely determined to do everything in her power to ensure that we leave the EU as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I regret not being able to deliver Brexit on 29 March. I had genuinely wanted to be able to do that. I can confirm that it is important that we do deliver Brexit and that we deliver on the vote that people took. I want to see that. Obviously, if we are going to do that with a withdrawal agreement that has been put into legislation, that takes time, which is why the extension to 22 May was agreed at the European Council. I want to ensure that we do leave and that we do deliver on the wishes of the people.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has yet to explain why she expects MPs to change their mind after two weeks but does not expect the people of this country to change their mind after three years. Can she explain that to the House?

The Prime Minister: Members have been expressing their views in a whole variety of ways, and they will continue to do so over the coming weeks. I indicated this to Members earlier, so they will not be surprised by my position: I think it is important that we deliver on the vote that took place in 2016. If a second referendum took place and came to a different decision, presumably some Members would say that that decision should be held to, regardless of whether people subsequently said they had changed their mind. Actually, many people would ask why we have failed to do what the British people asked us to do.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I would like to be able to support the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, but I continue to have concerns about the backstop and our lack of control of it should it kick in. When the Prime Minister brings it back for a third vote, I very much hope there will be enough changes for me to be able to support it.

In the meantime, will the Prime Minister confirm that she will indeed table the commencement order so that we can, if we need to, have 12 April as a no-deal departure date? If we do not replace 29 March, we will have no pressure point with which to encourage colleagues to support the withdrawal agreement when it comes back.

The Prime Minister: As I have said in response to earlier questions from hon. and right hon. Friends, I will come back to my hon. Friend on this specific point about the commencement order.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Would the Prime Minister think it constructive were we able to secure a single majority view from the indicative votes process, or would she prefer further indecision?

The Prime Minister: I indicated earlier that the Government are not giving a blank cheque to the indicative votes process, which is important. It is perfectly possible that the House might come to a decision, to contradictory decisions or to no decision at all. We will obviously have to engage constructively with whatever comes out of those votes.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I share the Prime Minister's scepticism about the indicative votes procedure. Indeed, I would go further and say it is a complete waste of time. I am sure some who propose it are genuine in their desire to find a way through but, in actual fact, I think the majority want to thwart the result of the referendum.

I was out in my constituency over the weekend and, as the Prime Minister knows, it is a 70% Brexit-supporting area. Like me most of my constituents are prepared to back her deal when I explain it, imperfect though it is, but fear that there may yet be further concessions. Can she give an absolute assurance that she and the whole Government will not agree to anything that further delays Brexit beyond a few weeks?

The Prime Minister: I want to be able to deliver Brexit, and to do it within the extension we have been given to 22 May. Any further extension would require us to stand in European parliamentary elections. As I said earlier, I think people would ask what on earth we were doing if, having voted nearly three years ago to leave the European Union, they were then asked to elect Members to the European Parliament. I think they would say that we were failing to deliver on their vote, and I believe we have a duty to do that.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I genuinely believe that people have the right to compare any Brexit deal with the promises that were made in 2016. It is their right to want the final say in this process. I know how much work the Prime Minister is doing to get her deal across the line and, in the spirit of compromise, I would help to facilitate the passage of her deal, indeed any deal, so long as it goes back to the British people. May I ask her to meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) to discuss the compromise we think is the way out of this? Whatever the result of that ballot, we will not bring this country together until we hold it.

The Prime Minister: I say to the hon. Gentleman, as I have indicated to the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and others, that I am happy to meet Members of the House to discuss these matters. I know that the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has already met him and talked about this issue. I continue to have the reservations and concerns I have expressed previously in relation to these matters of a confirmatory vote, but, as I have said, I am happy to meet hon. Members.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Almost three years ago, every household in my constituency, like the rest of the country, was sent a leaflet from the Government, paid for by the taxpayer, advocating that we remain

and, crucially, saying that the result would be honoured. Three years on, following a general election in which 589 Members of Parliament were elected on a promise to deliver Brexit and with the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 now law, is it not within the Prime Minister's power to now deliver Brexit? The message that I clearly get from my constituents is that they want that now achieved.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding the House that that Government leaflet did indeed say that we would abide by the result of the referendum and that some 80% of Members of this House were elected on the basis that they would honour the result of the referendum. I think that is absolutely what we should be doing. The point I was making earlier in relation to a number of matters is that of course this House has already indicated ways in which it does not want to see Brexit being delivered—by voting against no deal—and may continue to do so. We could very well see the House trying to ensure that that solution is not delivered. I am very clear that we need to deliver Brexit—we need to deliver it because we promised people we would.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Why is the Prime Minister incapable of accepting the principle that democracy is a process, not a single, one-off event? For nearly three years, opinion poll after opinion poll has shown that people do want to have a final say on whatever deal comes out of this place. Before she answers by saying that that might lead to a third or a fourth referendum, let me say that she knows perfectly well that the beauty of the Kyle-Wilson amendment is that whatever the result of going back to the people on the deal that comes out of this place, it will go straight into law, so that it will be an end of it. So why will she not accept that?

The Prime Minister: I have answered this question on a number of occasions.

Caroline Lucas: You haven't.

The Prime Minister: I have answered it on a number of occasions. I think that when I met the hon. Lady she indicated that she would want to see remain on the ballot paper as well as the deal. She is not asking for confirmation of the deal in relation to leaving the European Union; she is questioning people, by going back and saying, "We asked you the question and you gave us an answer, but actually we are not sure that is the right one. Have another go."

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If decisions and powers have to be taken here in order to remedy the current unreadiness of Northern Ireland, is there a plan to deal with that in good time for 12 April?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I think I might surprise the Prime Minister by saying that there is something I welcome in her statement. She said in her statement that

"unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen."

So can she confirm that if this House continues, as it has so far, to vote against no deal, she will not seek to take us out of the European Union on 12 April without a deal?

The Prime Minister: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that if we are not going to leave the European Union without a deal, we clearly need to have a deal that enables us to leave the European Union. It is very simple. I have made the point on a number of occasions and I will continue to make it.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I gently remind the Prime Minister that this House has expressed a view in law: to leave on 29 March, with or without a deal. Given the constant assurances we have had about no-deal preparations, including in answer to my urgent question last week, may I urge her now to face down this remain-dominated Westminster bubble and support leaving on no-deal, World Trade Organisation terms, in order to honour not just the referendum result and the triggering of article 50 but our own manifesto?

The Prime Minister: I do want to deliver Brexit; I do want to make sure that we leave. I continue to believe that leaving with a deal is the best route for the United Kingdom. We are continuing with the no-deal preparations. My hon. Friend will be aware of the Council conclusions in relation to the extensions. I continue to believe that if it is possible to do so, we should leave on 22 May, and that is the way to guarantee Brexit.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): Does the Prime Minister realise that when she so flippantly dismisses calls for a confirmatory public vote or second referendum, she is—just like that—dismissing the million-odd people who marched on Saturday and the 5.5 million and rising who have signed the petition to revoke article 50? She says it would undermine democracy, but does she realise that democracy is not indefinitely owned by the people who voted that day in the referendum? It is not owned by the Government, it is certainly not owned by the Conservative party, and it is most definitely no longer owned by the Prime Minister. Our country's future is owned by the people. Does she not realise that it is no longer her decision to make? It is now Parliament's turn—it is our turn—and following that, this decision absolutely must go back to the British people.

The Prime Minister: I remind the hon. Lady that Parliament has already had a vote on a second referendum, and in that vote Parliament rejected the concept of a second referendum.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): For two years we have heard the opinions of MPs in this place, of whom the majority sadly do not want to leave the EU or want our leaving watered down to the extent that in fact we really have not left. That is the problem that the Prime Minister is dealing with. Prime Minister, what about the people of this country who voted overwhelmingly to leave—L-E-A-V-E—the EU? Can she assure me that that is what we will do—that if it takes till 12 April, so be it, but if a deal cannot be agreed, we will leave the EU, as we promised the people of this country, on that date?

The Prime Minister: I want to deliver on the vote of those 17.4 million people to leave the European Union. I continue to believe that it is better to do so with a deal. We have the extension to 22 May. We can guarantee Brexit by agreeing a deal and leaving on 22 May.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister have a plan B, and if so, what is it?

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the hon. Gentleman, and to many other Members of this House, that on the one hand people are asking me to listen to the House of Commons and to abide by its decision, but on the other hand they are asking me to have a plan B, which could very well be different from that decision of the House of Commons. You cannot have it both ways.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am not recommending this to the Prime Minister, but has she got so fed up with this House of Commons and the way it is behaving that she just wants to pop over to Brussels and sign the withdrawal agreement anyway?

The Prime Minister: Being an experienced Member of this House, my hon. Friend will know that in order to ratify the deal we need to pass legislation through this House, so it is not quite as simple as he might like to think it would be.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Does not everything the Prime Minister has said today indicate that she still believes that no deal is better than any deal other than her own? Does she understand that this House will not permit her to allow this country to crash over the edge into a no deal? Why does not she just state that clearly so that we can get on with the indicative votes?

The Prime Minister: I have dealt with the issue of indicative votes, and I have said that no deal is better than a bad deal. I happen to continue to believe that we negotiated a good deal with the European Union. I repeat to the hon. Gentleman the point I have made to others: it is all very well the House wanting to say that it does not want to leave with no deal, but the House then has to agree something to put in its place.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The Prime Minister refuses to support a people's vote, and she also refuses to support a second referendum on Scottish independence, despite the fact that there has been a fundamental material change in circumstances. If she is so sure of her position, why is she scared of trusting the people and putting it to a democratic vote?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady believes in trusting the people, she should trust the result of the 2014 Scottish referendum.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I implore the Prime Minister not to believe that she can run down the clock to the extent that she puts her deal back to the Commons with days to go and think that Members across the House will vote differently. If she takes it to the wire and makes it a choice between her deal or no deal, she will usher in a period of economic chaos and political damage that will give succour to the extreme fringes of our politics on the left and the right.

The Prime Minister: I want us to be able to leave the European Union in an orderly way. I want us to recognise the vote, to deliver on that Brexit and to do it in an orderly way, which, as I have said before, protects not only our Union, but jobs and livelihoods for people and our security. That is what I will continue to work for.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In a previous question to the Prime Minister, I stated clearly that Northern Ireland would never be the sacrifice for the withdrawal agreement. I felt the sacrifice then, as I feel it now, and I refuse to play that role. Does she understand our determination to be treated as an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? The failure to deliver the legally binding assurances and the time-limited backstop continues to be the stumbling block and obstacle and we must not—and we will not, Prime Minister—be treated differently from the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: We have, of course, been working with the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to look at the ways in which we can ensure that there is that commitment to the people of Northern Ireland that there will not be that different treatment. We were very clear with the European Union on the need to have a UK-wide customs territory in the backstop, not Northern Ireland-only customs territory. We continue to maintain our commitment to ensure that Northern Ireland is treated as an integral part of the United Kingdom.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Prime Minister may recall that, just a little over a week ago, I spoke to her at the door of this Chamber and begged her to dial down the hate not only because of the incessant abuse and threats that I receive, but for the millions of people in our country who are fearful. She responded on Wednesday evening with a despicable statement that, frankly, many of us felt put more of us and more of the public at risk. Being Prime Minister is a huge privilege, but with that privilege comes responsibility. Will she tell me today how she will use her responsibility to dial down the hatred?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady and I did indeed have a very serious conversation just outside this Chamber just over a week ago. As I said in my statement, I was expressing my frustration. Others have their frustrations—*[Interruption.]* Everybody has their frustration in relation to this issue. I do not want to see anybody—*[Interruption.]* I genuinely do not. She may recall that, following our conversation, I took action to ensure that some of the things that she had said to me were properly looked into.

Paula Sherriff *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: I did indeed do that. I want to see the people of this country feeling that this Parliament has been able to deliver for them—that is important for us—and that is what we will do. I continue to believe that, as we carry this debate forward, we should indeed take care with the language that we use, and I will take care with the language that I use.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Prime Minister, I am a former Member of the European Parliament. I was a proud Member of that Parliament. I am ashamed of the way that our Parliament has been behaving towards the European Parliament and the whole European community. If any kind of deal goes ahead and we come out of the EU, my constituency will be poorer. The people there know that. One of my constituents has just sent me a message saying that the Prime Minister is

doing deals with all kinds of people. “Why do you not ask her,” they said, “for the money that we need in our area and that we have been deprived of? We just want to clear up 126 acres of contaminated land. It will cost £12 million.” Is the deal still open?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady will be aware that we have made some extra funding commitments for places across the country. We have also indicated our recognition that funds have been available from the European Union for different parts of the country, and our shared prosperity fund will be available to different parts of the country to deal with their needs and the various issues that they face.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Following on from the question asked by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), in the past week the Prime Minister has shown that there is not a word too harsh that she will not say it, that there is not a dog whistle too shrill that she will not blow it and that she is prepared to take the UK to the brink of catastrophe to get her own way. When she reflects on the past seven days, does she do so with a sense of pride or with a deep sense of regret and shame?

The Prime Minister: What I want to ensure—what I am working for and what I hope that we will be able to achieve in this House—is that we deliver Brexit, and that we do so in a way that enables us to protect our Union, jobs and livelihoods, and our security. That should be the aim of everybody across the House, and I hope that everybody will be able to come together to deliver that.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Since October, there has been extensive no-deal planning in the United Kingdom and the European Union. This has been acknowledged not only by those in the UK and the EU, but also by the Governor of the Bank of England. I therefore simply say to the Prime Minister: have faith in our officials. Let us try to get a deal by all means, but, if we cannot, let us not be frightened of no deal. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a quite a lot of noise on the Opposition Benches. I assumed that the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) had been present throughout the statement.

Michael Fabricant: Yes.

Mr Speaker: In that case, the hon. Gentleman’s question is perfectly orderly.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that the no-deal preparations have been, and are continuing to be, put in place. He expressed a wish for us to leave with a deal, and I want us to leave with a deal. The point that I made in my statement is that this House has already shown on a number of occasions that it wants to try to ensure that we do not leave without a deal. The best route is to leave with a deal, and I think my hon. Friend indicated that he agreed with that position.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Today, I went to an excellent cross-party briefing organised by the Cabinet Office on the subject of no deal—something that I would recommend that those who advocate no

[Tom Brake]

deal attend. It set out the extensive damage that no deal would do to the United Kingdom, so will the Prime Minister finally allow this House to pass a binding motion that rules out no deal?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the House has already passed, I think, two motions saying that it does not want to leave without a deal, and it will have further opportunities to look at the options that lie ahead. The right hon. Gentleman talks about a binding motion to ensure that we do not leave without a deal, but if we are going to leave—which the right hon. Gentleman does not want to do, but I believe we should be doing because that is what people voted for—and if we are not going to leave without a deal, we need to leave with a deal and we need to agree the deal that we can leave with.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Does not this statement show the completely incoherent approach from the Prime Minister? She has just answered a question from the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) regarding no deal, saying that the only way to prevent no deal is to back a deal, yet her statement from the Dispatch Box said:

“Unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen.”

So what did she mean by that?

The Prime Minister: That is a statement that I have made not just today, but previously. I have been very clear that this House may very well try to ensure that we do not leave without a deal, but that the question to Members—if they wish to do that—is, what do they then want to do? Do they want to leave with a deal, or do some Members of this House not want to leave at all? We need to leave.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Ind): This is a parliamentary democracy and it is quite clear that this Parliament will not approve the Prime Minister's deal. If, through an indicative vote process, a majority forms behind an alternative way forward and she does not then implement it, will not any remaining shred of authority or credibility she has with our EU partners completely disappear? How on earth could she remain in office in those circumstances?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman heard the response I gave earlier in relation to the Government's position on indicative votes. We will engage constructively with those votes. It is possible that those votes will decide contradictory things; it is possible that they will not decide anything at all. We will engage constructively.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I do not know who advises the Prime Minister, but she says she will engage in this constructively, yet she is whipping against the idea of having it and she will not make any of it binding. Just as an observer, that does not seem very constructive to me at all. But what did seem constructive was all the meetings that she had over the weekend and the people—sorry, men—that she invited to those meetings. What comes out this morning shows without any doubt to anyone, if anyone even had any left, that this is just some psychodrama in the Tory party. Every time I think that she does actually have a

sense of duty, she totally disappoints me. This is about whether the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) can become the Prime Minister, and it is writ for all to see. This has got to end. So the question I ask the Prime Minister is: if we have indicative votes and we come up with a new way for the political declaration, how can she guarantee that any of that will happen, because it will not be up to her?

The Prime Minister: We are working to find a way to ensure that we can leave in a smooth and orderly way and we can deliver Brexit for the British people. I think that that delivery of Brexit is what should be at the forefront of all our minds.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I start by paying tribute to the bravery of my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) and the many other hon. Members who have suffered lots of attacks over the past few months? In her statement, the Prime Minister said about what she said on Wednesday:

“I expressed my frustration with our collective failure to take a decision”.

I do not think that it is actually correct—it was an attack on Members of Parliament doing their job scrutinising the Government at a time when tensions in the country are already heightened and MPs are accused of being traitors. In my constituency, the majority of people who have asked me about this do not want me to vote for the Prime Minister's deal. So will she now do the right thing and apologise to Members of Parliament for what she said on Wednesday evening?

The Prime Minister: It was never my intention that what I said should have the sort of impact that the hon. Lady is talking about, and I regret if it did have that impact, because the point that I was trying to make was a very simple one, which is that we stand at a moment of decision for this House. It is an important moment. People have talked about responsibility. We all have the responsibility as Members of this House to make the decision that enables us to deliver Brexit for the British people.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does the Prime Minister intend to lead the next phase of Brexit negotiations?

The Prime Minister: I have always made it clear that there is a job to be done, and I am continuing to do that job.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Prime Minister, on your watch your deal has failed. The UK has seen austerity rise and food bank use rise, and now we hear that the Government will delay the repeal of the Swedish derogation, leaving thousands of agency staff financially worse off. So will plan B include any resignations?

The Prime Minister: May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that we have employment at a record high, our debt is falling, our deficit is falling, and we have seen the strongest period of quarterly growth of any country in the G7?

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): Two years ago, after the triggering of article 50, the Prime Minister went on a walking holiday during the Easter recess. Does she have any plans to go on a walking holiday in April? If so, will it begin at the end of next week, when the recess is supposed to happen, or after 12 April?

The Prime Minister: I always look forward to the prospect of a walking holiday, but, obviously, with matters as they stand at the moment, my focus is on trying to ensure that we deliver on Brexit and do that with a deal and by getting the legislation through.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor of the Exchequer described the proposal to hold a ratification vote on the Government's deal as perfectly coherent and worthy of consideration. Given that there have been efforts across the House to build consensus around this idea, will the Prime Minister at least agree that it is worthy of consideration and that it is coherent, reflecting the model of the Good Friday agreement?

The Prime Minister: The Chancellor did indicate that this was one of the proposals that has come forward. I have indicated on a number of occasions—I have done it in answer to a number of questions in this House—that I continue to believe that we should deliver on the result of the first referendum.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Was not the great irony of the Prime Minister's dictatorial Downing Street speech that, because she failed to accept her own responsibility for the mess we are in, we are unlikely to make any progress?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, I recognise the collective responsibility we have across this House in relation to the failure so far to get an agreement for a deal. I continue to believe that it is important to get agreement to a deal so that we can deliver Brexit in time.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): The Prime Minister has still not answered the question that was put to her quite a long time ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). She was not asked whether she approved of Britain being part of a customs union with the EU after Brexit. What she was asked was whether, if this House agreed through indicative votes to go for that option, she would abide by that decision and seek to negotiate that with the European Union. Will she now answer that question?

The Prime Minister: I answered the question about the Government's position in relation to a commitment on the indicative votes in the statement that I gave and in the questions that followed.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I would like to take the Prime Minister to the beautiful, misty highlands. In particular, I would like to take her to the Glen Mhor hotel by Loch Ness, which, by the way, is one of the best places to see the Loch Ness monster. The Glen Mhor hotel is having enormous trouble hiring EU seasonal workers this year; they are not particularly encouraged to apply for jobs, because

of where we are right now in our history and because the unemployment rate in Inverness is considerably lower than in the rest of the UK. We have a huge problem that is hitting the highland economy right now—even before we know what we are doing. How do the Government intend to tackle this massive issue?

The Prime Minister: I think that is the first time in this House that any hon. Member has invited me to a hotel to spend some time with them—but we perhaps will not go there. I recognise the issues, but we do have high employment rates—the hon. Gentleman referenced the high employment rate and the low unemployment rate in Inverness—and that is something to be celebrated. We are making sure, through the policy that we are producing in relation to the future immigration system, that we will enable people to come into this country based on their skills, not the country they come from. Of course, at the moment, we are still a member of the European Union, and we have guaranteed the rights of those EU citizens who come here and abide here.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I voted against the Prime Minister's deal twice; she voted against a people's vote. I never thought I would contemplate voting for any Brexit deal, because I am a passionate believer in staying in the European Union, and the nearly 50% of people who voted to stay in the European Union would not expect me to do anything else. However, I am prepared to vote for her deal if she is prepared to support a people's vote. Is that not a true compromise?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave earlier to a similar question.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister explain the mechanism by which a meaningful vote suddenly becomes a meaningless vote? Ignoring indicative votes on motions to take note in this House is one thing, but when she ignores a meaningful vote, it shows a level of bad faith that is frankly matched only by her grotesque speech last week in Downing Street.

The Prime Minister: The House was very clear after the first meaningful vote that it wanted to see change in a certain area, and the one thing the House positively voted for was to leave with a deal, with some changes to the withdrawal agreement. We negotiated changes to the withdrawal agreement—we negotiated legally binding changes to the withdrawal agreement. The House has not accepted those changes. I continue to talk to colleagues, because I continue to believe that it is better for this country to leave the European Union with a good deal.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Prime Minister has often said that she considers the withdrawal agreement to be in the national interest. If she concluded that the only way she could get support for her deal in this House was to offer her resignation, would she do so in the national interest?

The Prime Minister: This is about making sure that we leave the European Union and do it in the way that is best for this country, and that is what the deal is about.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): People are very concerned and alarmed by this Brexit chaos, in North Ayrshire and Arran and the UK as a whole. This is a time of crisis, and people in Scotland and across the UK are represented in these Brexit talks by a Prime Minister and a Government whom EU leaders at the weekend described as “evasive” and “confused”, in the final days before Brexit. Does she think that that description by EU leaders inspires confidence in those across the UK who are worried about Brexit?

The Prime Minister: What I hope people across the UK who are worried about Brexit will see is a Government who are trying to ensure that we deliver on the vote of the British people but in a way that protects their jobs, protects our Union and protects their security.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Yet again the Prime Minister displays a lack of self-awareness and a complete irony bypass. In her statement, she said that if she cannot get her vote through, she will work across the House to find a solution, except then she tells us that she will block Parliament taking control and will not bind the Government to accepting votes, and she dismisses all alternatives but is keeping no deal on the table. The truth is that she had no strategy when she triggered article 50, she has negotiated a bad deal, and when the wheels have come off the bogie, her idea of seeking consensus is threatening Parliament. When will she recognise her own failures, do the right thing and walk?

The Prime Minister: We have indeed engaged with others across the House. I have engaged with the leader of the Scottish National party, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), and leaders of other parties. There are different views across the House. I do not agree with revoking article 50. I think we should deliver on the Brexit vote. That is a difference of opinion between us, but we have reached out to see whether we can find a way to ensure that we leave the European Union with a deal that delivers for people and delivers to protect their jobs, their security and our Union.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): The Prime Minister has tested to destruction the possibility of getting the DUP and the right-wing ERG to get her deal through the House. She could, however, get it through if she agreed to check that it still is genuinely the will of the people. Instead of listening to the 14 men in fast cars

who came to Chequers, will she listen to the 1 million people who walked past her door? Considering that she spoke earlier about “female multi-tasking”, will she agree to meet a delegation of 14 women parliamentarians from across the House, so that we can really get things done?

The Prime Minister: As I have indicated to others—and as she knows, because we have previously sat down and discussed these matters—I am always happy to reach out and talk to Members across the House. I have a different opinion from the hon. Lady on a second referendum, because I believe we should deliver on the first.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): In 2002, the then newly elected chairperson of the Conservative party said:

“Twice we went to the country unchanged, unrepentant, just plain unattractive. And twice we got slaughtered.”

That chairperson is now the Prime Minister. Has the prospect of bringing her rotten deal back a third time made her reflect on those comments?

The Prime Minister: What I reflect on is the need to ensure that we deliver Brexit and that we do it in a good way for the United Kingdom.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): On seven occasions the Prime Minister has referred to the result of the 2014 Scottish referendum and correctly observed that a majority of people voted to remain in the United Kingdom. She will know, however, that a great many of those people believed the promises made by her party and her Government that by doing so they would, first, retain their European citizenship and, secondly, that their views would be respected within the United Kingdom. Given how things have turned out, does she understand that many of those people are now reconsidering that decision?

The Prime Minister: We went into the European Union as one United Kingdom and we will leave the European Union as one United Kingdom. Many people who voted remain in the 2016 referendum say to me that they believe that we should be delivering on the vote. Although they took a different decision, they believe that it is important that the decision is respected and that we deliver on it.

Points of Order

5.31 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last year the Department for Education published a myth-busting document advising local authorities that they could dispense with statutory guidance that is in place to protect our most vulnerable children. I have raised the issue in this House on two occasions with the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi). On 10 September he said that there would be no changes to legislation, and on 17 January he denied the very substance of the document. Fifty children's charities also wrote to him asking for this dangerous document to be withdrawn. Following a legal challenge from the children's rights charity Article 39, it appears, according to the press, that the document has been withdrawn.

This dangerous DFE and ministerial-approved guidance was in circulation for a number of months. Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, on whether it is incumbent on the hon. Gentleman to outline what steps have been taken to disseminate information about the U-turn to local authorities, and whether any redress is available to children and families who may well have been harmed by this guidance? Finally, can you advise, Mr Speaker, on what safeguards are in place to stop Ministers acting in such a reckless manner?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice that she wished to raise this matter. I rather assume that she has notified the Minister of her intention to bring it up on the Floor of the House this afternoon. She has made her concerns clear and it is on the record. Moreover, those concerns will have been heard on the Treasury Bench, including at a very senior and cerebral level. I rather imagine that the point she has made will be conveyed to the relevant Minister before very long.

In so far as the hon. Lady asks about redress and what the Minister concerned might do, that really is a matter for the Minister rather than for the Chair, but what I would say to her is that if she does not receive a satisfactory response from the Minister, there is a range of options that she might pursue involving airing the issue through the Order Paper or, indeed, in debate in the Chamber. My advice to her would be to consult the Table Office—which, for the benefit of those observing our proceedings, is a very short distance from here—and the dedicated and outstanding staff of that office will be happy to advise her as to what courses of action are open to her.

My basic advice, which I know can sometimes jar somewhat, but it does have the advantage of being valid, is persist, persist, persist. Go to the Table Office and do not take no for an answer in terms of the right to question members of the Treasury Bench. Of course, if the hon. Lady wishes to seek a debate on the matter on the Adjournment, who knows? She may be fortunate.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP) *rose*—

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady is so distinguished, I feel I must save her up.

Peter Grant: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The ministerial code requires any Minister carrying out official business in the constituency of another Member of Parliament to give that Member of Parliament advance notice in good time of the proposed visit. On Friday, the pensions Minister, whom I have notified of my intention to raise this matter today, carried out an official visit in my constituency. My constituency office was notified about it at two minutes to 12 on Friday. Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, at what point such short, inadequate notice constitutes contempt as opposed to courtesy? What options, other than continually raising points of order, which are heard and then ignored by Members on the Treasury Bench, are available to ensure that Ministers comply with the ministerial code?

Mr Speaker: The convention of notifying a Member of a prospective visit to his or her constituency is strong. It is not in the Standing Orders of the House; it is just that: a convention. Moreover, the merits of the case one way or the other are not justiciable by the Chair. However, the convention is there for a reason. It is about that basic concept of courtesy and respect for each other.

So what do I advise the hon. Gentleman? He can take the matter up directly with the Minister in the form of correspondence or a request for a meeting. Secondly, he could take it up with the Leader of the House, who I know will accept, in common with her predecessor, that she has a responsibility for ensuring Ministers' compliance with important conventions, including that of providing timely and substantive answers to questions. When that does not happen, traditionally Leaders of the House have accepted their responsibility to remind Ministers of their duty. The other option open to the hon. Gentleman is to ask the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who performs with élan at business questions every week, to raise the matter with the Leader of the House at business questions.

I am concerned that this rather important convention is being quite regularly dishonoured. That seems to me to be wrong. There is no precise time beforehand for notification, but the presumption is that of courtesy. Simply notifying a Member or his or her office minutes or an hour before a visit does not cohere with the spirit of the convention. The hon. Gentleman has reason to be irritated and I hope that that irritation can soon be overcome by a satisfactory explanation, apology and commitment not to repeat the offence.

Ms Eagle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have not given you notice of this point of order because it comes out of the proceedings that we have just witnessed. I wonder whether you might give us some advice about the fact that it became clear during the Prime Minister's statement that she has no intention of listening or responding positively to the results of an indicative vote process, which rather renders the whole thing pointless.

I remember when we went through a similar process on the future of the other place, the then Government made it absolutely clear that should that process come up with one way forward, which had been carried by the House, they would effect it. Yet today we have heard the exact opposite from the Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker sir, could you give us some view of how, as Members of Parliament, we can take this forward in

[Ms Angela Eagle]

a reasonable way and not see the convention that Parliament and its votes matter disappear before our very eyes at this difficult time for our country?

Mr Speaker: I do not think it is for me to rule on the matter at this time. The hon. Lady has raised an extremely important point, but in the course of making it, and in a spirit of some frustration and almost despair, she said that unless it was guaranteed that the process or its results would be honoured, it rendered the exercise pointless. May I politely suggest that that is not the right mindset? I have the highest regard for the hon. Lady, who is a more experienced parliamentarian than me—she has served as shadow Leader of the House and as a Minister in important roles. I say that it would be better to proceed with the process and support amendments as she sees fit and, if there are subsequent votes—I believe that the intention of the authors of this exercise is that such votes should happen on Wednesday—colleagues' wholehearted participation in them is to be recommended. They should see the outcome and then the hon. Lady can repeat her demand that those results be observed. I do not think there is much point in having the votes on a half-hearted basis. One has to go into it with full-hearted enthusiasm and commitment and see how events play out over the next 48 hours.

But process does matter and the hon. Lady might have noticed—though I would not blame her if she had not—that since the publication of the withdrawal agreement last November, I have sat in the Chamber for every single minute of the debates on this subject. I do so out of respect for the House. That principle of respect for the House and what it says is extremely important. I thank the hon. Lady for what she said and I hope that my reply is at least helpful.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion in the name of the Prime Minister tabled under section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 not later than 10.00pm; such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; the questions may be put after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents) and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—
(Michelle Donelan.)

European Union (Withdrawal) Act

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have provisionally selected amendments (d) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition; (a) in the name of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin); and (f) for Freddie in the name of the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett). I remind the House that, under the terms of the business motion just agreed to, the debate may continue until 10 pm, at which time the questions shall be put on any amendments which may then be moved. To move the main motion, I call the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office.

5.42 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): I beg to move,

That this House, in accordance with the provisions of section 13(6)(a) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, has considered the Written Statement titled "Statement under Section 13(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018" and made on Friday 15 March 2019.

This debate follows as a result of requirements of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and as a consequence of the decision taken by this House on 12 March. Since that date, the House has spoken on two further occasions: on 13 March, the House expressed its opposition to leaving the European Union without a deal; and on 14 March, the House agreed that the Government should seek an extension to article 50. I might add that, in respect of both those votes in this House, neither was legally binding on the Government, but that in each case the Government have honoured the wishes of the House in response to the resolution. I hope that that might provide at least a modicum of reassurance that in this Government we have not been, and we do not intend to be, dismissive in the least of how this House decides or votes.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Prime Minister-elect for giving way. He rightly just said that on 13 March this House agreed not to leave the European Union without a deal. In the statement the Prime Minister has just given the House, she said that, unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen. Could he explain what she meant by that statement?

Mr Lidington: I thought that what the Prime Minister said was quite clear. The Government believe in the case that we have frequently brought to this House for the deal that we believe is in the interests of the United Kingdom, which both those who supported leave and those who voted remain should be able to rally behind and move forward. We know that the legal default position must remain no deal because, from now on, any decision about this is contingent not only upon the view that this House or the Government might take, but on decisions by the European Council as to whether or not it wishes to extend—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Lidington: If colleagues will forgive me, I want to reply to one intervention before I move on to others. It was by no means a given that an extension would have been granted at last week's European Council.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) makes a very important point. As we embark on another very important debate and a number of serious, important debates over the next few days, may I raise with the Minister my concern about the Prime Minister's speech last Wednesday night? She has apologised—[*Interruption.*] Well, maybe it was not as clear an apology as we would have liked, but she has given some recognition that perhaps her words were not appropriate. However, I was particularly concerned to see that the clips from her speech were being pumped out across Facebook with targeted advertising, paid for by taxpayers' money—paid for by the Cabinet Office—into different MPs' inboxes. Does the Minister agree that, at this time, it is not appropriate to be raising the heat in this debate, and that what we need is an atmosphere of compromise, concern and respect for all the different views across this House, bringing people together, not dividing them further?

Mr Lidington: I do not think anybody in the House would disagree with the hon. Gentleman's comments at the end of his intervention, and certainly not my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. We are all deeply aware and, looking up at the memorial shield to our former colleague, Jo Cox, I am very sharply reminded of the fact that many Members of this House have been subjected to the most appalling threats, intimidation and online trolling. Every one of us in our individual or representative capacities has a responsibility to ensure that no encouragement or succour is given to those wicked people who seek to act and intimidate in that way.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I return to the point that was made in the first intervention that the Minister took—that is, the Prime Minister's categorical statement, which I have to say I welcomed today, that unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen. That could not be clearer. Given what the Minister rightly said about the need for the European Union then to take decisions that facilitate this, is not the inevitable consequence of what the Prime Minister has told the House today that, unless she gets her deal through, she will have to apply for an extension prior to 12 April?

Mr Lidington: That depends, of course, on what this House decides to do this week. That is the logic, certainly, of the right hon. Gentleman's argument about my right hon. Friend's remarks, if we start from the premise that the House were not to approve the withdrawal agreement this week. I hope we will and it is the Government's intention to persuade the House to approve the withdrawal agreement during this week, in which case the deadline moves forward automatically to 22 May. I repeat the comment that I made earlier in response to the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray): the United Kingdom can make a request, but it is not ever a certainty that the European Council will agree to it.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am very grateful to the putative Prime Minister—I say to him that he could not possibly do a worse job than what we have seen in the past few years. Has the right hon. Gentleman paid attention to the petition that has now been signed by 5.5 million people right across

the UK, including over 10% of his constituency? Would he now concur that revocation—just ending this madness once and for all—remains a real-life possibility for this country?

Mr Lidington: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. In my constituency, the votes were pretty finely balanced in 2016 between the two sides in the referendum. It would not surprise me that 10% of my constituents felt strongly in favour of revocation in the way that he suggests. Obviously, one takes seriously not only the scale and strength of the opinion expressed in the demonstration at the weekend but the number of signatories attracted to the petition, but that does not mean that one can simply ignore or set aside the fact that 17.4 million people voted to leave the EU in 2016.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Lidington: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but then I will try to make some progress.

Mrs Main: I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has mentioned the 17.4 million people, many of whom had never voted before, who took the trouble to vote leave in the referendum. Given the recent votes in the House—on no deal, the withdrawal agreement and the second vote—and given that the Prime Minister now seems to have taken no deal off the table, for some of us there are different options to think about. It is vital that the withdrawal agreement comes back before the House, because, if no deal is off the table, much worse deals might well be put forward by this remainder House, and those of us who do not wish to see those happen will feel we have a very bad situation.

Mr Lidington: I certainly hope that we have the opportunity to vote again on the withdrawal agreement this week.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Minister has said very clearly that the Government have responded to and honoured two of the motions passed in the last couple of weeks, but what about that huge majority for the withdrawal legislation and leaving on 29 March, which is still on the statute book? Now, because of some agreement stitched up between the Prime Minister and the EU, we will not have the chance to decide or look at that. Is that not constitutionally incorrect—apart from being legally incorrect?

Mr Lidington: I will say a bit more about the statutory instrument in a few minutes, if the hon. Lady will bear with me.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I support the Prime Minister's deal—I think it is a good deal—and I welcome the news that we will be voting on it again, but will my right hon. Friend look closely at the important proposals from my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) to amend the unilateral declaration to provide more certainty, clarity and reassurance to those not yet ready to vote for the deal?

Mr Lidington: I can reassure my hon. Friend that the Government have taken very seriously the comments from our right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and continue to have a dialogue with him and others to find the best way forward.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con) *rose*—

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I will give way to my right hon. and learned Friend, then to the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), and then I will make some progress.

Mr Clarke: On the Government's commitment to avoid no deal, in line with the votes, my right hon. Friend has acceded that the Government do accept last week's votes, which is in line with the constitutional convention that the Government do not proceed with policies that are rejected by this House of Commons. He has agreed that. Then he said that we therefore either pass the withdrawal agreement, which I have voted for, or ask for an extension, that being the only remedy presumably, but, as he rightly says, we cannot guarantee the Europeans would accept that. However, in line with the wishes of the House and what is now Government policy, if we are driven by the more hard-line people in this House to that circumstance, obviously the Government must revoke, in the hope that we start the whole process again once the House and everybody else has come back to their senses and found a consensus on how to proceed on the question of our future relations with the rest of the world.

Mr Lidington: With all respect, I disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend. I think he underestimates quite how severe the damage would be to already fragile public confidence in our democratic processes if the House voted to revoke the implementation of a decision that the majority of Members gave to the electorate in 2016, saying they would abide by their decision.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I will give way to the hon. Member for Cardiff West, then the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) and, then, if the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) will forgive me, I will make some progress.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Lidington: I will make some progress, but I will happily give way to my right hon. and learned Friend later.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman; he is being extremely generous. I cannot see how any deal can proceed without a public vote at the end of the process, given the circumstances. On the question of today's business, the Prime Minister said earlier that the Government were prepared to seek to provide time—I think those were her words—to discuss indicative options. Will he clarify what exactly she meant by that? When are the Government prepared to do it and for how long, and can he confirm that what the options are would be in the hands of the House?

Mr Lidington: I will gladly do so, but I ask colleagues to bear with me and permit me to complete page 1 of my speech and move to subsequent sections. Then I might be able to throw a bit more light on some of the questions being posed to me. I will give way to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central, but then I am going to make some progress.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): My assessment of where we are is that a majority does exist for the withdrawal agreement—the technical aspect of our leaving the EU—but the differences and difficulty are on the political declaration and where that may take us, where we may end up in that situation and what support and clarity the House will have in that process. Can the Minister give some assurances that the House will have a clear role in the next stage of the negotiations, so that we can avoid this merry-go-round at the next stage?

Mr Lidington: Yes, indeed. It is something to which the Government have been giving a lot of thought and has featured in conversations that Ministers have been having with Members across the House not just in the last few days but in the last several weeks. Various models could be adopted. In particular, there would be the question of the role of Select Committees—the Brexit Select Committee and other relevant departmental Select Committees—in the different aspects of that very wide-ranging negotiation. One lesson I have drawn from the experience of the last couple of years is that the House will insist on having a say and will find ways to express its view, including some novel initiatives. The reality is that the House is going to have a say and influence as the negotiations proceed, and I would hope that the agreement that I believe the Government will eventually succeed in striking will command widespread public support.

Mr Grieve: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Lidington: All right, I will break my rule, but then I hope that the House will allow me to move on.

Mr Grieve: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for his characteristic courtesy. May I take him back to his answer to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who raised the issue of revocation? I rather share my right hon. Friend's view that revocation would be a drastic act, but the fact that so many people are signing up to advocate it is probably a reflection of a growing level of exasperation. Is it not the case that the better course of action, rather than unilateral revocation, is to go back and ask the public whether they want the Prime Minister's deal, with the alternative being remain? That would show respect for the 2016 referendum result. My anxiety is this: the Government boxed themselves in with red lines in their negotiations with the EU; now they are boxing themselves in with red lines in relation to the options available to the House to resolve the current crisis. I also worry, if the stories about the Cabinet minutes are correct, that some of the reasons appear to be very narrow and partisan, at a time when a national crisis should be requiring us to look more widely. Those of us who try to do that get vilified, but I am quite prepared to put up with that because I think it is where the national interest lies.

Mr Lidington: One thing I can say with great confidence is that, above all, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, according to all my observation of her approach to these negotiations and the subsequent parliamentary proceedings, has been motivated entirely by what is right for the national interest. Judging the national interest certainly involves looking at the content and terms of the arrangements for our departure, but it also

means taking account of the fact of the referendum result in 2016, and the political and democratic reality that it represents.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I am going to make some progress.

During its meeting last week, the European Council approved the legally binding assurances in relation to the Northern Ireland backstop that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had negotiated with President Juncker a fortnight ago. As my right hon. Friend has explained, that should give additional assurance to Members that in the unlikely event that the backstop were ever used it would be only temporary, and that the United Kingdom and the European Union would begin work immediately to replace it with alternative arrangements by the end of December 2020. The Council also agreed—subject to a vote in this House—to approve the withdrawal agreement this week. The date of our departure from the EU would be extended to 22 May to provide time for the House to agree and ratify a Brexit deal, and to pass the necessary legislation to make that possible.

However, the Council agreed that in the event that the House did not approve the withdrawal agreement this week, article 50 should be extended only until 12 April. At that point, we would have two options: we could leave without a deal, or we would need to have agreed an alternative plan for a longer extension with the European Union, and the EU would have to have accepted that. It is very clear from what EU leaders and the EU institutions have said that that a longer extension would require elections to the European Parliament to be held in the United Kingdom.

On 14 March, I told the House that in the event that Members had not approved a meaningful vote by 20 March and agreed a timetable for the withdrawal agreement Bill, the Government would recognise that the House would require time to consider the potential ways forward. The Government stand by the commitment that I set out that day that in such a scenario, having consulted the usual channels at that time, they would facilitate a process, in the two weeks after the March European Council, to allow the House to seek a majority on the way forward. Since then my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have acted on that commitment, and have engaged constructively with Members on both sides of the House in recent days. Between us we have met leaders of all parties as well as other senior parliamentarians, and that process is ongoing; my right hon. Friend met the Leader of the Opposition earlier today. Those discussions will continue.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): There are reports today that, in those discussions with the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister put forward a proposal to decouple the withdrawal agreement from the political declaration as a way of seeking compromise. Are those reports correct, and, if so, what was the response of the Labour Front Bench?

Mr Lidington: The European Council conclusions specify that it is approval of the withdrawal agreement that counts in respect of whether there is an extension to 22 May. Of course, the requirements in the European Council conclusions are different in scope from what is required under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to constitute a meaningful vote.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): My right hon. Friend may know what I am going to ask, because I asked the Prime Minister this question and she suggested that I ask him. I do so as someone who, as he knows, voted to support the agreement last time, and will vote to do so again.

My right hon. Friend has just said that the Government will facilitate the discussion of alternative arrangements in the two weeks following the European Council should the deal not, for whatever reason, succeed. We are already eating into those two weeks. He urges us to resist the so-called Letwin amendment for various reasons, which I understand to some degree, but he has not yet specified a timetable for when the Government will present their own means and terms of facilitation. Let me ask my him what I asked the Prime Minister: when?

Mr Lidington: As I said a moment ago, the discussions with other parties and Members on both sides of the House will continue, but I can confirm that the Government would seek to provide Government time in order for the process to proceed. If the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) is not passed tonight, we will set aside time for a first day of debate later this week, and after that day's debate has been concluded, we will consider and consult on what further time, if any, might be needed. If, on the other hand, my right hon. Friend's amendment is carried, the consequence for the control of the Order Paper will be that the decisions will be very much a matter for my right hon. Friend and the House more generally, given the terms in which the amendment has been drafted.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be free votes on the Government side of the House if that situation arises?

Mr Lidington: I think it would be premature to say anything about whipping at this stage, because we do not currently know exactly what the content of any options might be, what amendments to them might conceivably be tabled, or which of those amendments the Chair might be willing to accept. However, I know that my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip will have heard my hon. Friend's representations.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): The reason the Prime Minister's statement last Wednesday was so disappointing—and we are hearing it today—is that this is not about the 17 million any more than it is about the 16 million; it is about everyone who lives in this country and has a stake in its future. People are looking at what is happening and feeling absolute frustration and despair, because the people whom they elected to make decisions and make this work have not found a way through the difficulties. Now, with the indicative votes that are coming, we have an opportunity to make a breakthrough and find some common ground, but it would require the Prime Minister to depart from the red lines and learn to compromise. What advice would the Minister offer to her in this circumstance?

Mr Lidington: I am afraid that one thing about which I am very clear indeed is that I am very willing to—and do—offer advice to my right hon. Friend, but I talk about that advice to her in private, not in the House.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Many of my constituents are emailing me asking me to vote for amendment (a) tonight. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that even if that amendment is not passed, if we have not passed the withdrawal agreement, the Government will make time for indicative votes? Will those votes happen this week or next week?

Mr Lidington: As I said a moment ago, if amendment (a) is not passed, we will make available a first day this week for the process to which we have committed ourselves to proceed. It may be that further time would be needed, but that would be a matter for consideration after the first day had concluded.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab) *rose*—

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind) *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I will give way first to the hon. Member for Leicester West and then to the right hon. Member for Broxtowe, but after that—I hope that the House will forgive me—I will try to move on.

Liz Kendall: The right hon. Gentleman is being very generous in giving way.

If amendment (a) is voted down and the Government do indeed propose their own slot, will they determine the options on which the House will vote, or will Members of Parliament do so?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Lady has pre-empted my next paragraph. I was about to say that we do not think it is for the Government to tell the House what options it should and should not consider—that should be a matter for the House—but that, in turn, does not mean that the Government will be silent about the options that might be debated. We will certainly continue to be strong advocates for the deal that we have negotiated, and we will continue to urge Members in all parts of the House to be realistic.

Anna Soubry: The right hon. Gentleman is being very generous with his time, but can he help us with this? Is it the Government's plan that those votes will relate to the withdrawal agreement, or will they deal only with the political declaration? As he knows, there is a profound difference between the two: if the former, the withdrawal agreement, passes it will be a treaty and go into international law, but the political declaration is non-binding.

Mr Lidington: If the right hon. Lady will bear with me, I want to come on to that shortly.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend has said that the Government are going to reject, or try to reject, the so-called Letwin amendment this evening but will then make Government time available for roughly the same thing. So as far as I can see, the only objection to the amendment is that it has been tabled by a Back Bencher and not by the Government. Would this not all be resolved if my right hon. Friend confirmed that the Government will make this Wednesday available for the purpose, since we do not have much time? It seems to me that we would then all be in total agreement and be able to proceed to the indicative votes.

Mr Lidington: Until we have had the Division this evening, assuming there is one, on the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), we will not know whether Wednesday is available for the Government's disposal or whether it will fall to other means of consideration.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I am genuinely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, but this is hopeless: he cannot argue against a perfectly sensible amendment, which is reasonable in the circumstances, in the name of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) on the basis that the Government are going to propose something similar without at this stage saying on what day, for how long, on what conditions, and on what range of motions. If he is saying that Parliament should not be in control because the Government ought to be in control, then surely it is reasonable to expect the Government to actually be in control, to have some sense of what the process is, and to provide some clarity now, otherwise we might as well troop through the Lobby to vote for the amendment.

Mr Lidington: There is a matter of constitutional principle here. We are saying that it is for the Government to control the Order Paper, as is normal, but in this case we would devote our time to consideration of the measures that the House wanted to see debated and decided.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Is it not the case that it is common practice in a debate for the Government to welcome an amendment proposed by Members on the Back Benches or representing Opposition parties? From what I have heard, my right hon. Friend is going to do on Wednesday exactly what amendment (a) says, so would not the easiest thing to do be just to accept amendment (a) tonight?

Mr Lidington: The difference between me and my hon. Friend on this occasion is that I take the view, and the Government take the view, that amendment (a) would upset the balance between legislature and Executive in a way that would set an unwelcome precedent, and it is for that reason that we are not supporting it.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I give way to my right hon. Friend.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would be grateful for your guidance on the whole question of Standing Order No. 14, given that we operate a system of parliamentary Government, not government by Parliament. That is for a good reason: in a nutshell, Government business takes precedence under Standing Order No. 14 because it is the wish of the majority of Members of Parliament, who form the Government, and therefore the wishes of the electorate are at stake. Would you be kind enough to answer my question, Mr Speaker, since I regard this to be a matter of fundamental constitutional importance?

Mr Speaker: I very much look forward to listening to the speech that the hon. Gentleman might make in the course of the debate, and he knows that he can always

look to me and very much expect to catch my eye. So far as the Standing Order is concerned, the fact of its presence is well known to everybody, but the House is the owner of the Standing Orders, and if a proposition is put to the House for a change in those arrangements, including in a particular case the suspension of a Standing Order or more than one Standing Order, it is perfectly credible and reasonable that that should be put to the House. I did announce my provisional selection of amendments earlier, and I do not think—although I accept that the hon. Gentleman objects to this amendment—that it came as any great surprise that the cross-party amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) was selected. As to whether it is acceptable to the House, that remains to be seen. It is obviously not acceptable to the hon. Gentleman, and we will hear further and better particulars of his objection in due course.

Mr Lidington: I give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way and I promise him that I had not intended to intervene in his speech, unlike almost everybody else sitting in the Chamber today, but he does force me to do so because I wonder whether he can clarify the following slightly different point. Given that his objection to our amendment is ostensibly simply the constitutional one, and given that that could be entirely resolved by the Government accepting the amendment—or indeed could have been resolved on Thursday or Friday, when it was tabled, by the Government signing it and turning it into a Government amendment, in which case a Minister's name would have been at the top of the list—could my right hon. Friend simply tell us whether on Wednesday, if our amendment fails, the Government intend to operate exactly the same principles as are contained within that amendment, or whether the Government have some other plan about how to construct the day?

Mr Lidington: I cannot give a commitment immediately for that or of that level of detail, but I will have further discussions, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union might be able to respond to the point in greater detail in his winding-up speech.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Mr Lidington: I am always over-tempted to give way to interventions, and I am deeply conscious that on the last two occasions that I came to this Dispatch Box I spoke for over an hour in total because of the number of interventions I permitted, so I will try to make some progress as I am sure many Members in all parts of the House want to catch your eye, Mr Speaker, and contribute to the debate.

Whatever options are put forward—this starts to address the issue raised by the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry)—will need to be negotiable with the EU, and in particular any deal will require the withdrawal agreement that not only we but the 27 other Governments of the EU member states have negotiated. The conclusions of the European Council last week could not have been clearer: EU member states are not

prepared to consider any reopening of the terms of the withdrawal agreement which for them, as well as for us, represented the outcome of a lengthy period of negotiation and compromise on both sides. And this is one of the reasons why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was clear earlier this afternoon that the Government cannot simply pre-commit to accepting whatever might come out of this process. It is entirely possible that this House votes for something that is neither realistic nor negotiable; for example, it could vote to seek further changes to the withdrawal agreement, which the EU has been clear is simply not possible. Equally, the House could vote to maintain all the benefits of the single market without agreeing to the obligations, such as alignment with state aid rules or the free movement of people, but the EU has been clear that the four freedoms are indivisible.

Of course we will engage constructively with Members across the House on whatever the outcome of this process is, but we continue to believe that the amendment tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset would be an unwelcome precedent to set, in that it would overturn the balance between Parliament and the Government. In the event that his amendment were carried tonight, we would obviously want to have a dialogue with him and his co-sponsors about how he proposed to take those measures forward.

I want to add a few words to what the Prime Minister said about the statutory instrument that has been published today on the extension of article 50. Now that the United Kingdom and the European Union have agreed an extension to article 50 and it has been embodied in a legal decision of the European Council, the date needs to be amended to reflect in our domestic law the new point at which the EU treaties will cease to apply in the United Kingdom. The Government have therefore tabled today a draft statutory instrument under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 that provides for both of the possible extensions: 12 March and 22 May.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): It is 12 April.

Mr Lidington: Did I misspeak? I meant 12 April. This will be subject to the draft affirmative procedure so that it will be debated in each House, and it must come into force by 11 pm on 29 March. The purpose of this is to ensure that our statute book reflects the extension of article 50, which is legally binding in international law. Without this instrument, there would be a clash in domestic law because contrary provisions would apply both EU rules and new domestic rules simultaneously.

Sir William Cash: As I said earlier to the Prime Minister, the commencement order has not yet been brought into force, so will my right hon. Friend give me the lawful authority whereby the decision endorsed by the authority of Sir Tim Barrow was consistent with the vires of the original enactment under section 1 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018?

Mr Lidington: I will try to give my hon. Friend a brief answer now, but the best thing would be for me or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to write swiftly and formally to him in his capacity as Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee to set out the answer for him.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Lidington: No, I will not give way, because I want to try to give my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) the short answer that I promised him a second ago.

The purpose of the statutory instrument is to reflect the extension agreed between the United Kingdom and the European Union. The Government will now therefore delay the commencement of the repeal of the European Communities Act. A commencement order is required under section 25(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act to give effect to this repeal. The timing of that commencement order will depend on the date on which we leave the European Union. As a matter of both EU and international law, the effect of the European Council decision is that we are not leaving the European Union on 29 March. It would therefore be wrong to commence the repeal contained in section 1 of the withdrawal Act on that date. In making that change, having sought an extension, the Government have acted on the basis of the resolutions that were passed by this House. The House did not want to leave on 29 March without a deal, and it explicitly voted in favour of the Government seeking an extension to article 50.

Anna Soubry *rose*—

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I am going to make some progress—

Kate Hoey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you rule on what the constitutional position would be if the statutory instrument to change the date that is already in our legislation were not accepted by the House? Does EU law overrule our Parliament?

Mr Speaker: As a matter of general practice, it is well established that EU law trumps UK national law. I am not saying anything controversial there. As to the particular circumstances here, the answer is that I might well pronounce upon it but I would be extremely foolish to do so off the top of my head. I may be able to sate the curiosity of the hon. Lady, which will be widely shared across the House, but I am afraid that it is not within my gift to do so now. It is better to give a valid and informative answer later than to give an invalid, uninformative and potentially misleading answer now.

Mr Lidington: Without the statutory instrument, there would be a clash in domestic law because contradictory provisions would apply both EU rules and new domestic rules simultaneously. It is therefore important that the instrument be approved by Parliament so that we can ensure that our statute book accurately reflects the fact that the UK will now remain a member state until at least 11 pm on 12 April.

I should like to turn briefly to the amendments that you have selected, Mr Speaker, other than amendment (a), which we have already debated at some length. Turning to amendment (d), the Prime Minister and I have had constructive meetings with hon. Members from the main Opposition party in recent days, and the Prime Minister met the Leader of the Opposition earlier this afternoon. On that basis, I would say to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) that the amendment is not necessary. I would also say that the official Opposition's amendment

demonstrates one thing very clearly—namely, that none of the changes that it seeks to secure are changes to the withdrawal agreement. The inference I draw from that is that the official Opposition now support the withdrawal agreement, and I hope that when the right hon. and learned Gentleman comes to speak, he will be able to confirm that he and his party accept that all possible deals with the European Union should include this withdrawal agreement and that that is also the clear will of the European Council.

I understand completely the motive behind amendment (f), tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett). It instructs the Government to report by 9 April on how we would ensure that the United Kingdom did not leave without a deal if the deal had not been approved by that point. Consistently throughout this process, the Government have accepted that we would need to come back to the Dispatch Box if the House had not supported the withdrawal agreement by the end of this week.

I recognise that the House has now voted twice against leaving the European Union without a deal. However, I have to say to the right hon. Lady and her co-sponsors there would be only two options before the House in the circumstances envisaged in her amendment. There would be the option, called for earlier by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), of the revocation of article 50, but that is not a temporary measure; it would not result in a mere stay in the proceedings. The Court of Justice of the European Union has made it clear that revocation would have to be permanent and a decision taken in good faith. The other option would be for us to ask for a long extension, but that would mean running elections for the European Parliament nearly three years after the vote of the British public to leave. Of course, it would also rely on the EU agreeing to such a long extension, which would by no means be assured.

Unless the House were prepared to support one of those two options, the legal default under European law would be that the treaties would cease to apply, whatever the right hon. Member for Derby South might wish, and we would have to leave without a deal. The way forward is for the House to accept the deal, particularly this week, to approve the withdrawal agreement and to secure the extension to 22 May.

If Parliament comes together and backs the Brexit deal, we will leave the European Union by 22 May. We can then end three years of divisive debate and uncertainty, allow the country to move on towards a new future outside the European Union and devote ourselves to the important work of negotiating a deep and special partnership with our European friends and neighbours, which the Conservative party promised in our election manifesto. The Government will make every effort to ensure that we are able to leave with a deal and move our country forward to allow those who voted leave and those who voted remain to come together in looking to the future. It is in that spirit that I commend this motion to the House.

6.31 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): The Prime Minister has got herself and the Government into a hopeless position. Having disregarded views from across this House for the best part of two years, the

Government now find themselves with a deal that they just cannot get through this House, and time has almost run out. Today, we see that they sort of agree with an initiative to break the impasse, but they also do not agree with it.

All that must be seen in the context of the Prime Minister losing control of the meaningful vote. In truth, we have no idea when or if it will be put again or whether it is winnable. I listened carefully to the Prime Minister's statement this afternoon, and she said that she had gauged that there was "still not sufficient support" for the deal, but she would continue discussions so that she could bring forward a vote this week. We have been in that loop since 10 December. She says, "I don't think there's enough support. I am going to have further discussions, and I am going to put the vote again." She has lost control of that process.

The Prime Minister has also lost control of the negotiations. That much is clear from the European Council's decision last Thursday. When the Government were asked, "What happens if the meaningful vote fails?" there was no answer. That created a real anxiety that we could crash out this Friday without a deal. It was in those circumstances that the EU acted as it did in putting forward the dates of 12 April and 22 May, so the Government have lost control of the very negotiations.

The Prime Minister also appears to have lost control of the Conservative party. There have already been too many jokes about whether the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is the Deputy Prime Minister or the putative Prime Minister, so I will scratch them from my speech, but it is clear that control of the party is gone. Tonight, it is likely that the Prime Minister and the Government are going to lose control of Parliament and of the process in circumstances in which, arguably, they do not need to, because they could have acted last week. The sense that we have to move forward was in the debate last week. It is not new today, because it was clear that many Members want to find a way forward and feel a duty to break the deadlock. That was the subject matter of last week's debate, but instead of a constructive discussion about how we do it, we will probably divide on this motion.

Kevin Brennan: On breaking the impasse, the Conservative manifesto has been cited, but is it not the case that manifestos need to win a mandate in order to be implementable? The Conservative party did not win a mandate at the last general election, because a mandate would mean having an overall majority in this House. Contrary to what the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has said, does that not provide room for the Government to be more flexible on this matter?

Keir Starmer: I agree with that sentiment. I have stood here and been critical of the red lines that the Prime Minister put in place at the beginning of the protest, and I have always seen them as the cause of the problem, but today is not really about an inquisition into that—although there will have to be one—because it is about whether we can find a way forward. I honestly think that many Members want to find a way forward and have been working to that end.

Gareth Snell: The Prime Minister was rightly questioned by Labour Members earlier as to whether she would honour and be bound by the result if the House were to

come together on indicative votes and find a way forward, but the Prime Minister was unwilling to say that she would be. If this House comes forward and finds a majority for a deal that is different from Labour party policy, would we be bound by that and would we whip in favour of it?

Keir Starmer: I listened carefully to what the Prime Minister said, and I will say something about that in a minute. I think she was saying that she would not say in advance whether she would be bound, and we need to probe that, because it is an important point. However, we are getting slightly ahead of ourselves. The process that is envisaged, in the first instance, is to test whether there is a majority among different propositions, and we need to get to that stage.

Sir William Cash: I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman understands that although amendment (a) is in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), in reality there are only 14 or 15 Conservative names on that amendment so, to all intents and purposes, it is the number of Opposition Members who would carry it. How does the right hon. and learned Gentleman answer the charge that that is inconsistent with our constitutionally accountable Government under Standing Order No. 14? How does he answer the point that an attempt to do so would effectively seek to reverse both the referendum result and the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 itself?

Keir Starmer: I honestly cannot see how exploring whether there is a majority for a different approach is inconsistent with anything that we have done so far. It is actually what we should have done two years ago, because the referendum answered just one question, which was whether more people would rather be in or out of the EU. It did not answer the next huge question, which was, "If we vote out, what sort of future relationship should there be?" That required serious and considered discussion, and really should have been discussed in this House to see whether we could reach an agreement.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) asked a serious question a moment ago about whether the Labour party would regard itself as bound to give support to any majority that emerges—the same question that we were putting to the Government. The whole thing is pointless if the Labour party is going to whip on all these indicative votes and then whip against a majority if that is not consistent with its manifesto, which also did not get the majority support of the public at the last election. We resolved all this in 1972—I apologise, because I do not normally go back into the depths of history—by having free votes on each side, because it would have been fatuous for the Front Benches to go as part of the process. Will the Labour party have free votes? Will it be bound by whatever majorities might emerge from the indicative voting?

Keir Starmer: If amendment (a) is passed tonight there will be an intense discussion about how the process will take place and what the options will be. When we see those options, the Labour party will take decisions about how to whip—[*Interruption.*] Let me complete

[*Keir Starmer*]

the point. If one of the options is no deal, we will of course whip against it. If that is the outcome, we will reject it. Of course, we need to see the options.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I am glad to hear my right hon. and learned Friend say that the Labour party will whip against no deal, because we are talking about my constituents' jobs. Does he agree that these questions about the constitution are not new? By definition under our constitution the thing that wins votes in this House is the Government, and it was hardly Back-Benchers who broke that convention.

Keir Starmer: I agree with my hon. Friend. In a sense, we are in this place only because there is no other way to break the deadlock or the impasse.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that if the Prime Minister had not tried to exclude Parliament completely from having a say—she had to be dragged kicking and screaming by the Supreme Court to allow us to legislate on triggering article 50—and if she had had a proper cross-party process and a national debate with a Green Paper and a proper White Paper, instead of springing things already decided on this House at the last possible minute, she would have considerably more good will in this place and there would have been a chance for us to do what should be done to get the withdrawal agreement through Parliament because it would have been done properly? We are now scrambling at the last possible minute simply because she has not done the job properly.

Keir Starmer: I could not agree more. It is a matter of record that the Prime Minister did not want a vote even on triggering article 50, on which we got a vote only because of a Supreme Court decision. She did not want a meaningful vote, which we got, in the teeth of the Government whipping against it, only because we won a vote. It is true that, every time, the Government have whipped strongly against any amendments about objectives, including a very controversial whipping exercise in the summer that threw up a debate about maternity leave. The idea that the Government have been genuinely open to debate, and have been willing to listen to where the House is, is just not true. We really should have gone through this exercise two years ago, but I understand the argument that we are where we are and we now have to find a way forward, which is why we support amendment (a).

If we are to find a way forward, we need to be clear about what we are not prepared to do. There is no way forward that includes blaming Members of this House for the mess we are in. There is no way forward that includes whipping up a sense of the people versus MPs. There is no way forward based on the notion that Members on either side of the House who persistently and forcefully advance their views, whatever those views may be, are indulging in some kind of illegitimate exercise—they are not. They are making important points on behalf of their constituents and in the national interest. They are doing their job.

I heard the Prime Minister say earlier that she did not intend her comments last week to have that effect, and I am not sure what I am more concerned about: that she made the comments, or that she did not appreciate how

they would be heard in the environment in which we live. Nor can we find a way forward based simply on the proposition of putting and re-putting the same meaningful vote. The fact that we are even discussing meaningful vote 3, or even meaningful vote 4, only has to be said to be seen to be absurd. The deal has been roundly rejected twice. We now need to move on, and I hope we can begin that process tonight.

Anna Soubry: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have listened with great care to what the Minister for the Cabinet Office said about the Government's alternative if amendment (a) fails to win a majority. Does he share my concern that the Government would, in effect, only allow indicative votes on the political declaration? The assumption would be that the withdrawal agreement will go through and cannot be touched or amended. In that event, is this nothing more than a Government ruse to get the withdrawal agreement through via some back-door method?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for the right hon. Lady's intervention. I listened carefully to what the Minister for the Cabinet Office said in relation to the withdrawal agreement. This is no disrespect to him, because I do respect him, but trust in the Government is not where it should be. This is not to disrespect anyone sitting on the Government Front Bench, but when we voted to take a no deal off the table, and when we voted on an extension, we were voting on the basis of what he said from that Dispatch Box about a short extension, in the event that the meaningful vote failed, being reckless.

When the letter to President Tusk was written last week, some of us were therefore taken aback and did not think it reflected what this House had decided. That is now one of the problems in relation to this exercise, because there is a lack of trust. If amendment (a) is not passed this evening, we may find that we are not where we thought we would be when we get to Wednesday, Thursday and Friday—it would not be the first time.

The decision of the European Council to grant an extension to article 50 was a necessity and, in truth, the only way to prevent our leaving without a deal on 29 March, but, as I have said, any extension must be for a purpose, which is why we need to come together to decide that purpose. The Minister for the Cabinet Office said two weeks ago, and he elaborated on it today, that the Government would consult the other parties through the usual channels and work to provide a process by which the House could form a majority to take things forward. It seems that the Government agree with what amendment (a) intends to achieve. If it is passed, MPs will decide the options, which is right. The Government say that would give too much control to MPs, but then they say, "If it doesn't go through, we will provide the time. As for the options, that should be for MPs." If the Government are true to what they say, MPs will decide the options in any event, so the easiest thing would be for the Government simply to signal that they accept the amendment. We could then foreshorten the debate, move forward and start the discussion on how the process will actually work.

Amendment (d), in the name of the Opposition, seeks to achieve that purpose, and amendment (a), in the name of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and others, does so, too. We will be supporting both amendments this evening.

Liz Kendall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree it is important that MPs should determine not just the options but how those options are voted on? Many hon. Members would be concerned if we voted on one option after another, rather than voting on all at the same time. The benefit of amendment (a) is that it allows precisely that, for MPs to vote on all options at the same time, as well as determining what those options are.

Keir Starmer: My hon. Friend anticipates my next sentence, which is that we recognise that Members will have different views on how the process should go forward. There will have to be intensive discussions over the next couple of days as to how that operates, but it needs to be a process that allows us to arrive at a sustainable majority view.

Ian Murray: My right hon. and learned Friend and his team have done a fantastic job on this issue. Will he try to answer my question, which the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster failed to answer twice this afternoon? The Prime Minister said in her statement that, unless this House agrees to it, a no deal will not happen. What does my right hon. and learned Friend surmise that means? What does he think the Government are trying to achieve?

Keir Starmer: I think it is a version of what has gone before, which is to say that the Government accept there is no majority in this House for a no deal—there certainly is not, and I do not think there ever has been—but, at the same time, to leave the threat of a no deal dangling by some kind of legal default. If the Prime Minister's comment has meaning, and I hope it does, it ought to commit the Government to take whatever steps are necessary in order to avoid a no deal, otherwise it is meaningless. It is really important that that is established.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): Is this not another example of the doublespeak we have come to expect from the Government? Our concern this evening is that we are witnessing another example of doublespeak and, potentially, double dealing. The implication of the Government accepting both the spirit and effect of the Letwin proposal while saying they will not be bound by it and not telling us whether they will do precisely what it says makes us all suspect it is another piece of trickery designed to get this taken off the table tonight, only for us to find that we are no further forward tomorrow.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I do think there is a trust issue. I hope that that can improve. The letter to President Tusk was an example of that because, having supposedly taken no deal off the table, the only extension that was asked for was one in the event that the meaningful vote failed, rather than if it went through. That left the prospect, but for what the European Council decided last Thursday, of no deal this Friday going back on the table, just a week after we thought we had taken it off the table.

So we do need to get into Wednesday. We need to have an intense discussion about how the votes on Wednesday are to be taken and see whether we can reach a consensus about that, reach a majority and find where that lies. We need to consider the credible options. Labour has long advocated a close economic relationship,

including a customs union and single market alignment, but we have also made clear our support for a public vote as a lock on any deal that the Prime Minister passes. The Leader of the Opposition and I have met colleagues to discuss these proposals and the other ideas that have been put forward by other colleagues. What we need to do now is to agree the process for having a proper debate and to look at those and other credible options.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that there is a difference between the people's vote/public vote option and the others? The others relate to a substantive route forward on Brexit. A public vote is a way of ensuring that there is a broad consensus and the public are behind whatever consensus this House may find favour with.

Keir Starmer: That is a very important intervention. Obviously, discussions will take place in the next two days, but the basic proposition that the House needs to decide the substance of any deal it might be able to support—and, arguably, to look at the process around it separately—is important, because some of these options are not like-for-like options, in that some are about substance and some are about process. It would be perfectly possible to make the argument that, if there is to be a deal, it ought to be what we consider to be the least damaging deal. We could have an argument about what that looks like. Equally, it would be possible to say that, whatever deal there was at the end of that exercise, it ought to be subject to the lock or safeguard of some sort of confirmation vote. I do not know. I am not anticipating how the votes would go, but I can see that one of those decisions is about the substance of the issue and the second is about the process. We are going to have to grapple with that before Wednesday.

Mr Grieve: I agree entirely with what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said, as indeed I agree with the question to him from my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening). He may also agree that it is going to be important, in the course of this debate and how we structure it, that we make sure we can provide reassurance that Members can vote for what they see as preferred outcomes without in any way having the sense that they might be forfeiting the right also to the insistence that that has to go to the public, whatever it might be.

Keir Starmer: I agree with that because otherwise we inhibit the likelihood of finding a majority. Therefore, that will require careful thought going into Wednesday.

Let us assume, for the moment, that we can find a process that most Members are content with and that we can then move towards a majority view. It may take some time. I, for one, am troubled by the idea that, in one afternoon, all of this can be solved. It may be that all we can do is start down a process of finding a majority. It would be wrong to rush at this at this stage of the exercise. But assuming that can be done, it raises the million-dollar question: if the House does find a majority, will the Government accept the result?

I understand and respect the position of the Prime Minister, who says, "I need to know what the options are and what the result is before I can answer that question." I understand the logic of that and it is a fair point, but what I do not want is—wrapped up in that

[Keir Starmer]

perfectly reasonable, logical answer—to find, in a week or two, or whenever it may be, that whatever outcome is agreed upon by a majority it will never be accepted by the Government and we are back to where we started. That is my concern about the exercise. So when the Government say they will go into it in good faith, that has to mean that, if there is a majority, the Government will look very seriously at supporting where that majority view is and not simply rule it out. The red lines are the very thing we are trying to break. If the Government apply their own red lines to any outcome and say, “It does not fit our red lines”, there is not much point going through the exercise in the first place because it is precisely to remove those red lines that we are going forward.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. and learned Friend is making a powerful point about the absurdity of an ill-designed referendum that asked for a simplistic answer to a very complex question. Nobody can really understand what that 52% who voted leave wanted because it was so ill-defined and so massive. The Government have arrogantly assumed that they have a monopoly of wisdom on what that leave vote meant and hold Parliament in contempt in pursuit of it. Is it not the reality that, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said, something like a confirmatory public vote would be entirely logically coherent, and that it is bizarre that the Prime Minister, despite not having a mandate or a majority, seems so pig-headed in not actually reaching out to the House of Commons to pursue that sort of consensus-building approach?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. On this question of the Government accepting the outcome, if they simply reject whatever is the outcome of this exercise, they will be doubling down on one of the big mistakes of the past two years, which is to push Parliament away and not let Parliament express its view as to where the majority is. That is one reason we are in this mess. For two and a half years the Government have pushed Parliament away at every turn and we need now to find a mechanism, albeit a constitutionally innovative one, to break through that.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Does my right hon. and learned Friend not recognise that, in some areas, there is huge opposition among the electorate to having European elections, but there is the opportunity, through the withdrawal agreement Bill, should it ever be reached, for every single option being potentially proposed on Wednesday to be put as amendments, including the customs union? Has he considered that as an option?

Keir Starmer: I have, not least because my hon. Friend raised it with me last week. The difficulty is that the EU argues that, once the withdrawal agreement and political declaration are agreed, we cannot, through domestic legislation, change the terms of those documents. Therefore, whatever amendment is put down to the legislation, it could not alter the terms of the political declaration. So it is not accurate to say that all of this could be swept up with the implementation Bill, because the words in the document that we are seeking to implement have to be the ones that the House is happy with and thus has agreed before we get to that stage. Some things could be dealt with in the implementation

Bill—I do not quarrel with that—but the EU will not countenance this House changing the terms of the EU’s agreement through amendments to the Bill. That was one of the concerns the Government rightly put in relation to the meaningful vote. When we were saying that there should be amendments to the meaningful vote, the Government’s position was that we cannot really have amendments because this House cannot amend the substance of the document.

John Mann *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I will give way, but then I am going to make some progress because I realise how long I have been talking.

John Mann: Would my right hon. and learned Friend not also accept, on the proposal put to him this afternoon of having separate votes on the political declaration and the withdrawal agreement, that it is the political declaration that is up for steering what happens in the next phase, whereas the EU has made it clear that the withdrawal agreement itself is not for renegotiation with anyone, at any time?

Keir Starmer: I certainly accept the proposition that the EU has said that the withdrawal agreement is not for reopening at any stage, and it has resisted that for month after month from the Government. But I remind myself and the House that in the letter that Presidents Tusk and Juncker wrote to the Prime Minister in January they were clear that the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration are part of the “same negotiated package”. I believe those were their words. I also remind myself and the House that under section 13 the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration go together. That does not mean that there are not different views on the agreement and on the declaration, but they are part of the same negotiated package.

Anna Soubry *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I am going to make some progress now, because I wish to indicate that we would have supported amendment (c) and that we do support amendment (f), tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett). Amendment (f) addresses a different point, which is how to prevent a no-deal outcome and ensure that the House can shape the extension process. We thought we had cleared up those matters some weeks ago, but it is important that we come back to my right hon. Friend’s amendment so that we can reassert the position going forward.

Tonight really is about the opportunity to bring to an end the Government’s failed approach. For two years, they have not put forward a credible plan, or really listened to other alternatives. I used to say that the Prime Minister was surviving by the week, but I changed that to saying she was surviving by the day; now, she appears to be surviving by the hour to get through to Wednesday. Enough is enough. We cannot go on like this. The country deserves better. Parliament must take back control. We have the chance to do that tonight and we should do it.

7 pm

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Amendment (a) has already been much discussed in the course of this debate, and I do not want to detain the House long.

First, though, I wish to say what it is trying to do and what it is not trying to do. It is not some kind of massive constitutional revolution, although I know that some of my hon. Friends and others have suggested that it is. The truth is that, as you said yourself earlier in the debate, Mr Speaker, the House has since its inception owned its Standing Orders. In fact, under the principle of comity—one of the most fundamental principles of our constitution—the courts have never sought to intervene in the proceedings of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and have recognised that the House in each case controls its own proceedings.

As a matter of fact, the idea that it is an ancient constitutional principle that the Government should control the Order Paper is slightly anhistorical, if that is the right word, because the practice started in 1906, so it is not, as far as I am aware, part of our ancient constitution. For about 400 or 500 years, things that either were the House of Commons or were very much like it controlled their own Order Papers. That changed at the beginning of the 20th century, but what did not change was the fundamental point that the way that Standing Orders are decided is by a majority vote in the House of Commons, and therefore they can be adjusted by such a vote and, if so adjusted, the adjusted version is what applies.

Every time there is a private Members Bill Friday, astonishingly, the Government do something that we are apparently now entreated to regard as utterly revolutionary—they hand over to private Members the opportunity to put forward Bills. According to this soi-disant constitutional theory that has been invented, that must be a kind of revolution, because it is not the Government putting forward a Bill, but in fact we have been doing it perfectly happily for years. So there is no revolutionary intent behind the amendment at all.

The second point I wish to make is about what the amendment does do. It does exactly what has been described in the debate; namely, it provides an opportunity, simply and nothing more, for the House of Commons to begin—I stress, to begin—the process of working its way towards identifying a way forward that can command a majority in this House.

I wish to reflect for a second on my own personal history in this matter. I find sometimes from the communications, not always utterly polite, that I receive from various quarters on my iPhone, that it is supposed that I have from the beginning attempted to destroy the Government's efforts to carry out an orderly Brexit. That is obviously a more amusing story than the real one, but the real one is very sad and ordinary. I started as an entirely loyal member of the Conservative party. I had never voted against the Conservative Whip in my entire parliamentary career—not once. What is more, although I voted remain in the referendum, I was absolutely determined that we should continue our proceedings by ensuring that we fulfilled the mandate of the British people and left the European Union.

For a long while, although I personally thought from the very beginning that the Prime Minister was unwise to set out her red lines, I swallowed my concerns about them and utterly supported her in her endeavour to get her version of leave across the line. Indeed, on frequent occasions, as several of my right hon. and hon. Friends will recall, I acted as a kind of broker to try to bring together my European Research Group colleagues with

other colleagues who now sit in various parts of the House, to produce results—some of which are now encoded, as a matter of fact, in section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act. It was my endeavour to make this a process that enabled the Prime Minister to get to the end of the road successfully.

I have fulfilled that endeavour by trying to vote with the Prime Minister on every occasion on which she has brought a section 13 motion to the House. I apologise to Opposition Members for saying that I will do that again if the Prime Minister brings forward a meaningful vote 3, or 4, or infinity. I will go on voting for the Prime Minister's deal, because I happen to think that it is perfectly okay. I am very conscious that many Members do not agree with me.

The problem we have faced—all 650 of us can agree on this—is that we have not been able to get a majority for the Prime Minister's deal. That is the fact, and it is a problem, because if there is no majority for that deal and we want to leave the EU, we are forced down only one of two possible tracks, one of which is to find an alternative and the other of which is to have no deal. It was at the point a few months back when I surmised that there was a real possibility that the Prime Minister, I think by mistake rather than on purpose, was going to end up taking us out without a deal and without having adequately prepared for that, that I became so concerned that I started to work on a cross-party basis with many colleagues on both sides of the House to try to find a solution. This modest attempt to provide the House with an opportunity to vote in the majority in favour of an alternative way forward is simply part of that process.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): There is a sentiment in the House that we need somehow to compromise. Earlier, I said to the Prime Minister that it was previously unthinkable for me ever to vote for a Brexit deal. Why is it so unthinkable for Government Members to agree to support a people's vote on whatever Brexit deal we come together for?

Sir Oliver Letwin: If we go through the process that I hope we can inaugurate this evening, one thing we will all have to do is seek compromise. We almost know that if we all vote for our first preference, we will never get to a majority solution. I do not believe there is a majority in favour of the first preferences of any person in this House.

Gareth Snell: We have heard today from the Prime Minister and from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) that there is no immediate guarantee that whatever majority we find in the House will become the established policy of either of the two main political parties. Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that we may end up in a situation in which we manifest a majority for a deal that is not quite right for the Conservative party and not quite right for the Labour party, and then the Whip system will kick in and there will suddenly be no majority in Parliament at all? In my mind, that makes no deal very dangerous and real.

Sir Oliver Letwin: The danger that the hon. Gentleman speaks of is real—we all face it—but there is a solution to it, which is to ensure that as we approach a majority

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we sufficiently discuss that issue, not only among Back Benchers but with those on the two Front Benches, to ensure that there is what the shadow Secretary of State rightly referred to a few moments ago as a “sustainable majority”. We need not just a majority for something but a majority for something that will continue to persist as the various stages have to be carried through. That must be our aim.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I have agreed with my right hon. Friend’s every word so far. He has just reached the key moment. As his amendment does not set out precisely the form that the indicative votes will take, there is a real danger that if everybody votes for their first preference, we will not produce a majority for anything. His amendment does not set out the basis on which the indicative vote motions are to be tabled. How are we to resolve the method by which we table them? The opinion of the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and myself is that the single transferable vote is the best way to steer people to one conclusion. It will force compromise, except from those who will vote only for their first preference. Unless my right hon. Friend has a better alternative, how does he guard against the danger of nothing getting a majority?

Sir Oliver Letwin: My right hon. and learned Friend is asking what is clearly one of the right questions. I give him two answers. The first is that, if this amendment is passed, we will need to think very seriously over the next 24 hours about the shape of the business of the House motion to determine the process for Wednesday, and indeed about how the process will carry forward beyond that. My own view is that, at least to begin with, it may be wiser simply to disclose where the votes lie on a plain vanilla basis—this point was made very forcefully a few moments ago—with all the voting going on at once, with pink slips in the Lobby at the end of the debate and not sequentially so that we do not have the gaming of sequence. On that basis we could discover which propositions that have been put forward commanded significant support and which did not. We should do so in the hope that, as politicians—we should remind ourselves that we are not just an ordinary electorate, but politicians who have spent our lives in this business—we can, in the succeeding few days, having observed the lie of the land, zero in on a compromise that could get a majority.

My second answer is that I do not at all discount the possibility that, at a later stage—I am sure that there will have to be a later stage, and indeed I hope that the business of the House motion will book a slot for a later stage—we should resort to some other method to crystallise the majority if we find that it is otherwise difficult to do.

Mr Clarke *rose*—

Anna Soubry *rose*—

Sir Oliver Letwin: I give way first to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr Clarke: Given that the process could take a few days more, as my right hon. Friend clearly explains, does that not underline that we had better crack on with this on Wednesday? If the Government will not, for

some peculiar unknown reason, commit to Wednesday in their wind-up tonight, it is absolutely essential that we pass his amendment.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I find myself in the very odd position of being slightly more hard-line than my right hon. and learned Friend on this. I am afraid that we have to press this amendment tonight, because I do not believe that the Government have a clear view of how they would conduct this process. The terms of the amendment, which have been very carefully considered over quite a long time, are structured in a way that maximises our flexibility and our capacity as a House to work together. We should work with Members on both Front Benches on formulating Wednesday in the best possible way and producing a business of the House motion that, if possible, is a matter of consensus. That is best done under the framework of this amendment, and we should press it tonight.

Stephen Doughty: I will support the right hon. Gentleman’s amendment tonight, and I am happy to have put my name to it. What he said about not rushing through this all in one day is a very important point. We need time. There are reasonable concerns that people do not want suddenly to be deciding on the future relationship of the country, potentially for the next 40 years, in a couple of hours in here. I was pleased to hear what he said about this being the start of a process. Does he agree that in getting together and setting that business of the House motion, we must ensure that it is a fair, balanced process that enjoys the confidence of Members in all parts of the House—all parties and all persuasions—and that it is not seen as loaded in one direction or the other, or indeed in favour of the Government’s policy?

Sir Oliver Letwin: I thoroughly agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is possible—and, above all, it should be possible for us at this juncture—to ensure that the neutrality of the process is guaranteed. Of course we will have conflicting views about the ideal outcome, but if we are to come together on an outcome that all of us can tolerate, and that will consequently achieve a sustainable majority, we will have to ensure that everybody recognises the process by which we get to it as being fair and neutral as between the various options.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) *rose*—

Hilary Benn *rose*—

Sir Oliver Letwin: Of course I shall give way, but if the right hon. Members will allow me, I did indicate earlier that I would give way to the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry).

Anna Soubry: I just wish to confirm everything that the right hon. Gentleman has said about how he started off believing in the delivery of Brexit, and indeed continues to do so. His description of his journey is accurate. My question was whether he would push his amendment to a vote, and if so, why. I think he has made that very clear to the House.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I am delighted to give way next to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper).

Yvette Cooper: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. As he knows, I strongly support his amendment, and he is making an extremely important speech. Does he agree that, as the Government have effectively taken two years to get to this point, it is not unreasonable for the House, in this unusual and difficult situation, to recognise that it is likely to take us more than one day to attempt to do what the Government should have done quite a long time ago? Can I therefore urge him, when he is thinking about further steps, to highlight the importance of our identifying a further day next week when we can have similar debates and discussions if we need to, so that we can come to a conclusion? I also urge the Government to think about what they should be doing to provide for these further votes so that we can come to a consensus, and to recognise that there may need to be further binding votes in this process as well.

Sir Oliver Letwin: Unsurprisingly, given the close co-operation that there has been between us, I entirely agree with everything that the right hon. Lady has just said. It is of the utmost importance that the business of the House motion on Wednesday should also provide for a further day, or days, in which to take forward the process that will begin on Wednesday so that it can reach a successful conclusion. We will also have to attend to the question that has been discussed this evening and that began to be aired when the Prime Minister was answering questions on her statement: what the Government will do if the House reaches a majority—not for some unicorn or some ludicrous proposition that utterly contradicts common sense, but for a sensible way forward—and how we will persuade the Government at that stage to allow that majority view to be implemented. That will be a major issue.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I support his amendment and will vote for it tonight. I am delighted that he has agreed that we need to move to paper ballots and to end some of the gamesmanship that has been going on. The Father of the House raised the issue of the voting system, so I shall not repeat that point, but there are two other points that we need to bear in mind. One is whether the votes are indicative or definitive. Perhaps we will move from one to the other, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) said. The other point is how an option gets on to the ballot paper. That is also an extremely tricky, nice issue. What I want to know from the right hon. Gentleman is whether he thinks we might need time to amend the business of the House motion. The way we do that will also be a subject for discussion, as will actually going on to do it.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I was with the hon. Lady nearly to the end, but not quite to the end. I am conscious that although the point that the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford made a minute or two ago is right—we should allow ourselves a couple of days to do what should have been done over a couple of years—we are also under very considerable time pressure. There is a reality in the situation, which is that on 11 April, we will hit the buffers. Therefore, we should not spend too much time debating the process. We should, if possible, move forward on the basis that there is sufficient consensus about the process not to have to

debate it, and get on with the substance. To that end, it would be sensible if we began this process by allowing Members who wish to put forward alternatives to do so. There are groups of people who support, for example, a people's vote as a confirmatory process or otherwise, Norway plus, or the propositions hitherto put forward by the Opposition. We need to let those Members formulate their propositions in their own terms, in the ordinary way.

You have a long record, Mr Speaker—previous Speakers have also had a long record—of finding a way of selecting for debate amendments that carry sufficient weight in terms of numbers, cross-party support and so on. That is a perfectly proper process to use. It does not involve any one of us tilting the playing field, and it enables us to proceed without too much further debate about process.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Oliver Letwin: I will give way, but once I have done so I am going to conclude.

Stewart Hosie: The right hon. Gentleman is being very generous in giving way. The Scottish National party will be delighted to support his amendment because if the House controls the process, it is likely that all the options can be considered, including revocation, which is the only thing that we can do unilaterally. I say that publicly now partly as a pitch for revocation to be on the options paper, but mainly to say that I rather lack the trust in the Government that they would include all the valid options if they were in control of the timetable.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I am glad that I did give way to the hon. Gentleman—first, because I am obviously very grateful that he and his colleagues will be supporting the amendment, and secondly, because I wholeheartedly endorse what he says. Personally, I am utterly opposed to revocation and I am also actually wholly unpersuaded of the merits of a people's vote at the moment, but both are obviously serious options to consider. Incidentally, I am also radically opposed to a no-deal exit, but if some of my colleagues wish to put that forward as a serious proposition, it is a serious proposition that would need to be debated. Yes, it is essential that we should be able to look at all the serious options—not wild unicorns, but things that we could actually do to carry this process forward in one direction or another. I feel confident, Mr Speaker, that when you look at sensibly phrased motions of very different kinds, you will choose for debate all those that are serious possibilities that the House needs to consider; that is in the interests of the House and in the interests of the nation.

I will end my remarks by mentioning something that comes from personal experience. Liberal Democrat colleagues may recall this, as well as some of my hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches. There was a time, in 2010, when this nation faced another cliff edge. We were within days of the Bank of England discovering that our creditors would not finance the UK any more. It was just after the 2010 election, which no one had won, and it was clear that nobody could form a Government except by coalition. We were very heavily indebted due

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to what had happened in 2008, and we were told by the Governor of the Bank of England that if a coalition was not formed pretty quickly, he personally felt that the lenders would go on strike and we would have a meltdown.

Of course, there were then discussions between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party, and between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party. I was a part of the Conservative party team on that occasion and I was informed, when we had finished those negotiations and had brought them to a successful conclusion, that the cleverest and most experienced people in the civil service—incidentally, I do not wish to demean the civil service, and I hardly can because my wife was a senior civil servant—had put their collective minds to the task and formed teams to find out whether it was possible to have a coalition agreement, either between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats or between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party. They had worked the situation through in awesome detail and had convinced themselves that it was absolutely impossible to form a coalition—that it could not be done.

We sat down, and four days later there was a coalition agreement. And why did that come about? It came about because politicians sat down and were not concerned with the kinds of things that people are concerned with when they are very brilliant administrators, but were concerned with trying to find out how to accommodate the essential requirements of the other side. This is, of course, the process that should have happened two years back in this connection—but we have the opportunity to do it now. I hope and pray that if the House does vote for this amendment, it will not see this approach simply as a set of votes in the abstract, but as the beginning of a process in which, by discovery of where the land lies, we can then come together, find a consensus, get a majority and carry on forward in a sensible way.

7.24 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): This morning, I left my home, not far from the town of St Andrews in my constituency, to set off on my regular commute. Like other Members of this House from different parts of the United Kingdom, I travelled quite literally by plane, train and automobile. Like most weeks, I had no idea when I would be going home to my family and my constituents, but unlike most weeks, my family, my constituents and I had no idea whether, by the time I got home, I would still be afforded the rights and privileges that EU citizens take as their own. What a state to be in, all these years on. That is why I thank the right hon. Members for West Dorset (*Sir Oliver Letwin*) and for Derby South (*Margaret Beckett*), and their colleagues, for the work that they have put into their amendments, which the SNP will obviously back this evening.

We are here for no other reason than an attempt to offset a Tory civil war. This disaster is years in the making, and we are only in this situation because once upon a time David Cameron decided to call an EU referendum so that he could avoid a full-blown Tory civil war. There are many people in the House who will disagree with me.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): Yes, yes.

Stephen Gethins: But I am not sure that there are many who will disagree with me when I say that it is not working very well, is it? How is that attempt to avoid a Tory civil war going? Does the Minister want to intervene now? No, I did not think so, because there is a full-blown civil war in his party. And this is a Tory party determined to take the rest of us down as well, but today's amendments give us the chance—for the moment—to stave off that opportunity that the Tories are trying to give us.

The Prime Minister continues to appeal to the hardliners in her own party, rather than to face up to the reality of minority government, but this is a lost cause. The Brexiteers who campaigned without any sort of plan are the ones who got us into this mess. And, frankly, the message to the Prime Minister must be that they are unlikely to get us out of it. Now, it is not for me to judge Conservative party management—the voters will have their opportunity to do that in due course—but what strikes me is just how in thrall this Conservative Prime Minister is to the extremists in her own party. With that, I want to praise some Conservative Members, because there are Members who I disagree with and who disagree with me, but who have stuck their necks out, and look at the way they have been treated.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (*Nick Boles*), who is in his place, and I disagree over plenty, including Brexit; he wants us to leave the European Union and I do not. Some Members have tried to make positive proposals, although we do not always agree on them. But even when one of those proposals is accepted by the Government—as was the case with the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (*Alberto Costa*)—we are now in a situation whereby the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford finds himself deselected and the hon. Member for South Leicestershire finds himself sacked, yet all along—I disagree with them over this—they have backed the Prime Minister's deal. What does that tell us about trying to find some kind of consensus or trying to reach across? This is a Government who are in thrall to the very extremes, and this House cannot put up with that any longer. Just look at the invitation list of those who were treated to lunch at Chequers: the very people voting against the Prime Minister. This tells us everything about a Prime Minister who has lost control of her own party and who has dragged us into this folly.

Anna Soubry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Gethins: I will give way to the right hon. Lady because she has some experience in this.

Anna Soubry: I do indeed. Does it strike the hon. Gentleman as being quite perverse that the very people invited to Chequers were the very people who, in December, sought a motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister as leader of the Conservative party and plotted against her? Is he also aware that a lot of Conservative associations hold their annual general meetings at the end of this week, and does he share my concern that too many right hon. and hon. Conservative Members will be more concerned about the outcome of those AGMs than about the effect of a no-deal Brexit—or, indeed, any Brexit—on their constituents?

Stephen Gethins: The right hon. Lady knows the Conservative party much, much better than I do, and it shows. She makes a very valid point. The small, elitist group of Conservative MPs—all men, incidentally—who were invited to Chequers have failed, and failed spectacularly, on their pet, lifelong political project. I would not let that lot anywhere the TV remote in my house, never mind the most important decision that we have had to make for generations.

Wera Hobhouse: Would the hon. Gentleman extend that to listening to a mob of people who will apparently rebel if we ever do not deliver on this vote of the people? Nobody listens to the peaceful 1 million people and 5 million people who want to revoke article 50. They are not giving us death threats or mobbing us; they are just peaceful people. Yet we are worried about the keyboard warriors who threaten us from the security of their homes. Is that not also wrong?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Lady makes a very powerful point about the way that millions protested peacefully on Saturday. I am delighted that our First Minister joined them, as did the leader of the Liberal Democrats, colleagues in the Labour party and even some Conservative colleagues. They were right to have done so.

The Prime Minister is effectively out of power, and we need to move on. Her deal has been rejected twice, overwhelmingly, which means that it becomes more and more pointless to debate it with every passing hour. The Opposition spokesperson was right to point that out. The House of Commons must seize control of this process tonight so that we can hold those indicative votes and start—start—to find a way out of this mess. We know from the UK Government's own warnings that her deal is not in the best interests of anybody in the UK, and we know that no deal is not in anybody's best interests either. This Parliament has come together and comprehensively rejected both her deal and no deal. Having wasted almost three years, the Government have run out of options and run out of ideas, and we need to step up.

Where we are today is not a farce: it is a tragedy, and a tragedy that is taking us all down with it. I assure colleagues that, as somebody who fundamentally wants Scotland to be an independent state, it really gives me no pleasure when I speak to colleagues overseas and find that the UK's international reputation is broken. That hurts us all. When I was working in the European institutions, I saw that overall in the EU, the UK could be a real force for good. Although I did not always agree with everything that it did, I acknowledge many of the positive contributions made by UK citizens to the EU project. It is right that we all acknowledge that.

What was more striking, however, was the way in which the UK and Ireland worked as the closest possible allies and partners in the European Union. For the first time in that troubled history, there was truly a working as a partnership of equals alongside other European states. Now—again, this gives me no pleasure, nor, I suspect, the Irish either—the boot that has historically been on the foot of the UK is now on the other foot. As Robert Cooper wrote in the *Financial Times*:

“The smallest insiders (Dublin in the case of Brexit) matter more than the biggest outsider (us).”

That tells us everything about solidarity in the workings of the European Union. Yet even on this, the Irish do not crow but have been honest brokers. The best friends any of us can have are our most critical friends—the ones who tell us the truth when we want to see it the least. I have heard, when these matters of truth have come out, Brexiteers getting enraged and annoyed at the truth that people dare speak from Dublin.

Let me remind all Members that Ireland is independent and is not coming back—and it is not difficult to see why. Independent states thrive in the European Union. That is a means of strengthening democracy and sovereignty. The EU is a partnership of equals in a way that the UK simply is not. I want to see Scotland as a full and independent member state of the EU. That would be healthier in our relationship as a modern outward-looking nation in the same way that it has been healthy for the Anglo-Irish relationship.

Here in the UK, people are seeing through this mess. At the weekend, as we have heard, hundreds of thousands of people from the length and breadth of the UK marched for our collective future. Since then, at the last look, the revocation of article 50 petition has been signed by 5.5 million people, including 17% of the electorate in my own constituency—and that is not even the highest figure in Scotland. Millions of people can see what this Government cannot. What this Government clearly cannot see, but these people can, is that when you are careering towards the cliffs you slam on the brakes—that is what they are there for. Let us not forget that Parliament has that power, as was recognised by the courts, because the UK Parliament throughout this has retained, and always will retain in these circumstances, sovereignty in a way that the Scottish Parliament does not. Spot the difference, everybody: the UK Parliament, as a member of the EU, retains sovereignty; the Scottish Parliament, as this process has shown us, does not. This may provide a mechanism to stop doing untold damage to those we all represent.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. I want to ask him about something that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said earlier—that revoking article 50 could only ever be done once, and it would be permanent and could never be reversed. Has he, like me, read the decision of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Justice? Does he agree that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has got that wrong and that if this House chose to revoke article 50, it would be possible at some point in the future to resubmit the article 50 notice, provided that it was done in good faith?

Stephen Gethins: As usual, my hon. and learned Friend makes a very powerful point. I know that she tried to intervene on the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, but those on the Treasury Bench will have been listening to and taking note as well.

We are told that the biggest problem with this is the European elections. Let me tell the Government something: the biggest problem is not the European elections—not people taking part in a democratic election to elect parliamentarians—but the jobs that the Government's plans are going to cost, the public services that will be hit by Brexit and the opportunities that we have all had being denied to future generations. Each and every Member of the European Parliament is elected. That

[Stephen Gethins]

Parliament sits at the heart of the European project. We sit in a Parliament where not even half the parliamentarians who serve here are elected. It is a disgrace—it really is. We will be caused a huge amount of damage just because the Government want to avoid the democracy and scrutiny that comes with a European Parliament election. However, I am not that surprised when we have a Prime Minister who, as we have heard today, not only opposes a referendum and giving people a say in this momentous decision but is even opposed to respecting the will of Parliament.

If the Brexit debate has done anything, it has shown that the UK and the way in which it operates is no longer fit for purpose, as the example of the House of Lords amply illustrates. The EU is not perfect—no union involving 28 sovereign and independent member states ever can be—but, critically, it has the checks and balances to protect the smallest members from the largest. Within the UK, we have a constitutional set-up that is somewhat outdated and has not caught up with the momentous decisions that we are having to make now, but in the EU there is a modern and up-to-date relationship between member states—a true partnership of equals. I say this to a Government who have failed to respect devolution throughout this process: the EU would not be allowed to do that; indeed, it cannot be allowed to do that. To the people of Scotland, our message is this: there is a better way to do this that our friends and neighbours—our nearest neighbours in places like Ireland and Denmark—are pursuing successfully. This is not as good as it gets. In the meantime, and until we reach that point, it is up to each and every one of us to continue to work as constructively as we can.

I do not want to see our friends and neighbours south of the border dragged over a cliff edge by an out of touch and irresponsible group of Tory anti-EU ultras—no country deserves that. The easiest thing for us in Scotland would be to say, “We voted against this. It’s not our problem,” but actually it is our problem. We cannot just say, “The Tories made this mess. It’s for them to clear it up,” because it is clear that they are incapable of clearing up the mess they have made. The damage these plans would do to everyone across these islands would be devastating and felt for decades to come.

I again thank Members who have worked constructively. Today’s motion provides a start, but it is only that—a start on undoing this devastating Brexit, which has been brought to us by a Tory party that is out of control.

7.40 pm

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Mr Speaker, I will not long delay the House. I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) on making some very interesting points, many of which I find myself in agreement with. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) on his absolutely formidable speech, which renders anything I can say in support pretty nugatory.

I will be voting for amendment (a) tonight, but I want to make some general points. It is of the greatest importance for our country that we should now move to a conclusion on what is merely the beginning of a tortuous road that will eventually lead to our departure

from the European Union. Like my right hon. Friend, I voted to trigger article 50, despite serious reservations on the timing. I have voted with the Government in every single Division on the withdrawal Act and on every other piece of legislation to advance the delivery of Brexit. I have voted to leave and to honour the referendum many more times than my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) and many others. I find it ironic that those who apparently wish most fervently to leave are those who have most consistently voted against the withdrawal agreement and thus inhibited any real progress.

I should make it clear that there are no circumstances in which I will vote for a no deal, and nor will I back what would be a deeply divisive second referendum. Both are a recipe for further chaos and division, which should be unacceptable to those on all sides of this argument, for whom it is surely time for logic and common sense to prevail.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), I still believe in sanity. This is a country with a profound tradition of moderation and common sense. Our democratic institutions are elastic enough to be capable of compromise and of moving from the rhetoric of rejection to the painful necessity of an actual deal. It grieves me very much to see our influence abroad being so degraded, as the hon. Member for North East Fife said, as allies and partners who are close friends watch from afar with dismay as we burn up our reservoirs of good will and our reputation for common sense, most especially in the European Union.

Although it does not feel like it at the moment, this ancient country, in which we are so very privileged to live, is in general marked apart from many others by the tolerance, good nature and generally civilised manner of its democracy and institutions. These qualities are envied the world over; they need careful nurturing, but are currently entirely absent from the field. What on earth has happened to our pragmatism, self-restraint and common sense? It grieves me that our reputation is now under such extreme pressure at home and abroad; indeed, our reputation has been gravely diminished.

I greatly regret having to speak in this way in our Parliament; indeed, I cannot believe that I should need to do so. However, like many others, I find myself truly distraught at the painful, difficult and intractable position in which our country finds itself. What I really want, as, I am sure, do most Members of this House, is that the Government should be able to get on with the work of creating a more confident and hope-filled country that really cares for the weakest among us and for those who find their lives complicated and difficult; that encourages opportunity, enterprise and life chances; and that most especially keeps its vision of global service and influence, as a long-standing force for humanity and the general good.

Stephen Doughty: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Nicholas Soames: I will not, because many others want to speak. I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

All of us know that many of our constituents are understandably extremely angry that Brexit has so distracted the Government from the serious issues we face—the NHS, education, crime, the reform of social care, housing, the environment and climate change, and all the other great issues that have inevitably had to be neglected as Brexit has gradually sucked the life blood out of the Government. As you very well know, Mr Speaker, the public believe that we have collectively let them down badly, and this is leading inevitably and very seriously to the fraying of the bonds between Parliament and the nation. The national interest clearly dictates that we have to get this done and that we must get on with the vital work of establishing our future relationships with our most important economic partners and allies.

At the beginning of the business of the House every day, the Speaker's Chaplain reads the prayer that enjoins Members most especially to

“never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind”.

All of us need to pay a little more attention to those wise, profound and humane words, which have guided and succoured this House through thick and thin down the years and in worse days than these. It is now time that Parliament did its duty by the country, for the national interest and for national unity, and regardless of party or inclination, to bring these matters to a belated conclusion.

7.46 pm

Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab): It is, as ever, a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), although I should perhaps place on record that I totally disagree with what he and the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) said on one issue, because I feel that the only way we will resolve this situation peacefully and in a way that brings people together is by going back to the people for confirmation of whatever decision this House makes. Otherwise, I fear we will be seen as engaging in an establishment stitch-up, thinking of something that we will then foist on the people. It is essential to seek their view.

I am very conscious that today's is a crowded agenda. Amendment (f), standing in my name and those of others on both sides of the House, is so straightforward that it practically speaks for itself, so I intend to be brief. I am also mindful of how many others want to speak.

I recognise, of course, that the House has voted on more than one occasion against the UK leaving the EU without a deal; indeed, the Prime Minister has acknowledged that. I am also well aware that there are nevertheless Members who feel that, whatever the evidence to the contrary, leaving with no deal would not cause us major problems, and that there are even some who actively support our leaving without a deal or at least regard it as a desirable outcome. Surely, however, few if any believe it would be desirable that the UK should not make such a decision but drift or fall into it by inadvertence—almost by accident. That would be the very definition of irresponsibility.

We still have a very tight timetable, which presently encompasses, in addition, a potential recess period. As I said, my amendment is extremely simple and

straightforward. It seeks to ensure that the UK can leave the EU without a deal only with the explicit consent of the House of Commons.

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend is making a very important speech about the risks of no deal. The Prime Minister said today:

“Unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen.”

However, she has not provided for any process to ensure that those safeguards are in place. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we therefore need her amendment, otherwise there is a danger that we will drift by accident into the kind of chaotic, damaging no deal that both the CBI and the TUC have warned against?

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point, in line with the many contributions she has made on this issue. I will come to that in a moment.

The amendment guards against a no-deal withdrawal that lacks the clear and evident consent of the House. It also allows for the possibility of the House being in recess when such a danger arises and provides for the seeking of any necessary extension of the leaving deadline. I was originally very encouraged by the Prime Minister's statement today, as my right hon. Friend said, that

“Unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen.”

That is what the amendment says, so my hope was that the Government might be prepared simply to accept it. That would seem the logical thing to do—I am giving the vehicle by which they can give effect to the statement that the Prime Minister made today.

I listened with care to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I think he said that, despite the fact that the Government are not taking any steps, as my right hon. Friend just pointed out, to prevent us from simply running out of time, the amendment was not necessary. He said the problem with my proposal was that there would be only two options left before the House, and the legal default would be that we leave without a deal. That is the point—that is why I tabled the amendment. Although I appreciated the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's explanation, I know that otherwise, we would leave by legal default without a deal. He agreed that the Government will need to come back to the Dispatch Box to deal with these issues. I suggest that the Ministers on the Front Bench pass on to their right hon. Friend that the very simple thing to do—it need take no time at all—is to accept this amendment and ensure that the House does not run the indefensible risk of stumbling out of the EU without a deal.

7.52 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to participate in this debate and to follow the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett). I can tell her now that I shall be voting for her amendment if it is put to the vote at the end of the evening, as I hope it will be. I shall return to that in a moment.

I am the second signatory to amendment (a), and I want briefly to outline my thoughts on its necessity and why it may help the House. I have obviously approached this in a slightly different way from my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). As the House will be perfectly well aware, I continue to believe that Brexit is a historic mistake of very great

[Mr Dominic Grieve]

proportions, and I am afraid that at no time since the referendum took place have I felt, despite efforts on my part to do so, that we are moving towards a position where I could ever take the view that the future outside the EU was going to be better than remaining in it.

But I certainly voted to trigger article 50. I did it in deference to the result of the referendum and in the full knowledge that we could not even start negotiations unless we did so. Although I have occasionally been characterised as trying to obstruct Brexit, the truth is that, throughout 2017 and 2018, most of the work I did was to try to improve the process because of the concerns I had that it was being shortcut, thereby making mistaken outcomes all the more likely. I think there were only two occasions when I voted on substantive motions about alternatives, but that was because I was rather worried about the extent to which the Government seemed to be self-imposing red lines, and on neither occasion did it come anywhere close to success. I accepted that, and I accepted also that I should reserve my position on what the Government were negotiating and indicated that on a number of occasions in debates.

Where I disagree with or differ from my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset is that, when I finally came to look at the Government's deal as negotiated in December, I thought it was a deal that was going to condemn us to a third-rate future. That is the basis on which I have been unwilling to support it. In saying that, I am entirely mindful of the fact that it has been negotiated in good faith by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and I believe that every Member on the Front Bench has exercised as much diligence as possible to get the best possible outcome. Of course, that raises another question. If the outcome secured in December was so unsatisfactory that it was defeated by 220 votes in this House, and defeated because the examination of it from differing directions by Members on both sides of the House found it wanting, that calls into question whether in fact a fundamental error has been made and the entire process has inherent flaws.

A tendency that has crept in ever since the referendum result has been to close down debate on the basis that it is not proper to pursue it, because the referendum result must act as a *diktat* that prevents such debate from taking place. I have been long enough in this House to have experienced that sort of argument before, sometimes when Governments get very large majorities in general elections. I even remember on one occasion a Member of this House arguing that, because the then Labour Government had such a big majority, there was no real need any more to have the Second Reading debate of Bills, and the matter should be just put through on the nod and we should move on to the detail.

The one thing I am absolutely persuaded of is that we cannot have a working democracy where we close down debates. Democracy is all about the permanent shifting of tectonic plates. It goes on every second of every day, all the time. Just because somebody is defeated on one matter, it does not mean that they have to give up. They can keep going at it—and heaven knows, we have watched Members do just that in this House. In the same way, to argue that the referendum result imposes a permanency that cannot be challenged is, in my judgment, entirely wrong. When I look at the mess into which we have got

ourselves, it appears to be at least in part the consequence of pushing that argument and thereby preventing the democratic process from working.

We get criticism that this House is not functioning properly or that democracy is not working. I think that this House has an exceptional capacity to reach sensible outcomes, but, I have to say to my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench, it has been consistently prevented from doing its ordinary job by the straitjacket that has been imposed on the extent of what is acceptable to debate.

Stephen Doughty: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that, just as our activities in this place are a crucial part of democracy, so too are marches on the street with 1 million people, or 5.5 million people signing a petition? They are all part of our democracy and should all be treated with respect.

Mr Grieve: They should indeed, particularly when anybody who participated in Saturday's march, as I did, will have seen people who were optimistic, tolerant and filled with good humour and benevolence, even towards those with whom they disagree. It was very noticeable. I contrast that with some of the rabidity of the comments of which I have been on the receiving end from those who write to me and insist that, in some extraordinary way, the referendum has closed down areas of debate and made them illegitimate. My hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench really need to ponder that when they consider why things are not working properly for us at present.

I do not want to take up too much of the House's time, but it is for that reason that I have supported the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset and worked with him and others on amendment (a). Given that the Government have run into the sand and had their deal rejected, we have to find an alternative. I acknowledge that my right hon. Friend and I may differ in part on that alternative, but where we do not differ is in our willingness to have an open debate. I was greatly helped by the way in which he approached, in his characteristic and tolerant fashion, the examination of alternatives, just as I was by what the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), said about the breadth of the approach that might be adopted. It is clear that, if we are going to make progress, there should be nothing that is forbidden to be discussed. It is equally clear that we have to create an environment in which individual Members of this House do not feel that by supporting one option they thereby close the opportunity to express a view on another.

I will say no more about process at the moment, except to point out that I think it most unlikely that, if this motion is passed, we will come to a conclusion on Wednesday. It is part of a process. It certainly must not be dragged out, because we are so short of time. Equally, however, we have to take it at a sensible pace. Given that we have taken two and a half years to get ourselves into a complete dead end, it is worth taking a few weeks to ensure that we can get ourselves out of it, and that is what we ought to do.

I am the first to accept that the outcome may not be my preferred one, which remains the same: whichever option we take, I happen to believe that the evidence is now very clear that the public would like a final say and

an opportunity to express a completely alternative view, which might even be to remain in the EU. I think that is their right and that we should be aiming to achieve that. Whatever the outcome may be, amendment (a) offers, for the first time, an opportunity to do it. I entirely disagree with my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that this is some desperate constitutional novelty. It is the House doing its job. I am afraid that the Government have only themselves to blame—through their intransigence over many months of signals being given right across the House—if on this occasion they have lost the leadership to the House itself. They could have had that leadership.

I will finish with a request. The Prime Minister is indeed the leader—the leading Minister—in this country. She is in post. Will she please provide that leadership? If she does that, participates fully in this process and is prepared to open her mind to the variety of options we are going to discuss and debate, and to close her mind to none of them, I believe she will find the solution to this problem and that the House will be able to support her. But that needs a change in mindset, both by her and by some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, to get out of this narrow focus.

I said earlier that I would find it disgraceful if the Cabinet minutes reflect putting party political advantage ahead of the national interest. I do not know whether that is true or not, but it has been very widely reported. We have to put the national interest first and listen to what people are saying to us. It seems to me there is a consistent pattern of wanting to bring this unhappy episode to a conclusion and to do so in a way that reflects majority opinion in this country. We can do that by identifying the options and then putting it back to the public.

8.4 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). The right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) reminded us of the prayers that start each day. I do not know whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman set out with a desire to please, but I think his speech certainly did please many of us in the House.

I rise to support amendments (a) and (f), which were moved in compelling speeches by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) and, in this context, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). We need to remember that we have this opportunity to debate those two amendments for two reasons and two reasons only. First, the Government's deal was defeated for a second time. We are discussing a motion in neutral terms, and we would not have had the chance to do that had it not been for the efforts of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield and many other people last summer. Secondly, the European Union decided to give us an additional two weeks.

The fundamental problem, however, has not changed, which is the Government's inability to get their deal through. Indeed, they are so lacking in confidence about their ability to win a third time that we are not entirely sure whether and when they will bring it back before the House. That means that, if nothing changes in 17 days' time, either we will leave with no deal or the

Government will have to apply for—and be granted by the European Union—an extension. The moment of danger has been delayed briefly, but it has not passed.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman mentions the moment of danger. Would it not be prudent to put in place steps to revoke so that we do not go headlong over the cliff? The European Union's deal has been rejected twice. We are now staring down the barrel of no deal, and further extension is probably unlikely. We have to get our heads around it: revoke is coming down the line and we have to make a decision quickly.

Hilary Benn: I hear the hon. Gentleman's argument, but for the reasons I am about to advance I think the Prime Minister made a very significant statement today, to which many others have drawn attention. What she said bears repeating:

“Unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not happen.”

I take that to be a solemn and binding commitment from the Prime Minister, and the inevitable consequence, which she did not want to acknowledge in her statement, is that, unless she gets her deal through, she will have to apply for an extension prior to 12 April.

Why has amendment (a) been tabled? We are discussing it because the Government's deal has been defeated twice, no deal has been defeated twice, and the Prime Minister has said twice and more, “We know what Parliament is against; what is Parliament for?” The purpose of the amendment is extremely simple: it is to give us the chance to show what we might be in favour of. If the Government were doing their job, the amendment would not be necessary; it is because the Government are not doing their job that it is required.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office is a very charming man, but his arguments against the amendment were, frankly, hopelessly confused. I will summarise the Government's position. They are opposed to the amendment, but they want there to be a process. If the amendment is defeated they promise their own process, but that appears to consist of a debate later in the week and then something later on, the precise form of which we do not yet know. They seem to want Parliament to agree on something, but they cannot promise to accept any consensus that might emerge out of this process. They castigate us for not having reached an agreement, but oppose tonight the very proposal that is intended to enable us to do precisely that. The situation is frankly absurd. If I may say so in his absence, I do not think that the Minister's heart was really in his argument tonight, because the Government seem to be saying, in effect, “Well, if it passes, we'll get on with it.” Let us break out of the circular argument—my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) expressed it brilliantly—and get on with it.

I simply want to encourage every Member who has a realistic proposition to put it forward on Wednesday if the amendment is carried. In the report that the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union published the very day after the first defeat of the Government's plan, it set out the broad options. This is not about the withdrawal agreement, because the Prime Minister could not have been clearer today when she said:

“Everyone should be absolutely clear that changing the withdrawal agreement is simply not an option. This is about the political declaration.”

[Hilary Benn]

There was an exchange across the Chamber about that, and there is a fundamental flaw in the suggestion that the withdrawal agreement alone—not the political declaration—might somehow be passed this week. If that happened and the EU responded by saying, “Ah! You have passed the withdrawal agreement alone this week. Okay, we will give you till 22 May”, what would happen if we then asked the EU in the week leading up to 22 May whether we could have a bit more time? The EU would say, “No, you can’t, because you didn’t take part in the European elections.” I am afraid that the proposition of a separate vote on the withdrawal agreement as a way out of the crisis falls at the first hurdle.

On Wednesday, when our pink slips are distributed, I am looking forward to voting Aye to remaining in a customs union with the EU; Aye to a Norway plus-type arrangement, which could embrace Common Market 2.0; and Aye to a confirmatory referendum. Other Members may be looking forward to voting for things that they would be prepared to consider.

My final point is that the word “indicative” is important. This Wednesday is about indicating a direction of travel that Members might be prepared to support. It is not definitive. We may well need to get to that point in the next stage of the process. So Wednesday is not the end, merely the beginning. It is long overdue, and I hope that the House will enable it to happen by carrying amendment (a) tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. The situation is perfectly manageable, but a significant number of hon. Members are still seeking to catch my eye. As a guide, although I am not imposing a time limit, if each Member spoke for approximately seven minutes, everybody would be accommodated. To speak for significantly longer than that would be a notable discourtesy, of which I know that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), for one, would not wish to be guilty.

8.12 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is novel for me not to have a time limit, so I am used to those strictures.

It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), the Chairman of the Brexit Committee. He made the clear point that we have shown what we are against, but at some point, we as a House will have to show what we are in favour of. Speaking personally, I still think that the best deal on the table is the Prime Minister’s deal. It respects the referendum result, which is critical, and it deals with the complex problem of how on earth a country that has such integrated supply chains, with thousands of lorries coming through Dover, can maintain frictionless trade as far as possible, yet take back sovereignty in the key areas of the single market and the customs union. It is very difficult, but that circle has been squared in the Prime Minister’s proposal and I would like to vote for it again. However, I have to accept that it may not come back, and that so far it has been defeated very heavily indeed.

Although procedure is important—the amendments before us are about how Parliament brings forward the next stage of the debate—I do not want to focus on it.

I believe that we must focus on first principles—the underlying principles of how we will deliver on the referendum result.

The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said that we should consider a second referendum, a single market plus customs union and so on. However, there is one fundamental problem with all those proposals, which my constituents who voted to leave would raise. It is an issue that we all have to grapple with—free movement. I want to focus on two principles: free movement and free trade. Free movement is not an easy one, because it forces us to discuss immigration, to which we have so far failed to give anything like enough attention.

I feel strongly about the subject. In justifying a second referendum, it has been said that the facts have changed since the 2016 referendum and that therefore there should be another vote. We must consider what has changed, and whether, if it had been known in the referendum campaign of 2016, it would have led to a different result. I suggest that the single fact, if it had been known in advance, that would have had the most impact—whether we like it or not—is that Brexit has directly led to an unprecedented increase in immigration into this country from outside the EU.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Free movement is of course a double-sided coin. The hon. Gentleman mentioned immigration, but there is also emigration. We have seen on the television some people who voted for Brexit and then decided to retire to Spain now ruing the day of their rash action when they followed some of the crasser tabloid newspapers. When we talk about freedom of movement, we must remember that we are talking about rights that the hon. Gentleman enjoys, which he is perhaps trying to take away from everybody else and himself.

James Cartlidge: It is fair to say that freedom of movement works both ways. Of course, if we end free movement for those coming to this country, there will be an impact on our rights when we go to our nearest neighbours. We must ask ourselves a profound question in the context of the EU debate: would our country still vote to leave on the basis of concerns about immigration if people knew that the result of ending free movement would be that immigration would not decrease, but that we as citizens would face reduced rights in going to other countries in Europe, such as having to pay charges and fill in visa applications, at least for work and reasons other than tourism?

Let us look at the facts. The latest figures show that net migration into this country from the EU is down to 57,000. Net immigration into this country from outside the EU is up to 261,000. A year ago, the two top countries in the list were Poland and Romania, and they are now India and China. We are not talking Liechtenstein in population terms here. That is a serious point.

I remember the referendum campaign, in which I took an active part. I did home and away debates with my neighbour my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin). To anyone who claims that immigration was not a reason for the vote, I say that, yes, there are many people who for many years believed in leaving the EU for reasons of sovereignty—I strongly respect that view, which is based on a noble principle of democracy—but I know that what swung

many undecided people in my constituency was house building in the countryside. Why? Because they believed that if we left the EU, there would be no immigration and we would not need those houses. It sounds crazy, but I have got the emails to prove it, and colleagues will know it.

Immigration was front and centre of the leave campaign. We remember Nigel Farage standing in front of a poster of the new Untermenschen. Mr Speaker, you know the meaning of that word—it has a very serious meaning. The poster showed a whole column of people and the implication was that if we left, what it depicted would not happen. We know that that campaign played with fire. It opened Pandora's box, and somehow we have to put the lid back on. When I raise the matter, I do not do it happily. I am personally relaxed about immigration to this country because I recognise the huge contribution immigrants have made and will continue to make.

However, we must now be honest and say to the country that in the coming days, options will come before us in which free movement is back on the table. What if it is the case that keeping free movement will enable us to control immigration in future by having the strictest possible rules on immigration from 90% of the world population?

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I come from a nation that is positive about the benefits of immigration. Indeed, my constituents embrace immigrants in their communities. The hon. Gentleman makes a point about immigration about China and India, but he has not mentioned that those people are generally international students, who leave at the end of their degrees. Those students should be taken out of net migration figures.

James Cartlidge: That is a perfectly fair point, but of course the reason they are in there is that many do choose to remain. [*Interruption.*] I take the figures as they are. I remember your time strictures, Mr Speaker, so I will move on to my second point, which is on free trade.

The reason we have the situation with immigration is that it is a discriminatory system. We allow free movement from the EU, but not from non-EU countries. The reason it is discriminatory is that we have a trade deal with the EU called the single market. Of course, it was in the Lancaster House speech that the red line on the single market was first stated, but I want to return to a Lancaster House speech in which the Prime Minister was addressing an audience of business leaders. She said:

“Just think for a moment what a prospect that is. A single market without barriers—visible or invisible—giving you direct and unhindered access to the purchasing power of over 300 million of the world's wealthiest and most prosperous people. Bigger than Japan. Bigger than the United States. On your doorstep. And with the Channel Tunnel to give you direct access to it. It's not a dream. It's not a vision. It's not some bureaucrat's plan. It's for real. And it's only five years away.”

That was the Lancaster House speech of Mrs Thatcher in 1988. There are only three MPs left in the House who voted against the Single European Act. One is the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell), one is the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), and the third one is the Leader of the Opposition. The single market is not some socialist conspiracy; it is capitalism and it is free trade, and I believe fundamentally in free trade.

In the days to come, we will have to look at other issues. We will have to be prepared to flex our red lines, to be blunt, to deliver on the referendum result in a way that preserves free trade and gives us the best possible deal for our constituents.

8.21 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): As a member of the Procedure Committee, I have been thinking for about six months about the voting system. In autumn, the then Brexit Secretary came with proposals to change how we were going to run the meaningful vote. Since Christmas, however, it has been evident that we need a new system. The simple binary yes-no choice does not work very well in a situation like Brexit, where there are multiple options. We ran into problems on House of Lords reform, and the Prime Minister has found similar difficulties in the past six months. Partly, that is due to the way she has handled the situation, but it is also partly because it is very easy, with a yes-no approach, to build coalitions against things and quite a lot harder to build consensus and coalitions for options.

A month ago, the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), and I proposed using preference votes as we do for Select Committee Chairs. We were probably a bit premature with that idea, and I am extremely pleased to be able to support the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) tonight. It is clear that the Prime Minister's brinkmanship has brought us to this self-inflicted crisis. It is now essential that Parliament takes control and uses a new process. I am also pleased that the right hon. Member for West Dorset has agreed that we should be moving to paper ballots, voting on all the options in parallel. That will reduce considerably the scope for the gamesmanship that is bedeviling this process.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The hon. Lady makes a very good argument. We were discussing this earlier. Parliament is quite inefficient at making certain decisions, as we are finding out. Just as an analogy, if we sent Parliament off to buy a gin and tonic the questions would be what sort of gin? What sort of tonic? Would there be ice or no ice? Would there be lemon or lime? The paralysis from that one decision would probably be something akin to what we have with Brexit at the moment. Her suggested approach makes eminent sense in a Parliament that cannot decide any more than yes or no.

Helen Goodman: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I was going to say that the benefit of a new system is that it would enable us to find out where the consensus actually lies. It is absolutely obvious that not everyone in this situation will get their first choice, but we need to make a distinction between those things that Members and the public are very worried about and find totally unacceptable, such as no deal, and those things that, while they may not be a person's first choice, they can live with and can go along with. The process we need to move into needs to institutionalise that.

It is also obvious that building consensus will be painful, because it inevitably involves compromise. That, however, is essential on a major national project such as Brexit. It is much better for us to acknowledge those difficulties and take a calmer approach to reconcile

[Helen Goodman]

Parliament and the public than to be driven into a high-conflict situation with the rising tone of anger that we see at the moment.

The one thing that the right hon. Member for West Dorset said that surprised me a bit was that the business motion on how we are going to do this will, in his schema, be on the same day as the first round of indicative votes. I had not planned to speak today, but I thought that I had better set out what factors I would like to be taken into account in the drawing up of the process and the design of the system.

The first issue is the status of the votes: are they indicative or definitive? Indicative is good, because it allows people to feel flexible and more open-minded. However, we will move to definitive at some stage, to bind the Government, because we cannot continue with the situation where the Government defy the will of the House.

The second point we need to be clear about is that this vote may be on paper, but it is not a secret ballot. We want transparency. We want to be accountable to the public and to our constituents. And, of course, the Whips need to be able to do their job as well. That, too, requires some transparency.

The third issue is how to get on the ballot. I was slightly concerned in the middle of the day when I was hearing that the Government were planning to draft up for every Member what their view of other Members' options would be. That seems to me to be completely inappropriate. Groups of hon. Members must be allowed to say for themselves what their options should be. I appeal to Mr Speaker to allow more, rather than less, on to any ballot paper, if we get to that.

The fourth point we need to think about is how to vote: preferences or standard crosses. I think the right hon. Member for West Dorset is considering a traditional cross by the side of the option or options we like, rather than preferences. I am happy for us to embark on that, but, as he acknowledged, we may need to move to preferences as time goes on.

There are two other points that we need to bear in mind. First, how many votes are we going to have? How many preferences can we expect to be allowed to use—two or three? We need to consider explicitly whether people could use the same number of preferences, or whether that could be something that people would want to flex. My feeling is that everybody probably ought to have the same number of votes. Connected to that is how many voting rounds we go through. We know we have to do this in a fairly speedy way, because of the 11 April deadline. We may need more than one, but we cannot have a completely open-ended process going on ad infinitum. We need to bring it to closure at some point.

If people think that this is highly innovative, they should not be quite so alarmed. We vote on paper regularly. We have done indicative voting before. We have given preferences before. What we are proposing to do on this occasion is bring them all together. [Interruption.] The most important thing, as I can hear the Minister saying, is that we have some speed, not just for the political process but to end the uncertainty facing businesses up and down the country. To be three weeks out and still to have no deal, a soft Brexit or a public vote to remain on the table is shameful.

Our international reputation has taken the worst hammering in living memory. The Confederation of British Industry said that it has lost confidence in the political process. The TUC has specifically asked us to look for a new parliamentary mechanism. MPs are always telling other people to change and adapt. Now, perhaps it is time for us to do the same. Confidence in our parliamentary process will be restored only when we show that we can act constructively and creatively.

8.30 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I came to this debate as much to listen as to contribute, and I am very glad to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), who, in a very rare way in these debates over the past few years, has set out a way in which we might move forward. That may not be comfortable for her and these may not all be her preferred options, but it shows a willingness to listen, to compromise and to move, which has been pretty absent, if we are honest, from this debate so far.

The attitudes out there in the country are hardening. Constituents of mine who told me three years ago that they voted leave and that they were happy to leave on whatever terms Parliament deemed necessary, as long as we respected the result, are now telling me daily that they want to cut all ties and leave with no deal at all. Constituents who voted to remain and who said that we had had the debate, that the other side had won fair and square and that we just had to get on with it are now telling me that they want to halt the process altogether and remain in the EU. Having spent a lot of time with colleagues trying to find a way through this in here and behind the scenes over the past few weeks, I feel that exactly the same thing is happening in Parliament. If we do not start to move, they will not start to move and there is absolutely no prospect of repairing this country.

That is why I very much welcome what the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) has done with the amendment, particularly the way in which he presented it. He is not seeking to control the outcome of this process. He is not seeking to do what many of his colleagues on each extreme of this debate have done for several years, which is to knock out any preferred option that is not theirs and undermine any of us who are trying to find a solution by questioning our good faith, intentions and motives.

As somebody who represents a constituency where two thirds of people voted to leave—they did so largely in full knowledge of what they were doing and still feel strongly about it—but where a third of people also voted to remain and have every bit as much of a stake in the future of this country as the rest, I have to say that that bad faith is operating on both sides of this debate. Those threats and the abuse are coming from both sides. I and many hon. Members face them daily, and to seek to pretend, as some Members just did in this debate, that it comes only from one side is quite simply not true. It is insulting and it will not stick.

I am very dismayed today about the Government's position. I do not think that Ministers understand how little trust there is left. As we stand here in this Chamber, right now—according to lobby journalists who are briefing things out over social media—the Government are sitting in closed rooms trying to persuade Members on their own side to vote down this amendment in favour of

guarantees. We have been here before. Time and again, they come to the Dispatch Box and they tell us they are serious. They tell us they are listening and that the House must make a decision, and then, when we get up and speak with one voice about what we want, they say, “Okay, we will go away and think about it.” They make some promises and pick off Members on their own side, and then, lo and behold, where are those promises when they most count? They are nowhere to be seen.

Given the mess that has been created in this country, what is wrong, honestly, with giving Parliament the right to consider the options that we want to put forward? We speak for very different communities in this country. When the Government seek to deny us a voice, they are not denying me a voice—who cares whether I have a voice?—they are denying the 75,000 people I represent in Wigan a voice and all other hon. Members besides.

I say to both Front-Bench teams that if we are to consider the options in good faith, given the very different needs and priorities of constituencies, a free vote has to be offered on those options. I understand the discomfort. I have served in the shadow Cabinet. It is not an easy thing to do, but when we have this strength of feeling and these very divergent views and experiences across the country, all those have to be heard if we are going to find a way through this.

I say to Ministers, too, that almost entirely absent now is not just the trust, but the good will. Last week, I could not believe what I was seeing when the Prime Minister took to the steps of Downing Street and tried to pit the people against Parliament. The public follow our lead. When we stand in here using language such as “betrayal” and “traitors”, is it any surprise that we step outside and find that same language levelled back at us? If she wants to restore good will, the first thing that she must do is apologise to Members of this House, who are all, in our very different ways and positions, trying to find a way through this in good faith. She must rule out no deal.

We will not believe that the Prime Minister is serious about the interests of the country if she is not—*[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) is asking me why. Last week, I had a constituent on the phone whose son was in line for a clinical trial in the European Union that could save his life. They do not know now whether he will get it. This is a child who has no certainty about what is going to happen next. I have a constituent who is on dialysis, who rang me to say that she has been told to expect some disruption in the event of no deal. When I went to a Minister to ask what the advice was, he said, “We are doing our best, but we cannot make any guarantees.” My sister is diabetic and has not slept for months because she does not know whether she will be able to access insulin. People can accuse me of scaremongering all they like, but the Government’s technical notice cannot tell us what will happen in the event of a no-deal Brexit. What sort of Government cannot guarantee access to medicines in just a week’s time?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): I make the point gently that there was a written ministerial statement that did make those guarantees only three weeks ago.

Lisa Nandy: And I can tell the Minister that I was here on Monday when we were debating plans to allow pharmacists to limit access to medication in the event of no deal in just a few weeks’ time. I went to my local pharmacist and had a conversation with him a couple of days later and he had never heard anything about it, so to pretend that this is a responsible course of action is, frankly, a disgrace. The Minister can roll his eyes at me all he likes, but this is an absolute disgrace. The Government have driven this country to the brink and they are not learning. Every Member sitting in this House right now will look at that Minister sitting on that Bench and realise that this is a Government who are not serious about safeguarding the welfare of their citizens.

I will finish with this point, because I know that many Members are desperate to speak. In the next stages, if we get to them—if this shabby Government somehow manage to cobble together a majority for the withdrawal agreement and get us into the next stages—I would just say to hon. Members: look at what we have just witnessed in this House. Do not trust that they are acting with the interests of the whole country in mind. This House has no guaranteed role in those next stages of negotiations. If we do not insist on that right now, we will not get it.

For four months, I have been talking to the Prime Minister and to Government Members about giving Parliament the right to set out the terms of the negotiating mandate in the next stages and to guarantee a vote about the future relationship at the end of that process. They have resisted that. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) and I will be bringing forward an amendment on that when the meaningful vote materialises, because we have to have a reset. If we are going to get to the next stages of those discussions, that discussion has to involve every single part of this House. We cannot allow the Prime Minister, whoever he or she may be by that point, to go off and negotiate away our rights, freedoms and protections that have been hard fought for for 100 years without any say in it.

This has become a tug of war between two groups of people who I know, from speaking to them every day in my constituency, are quite reasonable people who want this resolved. We are breaking our democracy. I commend the right hon. Member for West Dorset for tabling amendment (a) because he is seeking a way to bring the House together, to compromise and to find a way through this impasse. We as a House have to rise to the occasion, because, my God, I have just seen a perfect example from the Government Benches of why they are not capable of doing it.

8.38 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I also rise to support amendments (a), (d) and (f), and it is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy). She spent much of her speech talking about the atmosphere within which this debate is happening, and I, too, would like to spend a few moments on that.

Like others, I have been bombarded in recent weeks with emails and other communications telling me to vote in diametrically opposed directions. Many insist that if I vote differently from the way they wish, I will be acting against the will of the people. I have not had the

[Richard Burden]

same level of aggression from all quarters, but some of it has been pretty extreme. I have been compared to a range of bodily parts of both the female and the male variety. Some have called me a traitor. A few have gone further. One email I read yesterday expressed the hope that this place would be burned to the ground with me and other hon. Members in it. I know that several hon. Members have received worse and in far greater quantities. There is no excuse for such threats and abuse. Neither I nor other hon. Members will be intimidated, but we have to face up to what is happening.

This kind of toxic atmosphere in politics is not unique to the UK—it is happening in other countries—but Brexit gives it a focus, and it can lead to violence against people regarded as believing the wrong things or simply because of who they are. My plea is that all of us who have the privilege to speak from public platforms, which can create headlines, think carefully about how we conduct ourselves and the way we frame political debates and take care not to contribute to that atmosphere of toxicity and intolerance, which undermines democracy and can lead to violence.

There is a deeper problem here. All too often people feel the political debate in this place happens at a level that does not speak to them and bypasses their concerns. They look aghast at how we have got stuck in a logjam over Brexit. Yes, the Prime Minister has made that worse, not better—her attempt last Wednesday to shift the blame on to everyone other than herself was unworthy of her office—but we need to look at ourselves too and understand that too often we appear to embody the stereotype of an institution that talks only to itself, not to the outside world. We need to learn from that, not only in relation to Brexit, but more generally.

What does that mean for the decisions we face tonight? The bottom line is that no deal cannot be allowed to happen by accident any more than by design. As chair of the all-party motor group, I know that all the warnings—from BMW, JLR, Nissan, Toyota, Vauxhall, and Aston Martin—could not have been clearer. Investment decisions are on hold now and our reputation in the international community is being trashed before our eyes. A no-deal Brexit would jeopardise the future of the plants of several of those car manufacturers and many thousands of jobs, and similar warnings are coming from other sectors, as others have said.

The priority has to be avoiding the nightmare of no deal, and that means agreeing a procedure that allows us not so much to vote for or against our perfect or worst options, but to do as the right hon. Member for West Dorset has urged and express preferences for ways forward we can live with. The idea of doing that through paper ballots is exactly right because it would allow people to express preferences and vote for several different options. This cannot be a zero-sum game. The objective has to be to find a centre of gravity through which we can move forward.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) are right that, as we move through that process, which may take some time, some kind of preference balloting is likely to be necessary. I suspect that, if we find that centre of gravity, it will involve jettisoning some of the Prime Minister's red lines, so there is a question for her there, and a decision

for her to make. If the centre of gravity in this House becomes a place that is beyond and different from her red lines, she must answer that question. Will she abide by the will of the House, and will she take that forward in negotiations with the European Union? Unless she is prepared to do so, the sustainable majority to which the right hon. Member for West Dorset referred will not be allowed to have its voice, and if it is not allowed to have its voice, democracy will be the poorer, the House will be the poorer, and the debate about Brexit will be set back.

In the few moments that I have left, I want to say a few words about the idea of a second referendum. It seems to me that when a million people take to the streets, that is not something we should ignore. In my view, arguing for a final say on any deal eventually arrived at, or against the possibility that the House is unable to achieve a way forward, has a logic to it, but let us not kid ourselves that the passions aroused in favour of a second referendum—or a people's vote—are not also aroused in other directions. The risk that a referendum will be conducted in a divisive atmosphere is a real risk, and we must recognise and address it. To me, that does not mean moving away from, or rejecting, the idea of a second referendum, but it does constitute a further indication and a further reminder to us that we must at least approach the coming weeks and months in a way that makes clear the kind of politics that we want to develop in this country. It must be clear that this process is about resolving differences, not about exacerbating them,

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Burden: I am afraid that I am very short of time.

Our approach must demonstrate our commitment to equal respect for all our citizens, irrespective of their background, and our determination to ensure that whatever else happens, democracy wins through.

8.46 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I was taken by the speech of the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who talked about the diminished place of the United Kingdom after Brexit and during the Brexit process. When Opposition Members mention that, Conservative Members often say we are talking rubbish, but I think the right hon. Gentleman's belief has a degree of support from his Government. Today we saw the naval process and the EU military complex and engagement process start to unravel, with the naval piracy taskforce moving from the United Kingdom to Cadiz, so I think the right hon. Gentleman was right about that diminished role.

Earlier today, during Defence questions, Ministers could not recognise the element of diminution in defence and security, but I think the right hon. Gentleman would agree that it exists. The Secretary of State for Defence rightly has a lot to say about Russia and China, but seems to have very little to say about our future defence and security engagement with our closest ally, with which we will have a land border: the European Union.

Last week, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who has just left the Chamber, gave a clear analysis of the process so far. I hope he will forgive

me for saying that only one slight element was missing from it: history. Another Member on the other side of the House—I believe it was the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who has also left the Chamber—seemed to exclude history in a more robust fashion, expressing utter disgust at the way in which the Government had brought them to this position.

I think both Members would probably agree, as would many other Members, that that is nothing new in this place. The civil war at the heart of the Conservative party is certainly nothing new, especially when it comes to the last 40 years of membership of the European Economic Community, the European Community or the European Union. In many ways, the discourse at the heart of the Conservative and Unionist party is fundamentally exposed by what it has done in walking through the doors with the Democratic Unionist party. Now of course the DUP are not here to defend themselves, but I think we would all agree that they have played a blinder when it comes to Brexit, because the history of the Conservative party with the ancestors of the DUP more or less has made the Prime Minister a modern-day Pitt the Younger, and we all know what happened in 1800 with Pitt the Younger and the utter disgrace that unfolded in Unionist history. So if the Conservative and Unionist party wishes to pin its hopes on doing deals with the DUP it should learn a lesson from its own political history. It is one it has clearly forgotten; it has no collective or institutional memory of its own history, and it is extraordinary to see it unfold before it.

The two main parties, both the Government and the official Opposition, had a commitment in their manifestos in 2017 to deliver Brexit, and the Prime Minister keeps coming back to that, but what was not in the Prime Minister's party's manifesto was giving a £1 billion bung to the DUP. That was hidden; there was nothing about that. No one wanted to talk about it, but that is where they are.

There is another issue that has gone about the nation. As you know, Mr Speaker, when I first stood in this House I made it clear that I was neither a Unionist nor a Home Ruler and I think that is self-explanatory, but I do have regard for both the Unionist Members and the Home Rulers in this Parliament and their position. So when it comes to a people's vote, for example, I am utterly delighted to support it. My party has been supportive of it, and the First Minister was at the march as well as our leader here in the parliamentary group in Westminster. I hope that when push comes to shove in respect of the mandate that already exists in Scotland in its own Parliament where there is a majority that a section 30 order—of the Scotland Act 1998—is requested, those on all sides recognise any hypocrisy if they would not support a second referendum on Scotland's constitutional position, whether they agree with that change or not.

Mention has also been made in this debate of the constitution. What constitution of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? There is no constitution of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I have heard about precedent; that precedent comes from the Parliament of England pre-1707. Before 1707 I would be a shire commissioner in the Parliament of Scotland sitting in the ancient Parliament that sits there, probably the oldest parliamentary building in these islands, and a member of the three estates. But I am not;

I am here in this place. So although I support the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), who is not in his place, I am hopeful that if there is a second referendum all those calling for it will be supportive of the mandate in the Scottish Parliament, and not just from my own party as there is a wider majority in the Scottish Parliament, calling if we are dragged against our will out of the EU for a referendum on our being again an independent sovereign nation state within the family of European nations.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): May I share with the House a fact that is sometimes overlooked? In the European referendum far more people voted to leave in Scotland than voted for the SNP at the 2017 election. That is a fact that some people do not understand; it is as though the hon. Gentleman thinks he speaks for all of the people of Scotland when he does not.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I am actually quite affronted—to use an old-fashioned term—by that type of question, because I do not stand here to speak for the people of Scotland; I stand here to speak for my constituents, those who voted for me and those who voted for other candidates of other political parties. But I am also mindful that some of the hon. Gentleman's own fellow Back Benchers have said that a true democracy is based on tectonic plates that shift, and if we cannot change our mind in a modern liberal democracy then we are in no democracy at all.

The hon. Gentleman was also in the House when we had the claim of right debate, and his own Members were cheering on when I was saying that Scotland was a nation. I did not hear him disregard that ability to be an independent sovereign nation. So I find his question bizarre, because I am not standing up to speak for Scotland; I am standing up to speak for my constituents who not only voted for their country to be an independent sovereign nation but also voted for the UK to remain within the EU. We were told by the first Brexit Secretary in his first speech that the industrial working class of this political state voted to leave the European Union. I took great delight in reminding him then, as I remind the House today, that the industrial working class of West Dunbartonshire voted overwhelmingly to remain. They also voted overwhelmingly for their country to be an independent sovereign state.

I hope that Members understand that in a modern democracy, we can change our mind. How can so many people be affronted by the proposition that mature adults who are able to go to a ballot box and vote can change their mind? I know that my country will do so, and that it will be an independent one at that.

8.55 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Sorry seems to be the hardest word for the Prime Minister. After her Mini-Me Trump act last week, it would have been appropriate for her to come to the House today—or indeed last week—to apologise for the words she used. She has chosen not to do so, however, and I really do regret that. I also regret the fact that clarity does not seem to be her strong point. She said in her statement that, unless this House agreed to it, no deal would not happen. That seemed to be a fairly clear statement, but

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when I intervened on her to ask her whether she could give us a categorical assurance that we would be allowed to pass a binding motion in this House ruling out no deal, she was unable to answer me positively. I am therefore left none the wiser about whether she has or has not ruled out no deal.

Amendments (g) and (e) have been tabled in support of a people's vote. Amendment (g) was tabled by the Liberal Democrats with the support of the Independent Group; amendment (e) was tabled by the Independent Group with the support of the Liberal Democrats. It is important to continue to maintain the profile of a people's vote, if only because absolutely nothing is predictable when it comes to what takes place in this House and whether votes will take place at the agreed time. It is also important because the 1 million people who marched on Saturday will be confused that no amendment relating to a people's vote has been selected this evening. Others have mentioned the passion, enthusiasm and energy represented on the march, which was attended by people from all over the country and all walks of life. They came from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England and they were really representative of the United Kingdom as a whole. It was a fantastic occasion. I guess we have to apologise for the fact that a few stickers were left on the Cabinet Office front door, but they had been cleared by the time I attended the no-deal briefing there earlier today.

I am happy to support amendment (a), which has been tabled by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) to facilitate indicative votes. I hope that it will enable the House to find a way forward because the Prime Minister and the Government are clearly incapable of doing so. Once the Prime Minister had set out her red lines, it became impossible for her to come up with an outcome that the House could support. That was made even harder when she blamed the House for her failure to find a way forward. It is regrettable that, when the deputy Prime Minister opened the debate today, he did not simply accept amendment (a). From what he said, it seems to represent what the Government want to do. He will know as well as anyone else that it is perfectly in order for the Government to commandeer an amendment put forward by the Opposition if they find it attractive, and that Governments normally do this. Despite opposition from his own Benches, he had the option today to grab that amendment and put his own name to it. Given that it would deliver what he says he wants to do, that would have been in order. I am also happy to support amendment (f), tabled by the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett). It would give the House some certainty about what would happen in a no-deal scenario.

On the indicative votes, we need to ensure that the Prime Minister is not able to claim at the end of the process that Parliament has come no closer to securing a way forward than she has. The process must enable a strong option to emerge. The Liberal Democrats, like the SNP, would like not only an option to revoke article 50, but something that would ensure a people's vote as a lock—something that would apply in relation to any proposals that come forward.

To conclude—hopefully well within your time constraints, Mr Speaker—the Prime Minister has lost not only legitimacy and credibility, but support both within and

outside her party. She clearly cannot lead this process, so Parliament must now grasp the reins and lever the UK out of the quagmire into which we are gradually sliding. We are up to our necks and we will be in over our heads in a matter of days. We are very much in the last-chance saloon tonight, and shortly after the votes at 10 pm we will know whether we have come out of it alive.

9 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), and I want to put on the record how impressed I have been with the calibre and quality of the speeches this afternoon and evening. It has been quite overwhelming and they have done this place some credit. At a time when the House is being vilified—even being disrespected and undermined by the Prime Minister—I have heard Members speak with passion and commitment. There have been different views and perspectives, but everyone has tried to navigate their way through things and to do what is best for their constituents and the country.

I rise to support amendments (d), (f) and, in particular, (a). Finally, Parliament is taking control of the process; the Government should have set that in train two years ago. We are finally about to decide what Brexit actually is. The fundamental dilemma of the 2016 referendum was that it allowed everybody to project all their fears, anger, hopes and fantasies on to a simply binary question, and the result has been interpreted by many different people to mean many different things. As a consequence—we will have to get used to this—whatever option the House supports will be met with cries of “Betrayal” from those who do not get the version of Brexit that was in their mind when they voted, or even the version that they have developed over the past two and a half years.

The narrative of betrayal, which the Prime Minister stoked up last week, is toxic and needs to be confronted with honesty and courage. Whatever version of Brexit comes out the other side of the parliamentary mangle, MPs need to acknowledge that people will be disappointed, upset and even angered. Whatever we do risks losing votes, and possibly even seats, for all parties. That is why we need to be brave and vote in the country's best interests.

Those who bandy around the word “betrayal” must be honest that the betrayal of the British people has already happened. The betrayal was to ask people to make a vague and over-simplistic decision, with insufficient information that was not honest about the real choices facing our country or the complexity of our economic integration with the European Union. The betrayal was rooted in the lies and fantasy promises that were told without any intention of being kept—like those on the side of the bus. The betrayal was the exploitation for personal and political ends of the justifiable and understandable grievances of left-behind areas and working-class communities such as mine. The betrayal was the legitimatisation of prejudice, hatred and division that we saw during that debate and have seen since. The betrayal was not to be honest that major constitutional changes should not be put forward to the public unless the work had been done to prepare for them. All that comes even before we have a proper inquiry into the potential law breaking.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am impressed with the hon. Lady's points. Does she agree that the way to overcome the sense of betrayal that the vote was misleading, or that the work had not been done and the people did not get what they bargained for is to go back to the people once we have decided on something and ask, "Is this what you wanted?"

Anna Turley: I concur completely. I was building up to a crescendo, but I agree that being honest and having a conversation with the people about the reality of Brexit is the way forward. This place owes the public an apology for the referendum—not just David Cameron, but all of us—but instead of an apology the betrayal has continued. Rather than being honest with the public, confronting the mistakes and admitting that the referendum was flawed, we have sought to continue it rather than face up to our historic error. The public are wiser than many in this place give them credit for. They can see that the process over the past two and a half years has been an absolute shambles. They can see that Brexit is nothing like what was promised to them. We should all have the humility to say we know much more now than we did then.

Why is the Prime Minister continuing to drive people to a destination that is not where they were told they were going? We do not even know whether many of them still want to go. She continues to talk about the will of the people, but she ignores not just the 48% but those who did not vote because they did not feel strongly enough to want to change the situation. Some 29 million people either voted to remain or did not feel they wanted to change things. None of them asked to get where we are.

No wonder the public call it betrayal when they are not getting the things they were promised, or when responsible politicians step up to try to stop this carnage. This is the ultimate Brexit paradox. The further we are from Europe and the more abrupt our break, the worse it is for our economy, particularly for areas like mine that voted most strongly to leave. Yet the closer we remain to the EU, with Norway-plus or a soft Brexit option, the more we concede British sovereignty and dilute the so-called will of the people, which is now hardening among many leavers for a no deal.

No one will be getting what they were promised and I believe it is a deceit to vote for Brexit in name only in the hope that people will not notice or to try to get them off our backs. All we would be doing is continuing to reinforce the lie to the public and failing to be honest with them about the reality of our situation. Worse, I hear the Prime Minister patronising them and telling them there is nothing that can be done to prevent it because this is what they wanted two and a half years ago. Denying them the right to change their mind or to have their say on the outcome now that the evidence is clearer is a real betrayal, both of them and of future generations.

Record numbers have marched and signed petitions in the past few days. They, too, are the people, and they, too, deserve to have their voice heard. A new referendum or a vote to ratify a deal that comes through our range of options must be put to the people in the cold light of day. We must be brave enough to ignore the calls of betrayal and do the right thing, and not continue the deceit that we will be able to please everyone with our

Brexit outcome. We must do what is in the best interest of our constituents' jobs and livelihoods and in the national interest of our country. Parliament needs to come clean that we have made a catastrophic mess. We must give the public the chance to help us clean it up.

9.7 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): It is a genuine honour to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). I have previously praised her and many of her Labour colleagues who represent seats that voted leave, yet who, through their leadership in engaging with their constituents, being courageous and forthright in many instances, and listening and engaging in the debate, have now come to the conclusion that the only way through this crisis is for this matter to go back to the British people. It is an unprecedented crisis, and nobody but nobody in Broxtowe or anywhere in our country voted for the incredible and appalling mess we are now in.

Tom Brake: I commend the right hon. Lady for the position she has adopted, which I know has come at some personal expense. Equally, I commend the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley).

Is the right hon. Lady as angry as I am that the advocates of hard Brexit—those who led the campaigns that were fined many tens of thousands of pounds for lying and cheating during the referendum—are very rarely here to defend their views but are quite happy to defend their views from the safety of a newspaper column?

Anna Soubry: I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I observe that many of them held the most senior positions in government but, when the going got tough, found life was much easier by leaving those positions, failing to deliver and failing to live up to the responsibility placed on them by their leadership of the leave campaign.

My constituents who are watching at home, reading the reports or, in any event, aware of the current situation are aghast, and I know I am not alone. Other right hon. and hon. Members have received emails and letters from constituents who are worried, and we have already heard about the availability, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, of medicines or, in one instance, of special food for a child with a particular allergy. Yet there are Conservative Members who actually look forward to and welcome a no-deal Brexit. It has to be said yet again that, in the words of the Business Secretary, that would be the most "ruinous" of outcomes for our country.

On that lack of certainty for businesses, let us consider a pharmaceutical company in Broxtowe. It is just in my constituency, although the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) might want to claim it as well—it is all about a line that goes through a car park. However, I know that she shares my concern for this real-life business that employs real people. At the moment, such is the crisis that it does not know what to print on its boxes, because it does not know what the outcome is going to be. That may sound minor, but it shows the problem, because too many Conservative Members do not understand the real crisis facing businesses. [Interruption.] One Conservative Member seems to find this amusing. I think this is the problem: some hon. Members actually think that a company of that scale, with 850 workers—one can imagine the huge amount of

[Anna Soubry]

pharmaceutical products that they produce every day—can go down to Prontaprint on a Friday and order all these boxes with all the right markings on, and they will be ready on a Monday. I gently say to Conservative Members—

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con) *indicated dissent.*

Anna Soubry: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I can tell him for a fact that British business will never forgive the Conservative party for what it has done to business throughout the whole of this Brexit process. Many of us have said this all before, but it is absolutely the case that people like me voted to trigger article 50—the majority of us did. The majority of us voted for the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and the majority of us accepted that we were leaving the European Union. As the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) has explained, we then reached out to find a way of reuniting our country and a way in which we could deliver on the result but do the right thing by British business, by minimising the effect on it, and of course avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland.

In our efforts, we made direct pleas to the Prime Minister in meetings with her and offered her a solution, knowing, for example, that the Scottish National party would have voted for the single market and the customs union, as would Plaid Cymru and many Labour Back Benchers. We would have won a consensus, but she point-blank refused to engage in that. Instead, this Prime Minister has led us—it is the only thing on which she has led—to this terrible situation. She was dogmatic in laying down her red lines, and at every twist and turn when she had the opportunity to change those red lines or just rub them out a little she refused.

I say to Conservative Members that what almost all of them have also spectacularly forgotten is that when we had the general election in June 2017, more than 30 Conservative Members of Parliament in England and Wales lost their seats. The Conservative party lost its majority; there is no mandate for hard Brexit. That was the perfect opportunity for the Prime Minister to abandon the red lines and seek to form the consensus that the country was crying out for, but, yet again, she absolutely refused to do it. It ended up with people, not just those like me, leaving the Conservative party. I represent many sensible, moderate, pragmatic, one nation Tories who are leaving the Conservative party as they see it moving to the right, no longer the party of business and enterprise, and no longer having the one nation Conservatism that so many of us held so near to us. Having failed to persuade the Prime Minister to reach out and build a consensus, we ended up in a position where the only way out that we could see for our great nation was to have a people's vote.

Others have spoken about what happened on Saturday. It was a real honour and privilege to be here in London and go on that march with people from all over the UK. These were not, as one Conservative Member described them, just fans of the Glyndebourne opera; they were real people from not only my constituency—and of all backgrounds and all ages—but from, for example, the constituency of the hon. Member for Redcar. I know she was heartbroken that she had another engagement and so she could not be here. We know that workers

came down from the north-east. The really striking thing was not only people's background, but to see children with their parents and grandparents, all of them marching in a spirit of hope and happiness, even though they were upset about the referendum result.

Bill Grant: We have to pay attention to the million on the street and the 5.4 million who have signed the petition, but that falls short of the 17.4 million people who voted to leave. That is a simple fact. There are many people in this Chamber today who are here through democracy—a democracy similar to that of the referendum—with wafer-thin margins, and they intend still to sit here.

Anna Soubry: Yes, but the hon. Gentleman forgets two things. The majority of people in this country did not vote to leave the European Union. As somebody who represents a marginal seat with one of the smallest majorities—I do not know what the hon. Gentleman's is, but we can have that competition—let me tell him that I am not interested in my majority. I am not interested in just coming back to this place to take the money and sit and enjoy all the privileges of being a Member of Parliament. I will put my country and my constituents first and foremost, and I do not care what that costs me, even if that means that I cannot go home of a weekend because of death threats, that I have to get a taxi instead of doing a 10-minute walk, and that I have to be frightened for my wellbeing and for that of my partner and children, which cannot be right, and I feel sorry for them. This is the biggest decision that this country has made since the second world war. We come to this place to represent our constituents and do the right thing by our country. It is not about us and it is not about the Conservative party; it is about doing the right thing. In this instance, the right thing is to get this decision back to the British people. There is no way out.

Bill Grant *rose—*

Anna Soubry: I am not taking any more interventions, or you will be even more cross with me, Mr Speaker.

I am going to vote for amendment (f), tabled by the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), and amendment (a), tabled by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). I gently say to Members how important it is that, here and now, we take control of this process and do the right thing. The other thing we need to do is heal the huge division that this ghastly Brexit has created. That is another huge priority of ours, as well as taking it back to the people, which is the only way forward.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Speeches of six to seven minutes are in order and would be helpful.

9.17 pm

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): I will of course follow your instructions, Mr Speaker.

It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). I agree with everything she said, especially about Saturday's march. It was a huge privilege for us all to be here in London to march alongside a million people. In our case, there were huge numbers of Labour members and Labour MPs, marching

for what we believe is right for our country and our constituents. We have had a great debate this evening, but that has been most missing from today's speeches, and the debate has been marked by its absence. Perhaps it is a function of the extraordinary times in which we live that there has been so little mention of the fact that a million people, some of whom travelled for many hours to get to London, came from every corner of Great Britain to take part in the march. It ought to have been given much greater attention. I put on record my personal thanks, and the thanks of many of us in the Labour party, to the People's Vote team who organised the march and who have performed a great service to our country by keeping alive the democratic dream of a people's vote. I hope they will continue to do so.

I first spoke in favour of a people's vote two and a half years ago, when I contested the Labour party leadership with the leader of the Labour party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). Unfortunately, he defeated me, but he did not defeat the democratic dream of a second referendum. I am absolutely convinced by the volume of people who turned out on Saturday that all of us who have kept alive that flame of democracy over the past two and a half years have been entirely right. What people were marching for on Saturday—people who voted leave, people who voted remain and people who may not have voted at all—was nothing less than that. It was a chance to exercise their democratic right, having started Brexit, to end Brexit; and having given the Government a mandate to pursue Brexit, to then have a say at the end of the process when we know what the Brexit reality looks like.

I fear that, marching on the streets on Saturday, what I encountered was a huge amount of frustration and a huge amount of anger gently expressed but powerfully felt. There was a massive degree of despair at the dysfunction of our Parliament and our politics and, frankly, at the breakdown that many people see and feel in our very democracy. I fear that they are to be denied a chance to have their say on the outcome of Brexit, as they had their say on the starting of Brexit. If those people—some of those 1 million people on the march or the 5.5 million people who have signed the petition to revoke Brexit—were listening to today's statement from the Prime Minister, I fear that they will have been doubly disappointed and despairing, because what they would have heard is more doublespeak. I fear that what they are likely to see tonight is more double dealing, with promises being made to Conservative Back Benchers to try to get them to back off supporting amendment (a) in return for a nebulous promise from those on the Government Treasury Bench that they will offer something similar. The truth is that we have been here before. We have seen countless false promises made from the Dispatch Box, but when it comes to the crunch, we see not just hon. Members but the country let down.

I want to say a few things before I close about the process that we are debating in respect of amendment (a)—the idea of indicative votes. The truth is that we have got to this point far too late in the process. It strikes me as extraordinary that the Government are effectively, in a rushed and desperate fashion, seemingly set to concede at the very last minute a demand that has been made by many on these Benches and across the House for several years, let alone months. I suspect, too, that this will be done in a fairly cack-handed and

haphazard fashion. We do not know when it will be debated or what the process will be. The Government say that they cannot lose control of the process, but they are going to afford Members the opportunity to determine what that process is and what the options are. It seems to be an utterly shambolic state of affairs and entirely reflects the way in which the Government have handled—or rather mishandled—this for more than two years.

Worst of all, the most likely scenario and outcome will be a lowest common denominator, second-rate proposal that the Government will not even be bound to follow. Earlier on, we had the extraordinary statement that we were going to have these indicative votes, but then we heard that the Prime Minister was not necessarily going to pay any attention to them at the end of it. Again, that strikes me as entirely reflective of the shambolic way in which the Government have managed this process. If we get to the point where we have a second-rate compromise Brexit deal on the table, it will make with absolute eloquence the point of the 1 million people who marched on Saturday—that if there is a poor Brexit arrived at in this House, the only way in which the Government can honour democracy and honour the will of the people is to give them a chance to cast their vote as to its merit. I hope and anticipate that the people, in their wisdom, will reject such a deal, but they do at the very least need to be given a chance to reject it.

I have one final point on the process. One of the ways in which the Government will, I fear, try to bamboozle Members of Parliament in the coming days is to present a smörgåsbord of options: Canada plus; no deal; Norway; and a customs union. All these things will potentially come alongside options such as revoke and a people's vote. That is no way to honour the will of this House or to properly conduct the democratic business of this House. We need to be absolutely clear that a people's vote—a vote on the Brexit deal—is entirely separate from any of the options that we might vote on in this series of indicative votes. It would be completely tricky and deceitful of the Government to try to confuse those two things in the public's mind or in Parliament's mind. The democratic, principled thing to do is to afford the people a say on whatever sort of Brexit deal is agreed on by this House, and certainly not to present an alternative between a referendum and one of those Brexit deals. That would be the wrong way to proceed, Mr Speaker, and I am sure that you will make sure that that does not happen.

9.25 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): In opening this debate, the deputy Prime Minister cautioned against voting for amendment (a) because he said that it would alter the relationship between the Executive and the Parliament. That is exactly why we need to vote for amendment (a). We must alter that relationship because we are now in a situation whereby the level of dysfunction and inertia in our political system is without parallel. We are in the midst of a political crisis that is mirrored only by our inability to do anything about it through the normal processes of government, so we must now take back control of the agenda.

We are in a bizarre situation whereby the Government have brought their proposals twice to this Parliament, and twice they have been roundly rejected. Now, not

[Tommy Sheppard]

only do the Government say that they will not bring their proposals back for a third time—they are taking their ball home with them, it seems—but they say that they refuse to change their mind and vary those proposals so that there might be a route to a majority. In those circumstances, there is no option left but for people other than those in the Government to take control of the situation.

Make no mistake, if amendment (a) is passed, it will most definitely be an indictment and a censure of this Government and the way in which they have conducted themselves over the last two and a half years. What we need to know from the Government is whether they are prepared to try to win back our trust—whether they will enter into this process with good faith in the attempt to see whether there is a majority in this House that they can be part of, or whether they just want us to exhaust ourselves running around in circles, so that they can come along two weeks later and bring plan A back again to be defeated.

As others have remarked, we should have been engaged in this process two and a half years ago, rather than leaving it to this last moment, but the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) put his finger on the button when he said that the problem is that, from the word go, the result of the 2016 referendum was hijacked by the winning side and used to close down any debate about how the mandate should be interpreted or what it actually meant. Therefore, for the past two years, there has been a dialogue that has involved only the Government, the ERG and the Democratic Unionist party. Thankfully, we are not yet in a situation whereby that political axis commands a majority either in this House or in the country. I appeal to the Government for the umpteenth time to reach out beyond their own narrow political confines and see whether it is possible to build a political consensus in this country that can put our fractured politics back together.

Time and again, we have heard the mantra of 17.4 million, and we really need to confront this point. In a democratic society, people do not just get one vote; they get a series of votes. In a democratic society, each vote qualifies and updates the ones that came before. What we need to know is what the views of the people are now, not what they were three years ago. I firmly believe that, although 17.4 million people voted for us to leave the European Union, they did not vote to endorse the prospectus that the Government have brought to this House, and they did not vote for the Government's harsh interpretation of that decision. For example, I do not think that 17.4 million people voted to deny themselves and their children the ability to move freely around the European Union. I just do not believe it; I think that was part of the hijack.

Most importantly, however, it is clear to anyone who wants to see that many of those people have changed their minds. In a democratic society, people have the right to do that, so we need to test the decision again, and that means we will have to put this matter back to the people. We do not need a short break in this process—a short extension—to tweak what is already there; we need a fundamental rethink. We need to go back to the drawing board. We need to scrap the phoney red lines that were imposed by this Government and see

if it is possible to come up with a new proposal. To do that, and to give time for that to be put before the people, we will need a serious extension to this process.

Thankfully, the European Union—President Tusk and others—has indicated that it would be happy to look at a much longer extension and at going back to negotiations if the Government change their red lines: their restrictive insistence on what the agreement had to do. So that option is there, but if there are complications in getting that level of extension, the answer is quite simple, and the power lies with us. All we need to do is to revoke article 50—not as a means of getting closure on the whole process but to take back control of it and give ourselves whatever time we need to formulate proposals and to democratically put them before the people.

Of course, we will go beyond 22 May and will therefore get into having the opportunity to elect representatives to represent us in the European Union, of which we are still part. What is wrong with that? How can it be that a bunch of people elected in a democratic election are so scared of having one in two months' time? Let us put this back to the people in an election. That will give us the opportunity to begin to redefine the narrative in this country—to try to explain to people that we gain most by common endeavour. We need to put hope in front of hate and to put hope back where there is currently despair. We can take a positive message to the people in those elections. My party stands ready to do that, and I do not see why others are not ready to contest them, too.

When we get the opportunity to run these elections in Scotland, you can bet, for sure, that we will also be taking the opportunity to explain to the people of Scotland that this process could have been avoided for them and they did not need to go through this if they had had the confidence to take the power for themselves, take back control and become a normal independent country like the others in this world.

9.32 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) are two extremely difficult acts to follow, but I will do my best in the limited time that I have.

We are now fractionally under 98 hours away from leaving the European Union without a deal. On Friday night, we are out without a deal unless the Government do something. When the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), who is not in her place just now, listed some of the catastrophic impacts of a no-deal Brexit, the Minister, true to form, was sitting there mouthing across to her, "Thanks to you. Thanks to you. Thanks to you." Even at this late stage, it is the fault of the hon. Lady, the fault of the Opposition, the fault of the Supreme Court: the fault of everybody apart from the Government, who claim that they have a mandate from the people from the referendum in 2016 and who have failed dismally to bring forward a credible, workable, sensible, rational or even sane way to implement that mandate.

Today, I heard an avid Brexiteer describe the withdrawal agreement as a stitch-up between the Prime Minister and the European Union. Well, that may be the case, because from day one she has sought to exclude anybody who might have been able to help in those negotiations who wanted anything different from her calamitous

red lines. The Government still try to put forward the line that her deal is the only one the European Union was prepared to offer, but that is not true: it was the only one it could possibly offer within the confines of the red lines that she had used to paint herself and us all into a corner.

It has become quite clear that those red lines stand in the way of any deal being acceptable to anything close to a majority of those in this House and stand in the way of a deal that comes anywhere close to commanding a majority of support among the citizens of these nations. The red lines have to go. If that means the Prime Minister has to go, then she has to go. It is not only the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) who has to be prepared to say that this is much more important than one person's political career.

The Prime Minister promised herself a free vote, whipped herself to vote against it and then lost. Government Whips have been giving contradictory advice to different Ministers about whether the Whip existed and whether it was one, two or three lines. Good luck to them trying to count whether they have 325 votes for tonight if they sometimes struggle to count up to three.

The Prime Minister cannot control her own party, but she now cannot even control her own Cabinet. She cannot go in one direction, because half the Cabinet will quit, and she cannot go in the other direction, because the other half will quit. Well, perhaps it is time the whole lot of them quit, so that we can take this issue back to the people. In any other democracy, if the Government failed to get their flagship policy through Parliament, the Head of State would have two options: a new Parliament or a new Government. Of course, in this democracy—or supposed democracy—when we have a chance to have a new Parliament, we also have a chance to have a new Government.

I find it astonishing that growing numbers of Conservative Members are saying they should be allowed a third chance at the meaningful vote because they did not understand that no deal might be taken off the table. They say that the circumstances have changed and that if they had known that the second vote was the last chance they would get, they might have voted differently. Is that the case? Is it the case that if people realise that circumstances have changed and that they had not understood what they were voting for, they should be allowed another chance? That is a good idea, and if it is okay for a few hundred Tory MPs, it sure as heck is good enough for the 60 million citizens who put all those MPs in place in the first place.

We hear Members talking about the number of people who took part in the referendum. I remind Members that the referendum did not ask what people wanted. Three years on from the referendum, with fewer than 100 hours left before we crash out without a deal, none of us can claim to know what any of those 17.5 million people were voting for. We know that they were voting to leave, but none of them was asked to vote on where they wanted to go. That is why we have to come up with a solution that commands the respect of the House and then put it to the people. It may not be the solution that I think is preferable—it may not be my first choice—but those who voted to leave, those who voted to remain and those who did not vote at all have to be given a choice.

I finish by saying that I have been reluctant to endorse wholeheartedly the campaign to revoke article 50, but if it becomes a choice between my nation being dragged out against the wishes of 62% of our people, and two other nations having to revoke article 50, with the option of coming back for another go later on, then article 50 has to be revoked. If we do not do this, in future another treaty will be revoked, thanks to the sovereign will of the people of my nation.

9.37 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant). I rise to speak in favour of amendments (f), (a) and (d). This country, and indeed this House, now face a very serious situation and a very substantial challenge. At this crucial time, with just a few days to settle the issue of Brexit—an issue that, as we all know, the Government have been unable to resolve for the last two years—we have to find a way through the impasse.

We have had months of delay, with the Government kicking the can down the road, putting off the inevitable, delaying reality and trying to pretend that their shabby deal was the only way of resolving Brexit. That is even though the proposed deal would have resolved only the withdrawal agreement with the EU and, indeed, offered only 22 pages of non-legally binding text to outline the whole of our future relationship with the EU. In other words, it set up several years—possibly six or even 10 years—of further botched negotiations, when the UK would have been in a very weak negotiating position.

Given the weakness of the Prime Minister's deal, it was not surprising that it was rejected by both ardent leavers and those with deep concerns about Brexit. I sincerely hope that we have now moved on beyond the charade of this Government trying to put the same deal back to Parliament again and again. That is why it is time for Parliament to take control of this process.

As you know only too well, Mr Speaker, in a parliamentary democracy, when a Government lose the good will and support of a majority in Parliament, they should rethink their approach. That is what I hope will happen tonight. It is my sincere hope and belief that we have a real opportunity to break this dreadful impasse. It is now incumbent on the Government to listen to MPs and the millions of people who marched on Saturday. I urge Ministers to listen and consider the very real merits of thinking again. It is time for indicative votes, including on a confirmatory referendum. We have to put this serious matter back to the people, and the Government have to fundamentally rethink their approach.

9.40 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): It is an honour to close for Her Majesty's Opposition in such an important debate on our nation's future and to follow the brilliant speeches made by Members who have risen to the occasion, including my hon. Friends the Members for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) and for Reading East (Matt Rodda), the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), who made a particularly thoughtful speech, and my good and hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who spoke with passion and conviction.

[Jenny Chapman]

Tonight the House must make an important decision: to take the reins from the hands of the Prime Minister and find a way out of this Brexit impasse. I know that that is not an easy decision for many Members, particularly those on the Government Benches, but we have seen how the Prime Minister has responded to losing two meaningful votes by two historic margins. First she hoped to push through the same deal again without meaningful changes, no matter the rules of the House or the obvious hopelessness of her strategy. Next she tried to pitch the people against MPs, with all the consequences that that has for parliamentary democracy. Then she went to the European Council without a viable strategy and had to have a plan to extend article 50 and avert no deal written for her and for the United Kingdom. Finally, when she should have been seeking consensus across the House, she spent the weekend further trying to placate the very people manoeuvring against her. At every turn, she has made a crisis of her own making even worse.

Well, enough is enough. There is a void where coherent leadership ought to be, exemplified by the Prime Minister's statement earlier today. Tonight Parliament must step into that void to find a consensus on the best way through. That is what amendment (a) from the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and amendment (d) from the Leader of the Opposition seek to achieve. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said, if the Government were doing their job, those amendments would not be necessary. The European Council's decision to grant the UK an extension to the article 50 process was a necessity—it was the only way to prevent leaving without a deal on Friday—but any extension must be for a purpose.

Parliament must rapidly decide how we wish to proceed if we are not going to face the cliff edge again on 12 April. Indicative votes are not ideal, but these are extraordinary circumstances, and indicative votes would allow MPs an opportunity to express their view on a way forward. Labour recognises that Members across the House have different views on how the process for indicative votes should be carried out. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) outlined her view based on her distinguished service on the Procedure Committee. Finding a consensus will not be easy. Different processes have different strengths and weaknesses, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) said, a key merit of amendments (a) and (d) is that they do not close off options for how we conduct that process.

Labour will be supporting both amendments, and I encourage Government Members to stop giving the Prime Minister, who is so evidently out of control, the benefit of the doubt. This is a chance to put the country before party.

However any indicative process is conducted, this House must reach a decision on the substance of the matter. What future relationship with the EU do we want, and how do we want to get there? We must start by eliminating the bad options and the unicorns. Labour and the House are clear that we cannot accept the Prime Minister's blind Brexit. Nor will we sign up to a distant and arm's-length economic relationship along the lines of Canada. The Brady amendment, which

proposed replacing the backstop with alternative arrangements, was an irresponsible, Government-sponsored unicorn. Neither we nor the House will countenance no deal, described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) as the very definition of irresponsibility. How right she is.

As far as Labour can see, that leaves two credible options. The first is a close economic partnership based on a customs union and single market alignment, with dynamic alignment for rights and protections. The second is a public vote between remain and a credible leave option. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Brexit Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), have met colleagues to discuss those ideas. They are engaged in good-faith discussions to find where a majority lies in this House—a majority that I hope will be expressed through the indicative votes process.

Let me finish by saying this: today the Prime Minister said that even if a majority for a way forward is found through the indicative votes process, she cannot commit to implementing it. How characteristic and typical that is of a Prime Minister who confuses the vices of blinkeredness and intransigence with the virtue of steadfast determination, whose first instinct is to ignore and push away the views of others, and who seems incapable of accepting that in our parliamentary democracy the Prime Minister must bring a majority of the House of Commons with her. It is an approach that has brought about a national crisis and brought us to a point where Parliament must now step in and take control of this process.

9.47 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): The central question before the House this evening, as reflected in amendment (a) in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), is: who controls the Order Paper? Should control be passed to Back-Bench Members in a process that is still to be fully defined and that would have constitutional implications, or do Members across this House accept the assurances given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when opening this debate that the Government will make time available this week for Members to express their preference on the way forward? That would follow consultation, through the usual channels, to enable the House to come to that view.

Stephen Gethins: Before the Secretary of State proceeds, it might be helpful for the House if he could outline whether he will vote in favour of his argument, or vote differently?

Stephen Barclay: If the hon. Gentleman had kept up with my speech last time, he would realise that I spoke to the three amendments, all of which were defeated last time. I hope that the same will happen tonight and that all the amendments will be defeated. That is the purpose of my speech once again. This is not the first time that SNP Members have not been awake during speeches.

The House has also been asked to consider amendment (f) in the name of the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) regarding the recalling of the House in the event of a no-deal exit being imminent.

The House has been further asked to vote on amendment (d) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, which calls on the Government to provide sufficient time this week for a series of votes, including on the Opposition's plan. The Government have committed to providing that time, but that does not change the fact that the plan from Her Majesty's Opposition has already been rejected by this House and the EU has suggested that key aspects are not negotiable.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): So has yours!

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman is correct. That is referenced in the amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition, but he is silent on the fact that his own proposed deal has also been rejected. That points to the lack of consistency that we see so often in his approach.

Let me turn to amendment (a). My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said that his proposal was little different from established practice on a Friday in respect of private Members' Bills. I gently suggest to my right hon. Friend, who is an experienced and senior Member of the House, that there is a difference between the Government choosing to make time available to Members for private Members' Bills and Members taking time from the Government to control the very business of the House.

Sir Oliver Letwin: If that is a problem constitutionally for the Government, what about their simply accepting the amendment, thereby turning it into a Government amendment?

Stephen Barclay: My right hon. Friend had that exchange at the beginning of the debate with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who in his usual skilful way addressed the point by saying that the Government will make time available this week to take the matter forward.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: As my right hon. Friend has just indicated that the Government have something different in mind from the proposal of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), will he give us a little more detail than just "will make time available"? When will that time be? Will Members be able to table the motions that are intended for an indicative vote? Will the Government take any notice of the majorities that are achieved for any amendments?

Stephen Barclay: We are in danger of rerunning the opening of the debate. Indeed, the shadow Brexit Secretary asked whether the Government would give a binding commitment to respect and adopt whatever was passed, even though the Opposition, who made that request, were not willing to give that commitment. We cannot give a blank cheque when we do not know exactly what those votes will be—I am sure that, when the Father of the House was a Minister, he would have taken the same line.

The real issue is the constitutional significance of amendment (a) because it is unprecedented in its nature. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has already addressed the kernel of the matter, which is whether the Government will make time available this week. Indeed, he set out at the beginning of the debate that, in good

faith, we will have discussions with my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, Opposition Front Benchers and Members from across the House on how the process should look. Amendment (a) does not set that out in detail, so the Government have undertaken to have that process and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster addressed that in his opening remarks.

On amendment (f), I reassure the right hon. Member for Derby South that the Government will return to the Dispatch Box in the event that the withdrawal agreement is not approved this week. We will also return to the House to consider plans for the week of 5 April after any indicative voting. As the right hon. Lady will know as a senior Member of the House, the decision on whether to enter recess is in the control of the House. Although we do not think it is sensible to try to set the Order Paper now for a date in two weeks' time without knowing what will happen in the interim, I hope that she is content that the House will certainly have a say on the matter.

Margaret Beckett: I will not detain the Secretary of State. If what I have suggested is acceptable, why does he not just accept the amendment?

Stephen Barclay: As I said, we cannot anticipate the business in two weeks' time, but we have given a signal from the Dispatch Box on behalf of the Government about our position.

Let me turn to amendment (d) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. The shadow Brexit Secretary said that many Members want to break the current deadlock, yet his amendment raises no objection to the withdrawal agreement and, as he well knows, it is the withdrawal agreement, not the political declaration, that needs to be approved to meet the tests that the European Council set for an extension to 22 May. He went on to criticise the Government for not giving a commitment to be bound by any indicative votes, yet, as I pointed out earlier, when the Father of the House challenged the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras on that very issue, he was unable to give such a commitment for Her Majesty's Opposition to be bound in that way. Indeed, despite many of his own Members pressing for free votes from the Government in respect of those votes, he was again unwilling to give such a commitment on behalf of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition's amendment notes that the Government's deal has been defeated, but it is silent on the fact that his own deal has also been rejected by the House.

Regardless of any other votes, if the House does not approve the withdrawal agreement this week, it risks a longer extension, potentially resulting in Brexit being revoked, at odds with the Government's manifesto. The uncertainty of any longer extension would be bad for business confidence and investments. It would also have lasting implications for our democracy, including our reputation around the world as a country that respects the votes of its citizens.

If this House can find the resolve, we could be out of the European Union in a matter of weeks. This is the ultimate mandate: the one handed to us by the British people; the one that reflects the manifestos that the Labour party, as well as the Conservative party, stood on. The Prime Minister's deal is the way to deliver what

[Stephen Barclay]

the people voted for in 2016 and 2017. That is why it is right that the Government maintain control of the Order Paper, in line with constitutional convention, and why the amendments this evening should be defeated.

Mr Speaker: I invite the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), to move amendment (d), which stands in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Not moved.

Amendment proposed: (a), At end, add

“and, given the need for the House to debate and vote on alternative ways forward, with a view to the Government putting forward a plan for the House to debate and vote on, orders that –

(a) Standing Order No. 14(1) (which provides that government business shall have precedence at every sitting save as provided in that order) shall not apply on Wednesday 27 March;

(b) precedence on that day shall be given to a motion relating to the Business of the House in connection with matters relating to the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union other than any Business of the House motion relating to the consideration by the House of a motion under Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and then to motions relating to that withdrawal and the United Kingdom’s future relationship with the European Union other than any motion moved under Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018;

(c) if more than one motion related to the Business of the House is tabled, the Speaker shall decide which motion shall have precedence;

(d) the Speaker shall interrupt proceedings on any business before the Business of the House motion having precedence at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 27 March and call a Member to move that motion;

(e) debate on that motion may continue until 3.00 pm on Wednesday 27 March at which time the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion including the questions on amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved;

(f) when those proceedings have been concluded, the Speaker shall call a Member to move one of the other motions having precedence;

(g) any proceedings interrupted or superseded by this order or an order arising from the Business of the House motion may be resumed or (as the case may be) entered upon and proceeded with after the moment of interruption on Wednesday 27 March.”—
(*Sir Oliver Letwin.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 329, Noes 302.

Division No. 373]

[9.57 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Benyon, rh Richard

Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Chris Leslie*)
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Boles, Nick
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre

Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burt, rh Alistair
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Collins, Damian
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion

Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Freeman, George
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, rh Damian
Green, Kate
Greening, rh Justine
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman

Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Masterton, Paul
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Neill, Robert
 Newlands, Gavin
 Newton, Sarah
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pawsey, Mark
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget

Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
 by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, John
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom

West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil

Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and
Colleen Fletcher

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Austin, Ian
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Cooper, Rosie
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims

Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Frank
 Field, rh Mark
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark

Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, John
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark

Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote
 cast by Tracey Crouch*)
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel

Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin

Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
**Michelle Donelan and
 Jo Churchill**

Question accordingly agreed to.

10.14 pm

The Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Order, this day).

Amendment proposed: (f), at end, add

“and orders that, in the event that the UK comes within seven calendar days of leaving the European Union without a deal, the Government must make arrangements within two sitting days, or if this House has been adjourned for more than four days to arrange for the House to be recalled under Standing Order No. 13 (Earlier meeting of the House in certain circumstances) for this purpose, for a Minister of the Crown to move a motion on whether this House approves the UK leaving the EU without a deal and on whether the UK Government should be required to request an extension of the period in Article 50(3) of the Treaty on European Union in order to avoid a no-deal Brexit and to give time for Parliament to determine a different approach.”—(*Margaret Beckett.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 314.

Division No. 374]

[10.14 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Heidi
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Bebb, Guto
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Chris Leslie*)
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul

Boles, Nick
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brine, Steve
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burton, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Crowley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhési, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Giindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter

Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greening, rh Justine
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid

Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz

Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and
Colleen Fletcher

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David

Andrew, Stuart	Ellis, Michael	Javid, rh Sajid	Offord, Dr Matthew
Argar, Edward	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Opperman, Guy
Atkins, Victoria	Elphicke, Charlie	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Paisley, Ian
Austin, Ian	Eustice, George	Jenkyns, Andrea	Parish, Neil
Bacon, Mr Richard	Evans, Mr Nigel	Jenrick, Robert	Patel, rh Priti
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Evennett, rh Sir David	Johnson, rh Boris	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Baker, Mr Steve	Fabricant, Michael	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Pawsey, Mark
Baldwin, Harriett	Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Johnson, Gareth	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Barclay, rh Stephen	Field, rh Frank	Johnson, Joseph	Penrose, John
Baron, Mr John	Field, rh Mark	Jones, Andrew	Percy, Andrew
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Flint, rh Caroline	Jones, rh Mr David	Perry, rh Claire
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Ford, Vicky	Jones, Mr Marcus	Philp, Chris
Beresford, Sir Paul	Foster, Kevin	Kawczynski, Daniel	Pincher, rh Christopher
Berry, Jake	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Keegan, Gillian	Poulter, Dr Dan
Blackman, Bob	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kennedy, Seema	Pow, Rebecca
Blunt, Crispin	Frazer, Lucy	Kerr, Stephen	Prentis, Victoria
Bone, Mr Peter	Freeman, George	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Prisk, Mr Mark
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Freer, Mike	Knight, Julian	Pritchard, Mark
Bowie, Andrew	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Pursglove, Tom
Bradley, Ben	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Lamont, John	Quin, Jeremy
Bradley, rh Karen	Garnier, Mark	Lancaster, rh Mark	Quince, Will
Brady, Sir Graham	Gauke, rh Mr David	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Raab, rh Dominic
Braverman, Suella	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Redwood, rh John
Brereton, Jack	Gibb, rh Nick	Lefroy, Jeremy	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Bridgen, Andrew	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Brokenshire, rh James	Girvan, Paul	Lewer, Andrew	Robinson, Gavin
Bruce, Fiona	Glen, John	Lewis, rh Brandon	Robinson, Mary
Buckland, Robert	Goldsmith, Zac	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Rosindell, Andrew
Burghart, Alex	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Ross, Douglas (<i>Proxy vote cast by Tracey Crouch</i>)
Burns, Conor	Gove, rh Michael	Lidington, rh Mr David	Rowley, Lee
Cairns, rh Alun	Graham, Luke	Little Pengelly, Emma	Rudd, rh Amber
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Graham, Richard	Lopez, Julia	Rutley, David
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Grant, Bill	Lopresti, Jack	Scully, Paul
Cartledge, James	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Seely, Mr Bob
Cash, Sir William	Gray, James	Loughton, Tim	Selous, Andrew
Caulfield, Maria	Grayling, rh Chris	Mackinlay, Craig	Shannon, Jim
Chalk, Alex	Green, Chris	Macleane, Rachel	Shapps, rh Grant
Chishti, Rehman	Green, rh Damian	Main, Mrs Anne	Sharma, Alok
Chope, Sir Christopher	Griffiths, Andrew	Mak, Alan	Shelbrooke, Alec
Clark, Colin	Hair, Kirstene	Malthouse, Kit	Simpson, David
Clark, rh Greg	Halfon, rh Robert	Mann, John	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Clarke, Mr Simon	Hall, Luke	Mann, Scott	Skidmore, Chris
Cleverly, James	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Masterton, Paul	Smith, Chloe
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hammond, Stephen	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Smith, Henry
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Hancock, rh Matt	Maynard, Paul	Smith, rh Julian
Collins, Damian	Hands, rh Greg	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Smith, Royston
Cooper, Rosie	Harper, rh Mr Mark	McPartland, Stephen	Snell, Gareth
Costa, Alberto	Harris, Rebecca	McVey, rh Ms Esther	Spencer, Mark
Courts, Robert	Harrison, Trudy	Menzies, Mark	Stephenson, Andrew
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hart, Simon	Mercer, Johnny	Stevenson, John
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hayes, rh Sir John	Merriman, Huw	Stewart, Bob
Crouch, Tracey	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stewart, Iain
Davies, Chris	Heappey, James	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stewart, Rory
Davies, David T. C.	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Milling, Amanda	Streeter, Sir Gary
Davies, Glyn	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mills, Nigel	Stride, rh Mel
Davies, Mims	Henderson, Gordon	Milton, rh Anne	Stringer, Graham
Davies, Philip	Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Stuart, Graham
Davis, rh Mr David	Herbert, rh Nick	Moore, Damien	Sturdy, Julian
Dinenage, Caroline	Hinds, rh Damian	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Sunak, Rishi
Docherty, Leo	Hoare, Simon	Morgan, rh Nicky	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hoey, Kate	Morris, Anne Marie	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Hollingbery, George	Morris, David	Syms, Sir Robert
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hollinrake, Kevin	Morris, James	Thomas, Derek
Double, Steve	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Morton, Wendy	Thomson, Ross
Downen, Oliver	Holloway, Adam	Mundell, rh David	Throup, Maggie
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Howell, John	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tolhurst, Kelly
Drax, Richard	Huddleston, Nigel	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Tomlinson, Justin
Duddridge, James	Hughes, Eddie	Neill, Robert	Tomlinson, Michael
Duguid, David	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Newton, Sarah	Tracey, Craig
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Nokes, rh Caroline	Tredinnick, David
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Jack, Mr Alister	Norman, Jesse	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	James, Margot	O'Brien, Neil	

Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather

Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Michelle Donelan and
Jo Churchill

Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Freeman, George
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glendon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, rh Damian
Green, Kate
Greening, rh Justine
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah

Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leslie, Mr Chris
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Masterton, Paul
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart
C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr
Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Graham
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Neill, Robert
Newlands, Gavin
Newton, Sarah
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr Speaker: We are waiting for the result of the Division but, in a cordial spirit, I am sure colleagues across the House will want to congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on his birthday.

The House having divided: Ayes 327, Noes 300.

Division No. 375]

[10.33 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Benyon, rh Richard
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Chris Leslie)
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Boles, Nick
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Collins, Damian
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr
Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela

O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pawsey, Mark
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
 by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura

Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, John
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
**Colleen Fletcher and
 Jeff Smith**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Austin, Ian
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Bellingham, Sir Henry

Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor

Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Cooper, Rosie
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinage, Caroline
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey
 M.
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr
 Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen

Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig

Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, John
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote
 cast by Tracey Crouch*)
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul

Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Snell, Gareth
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
**Michelle Donelan and
 Jo Churchill**

and made on Friday 15 March 2019, and, given the need for the House to debate and vote on alternative ways forward, with a view to the Government putting forward a plan for the House to debate and vote on, orders that –

(a) Standing Order No. 14(1) (which provides that government business shall have precedence at every sitting save as provided in that order) shall not apply on Wednesday 27 March;

(b) precedence on that day shall be given to a motion relating to the Business of the House in connection with matters relating to the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union other than any Business of the House motion relating to the consideration by the House of a motion under Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and then to motions relating to that withdrawal and the United Kingdom's future relationship with the European Union other than any motion moved under Section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018;

(c) if more than one motion related to the Business of the House is tabled, the Speaker shall decide which motion shall have precedence;

(d) the Speaker shall interrupt proceedings on any business before the Business of the House motion having precedence at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 27 March and call a Member to move that motion;

(e) debate on that motion may continue until 3.00 pm on Wednesday 27 March at which time the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion including the questions on amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved;

(f) when those proceedings have been concluded, the Speaker shall call a Member to move one of the other motions having precedence;

(g) any proceedings interrupted or superseded by this order or an order arising from the Business of the House motion may be resumed or (as the case may be) entered upon and proceeded with after the moment of interruption on Wednesday 27 March.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to congratulate the House on taking control. The Government's approach has been an abject failure, and this House must now find a solution. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and others who have worked to achieve tonight's result.

The Government must take this process seriously. We do not know what the House will decide on Wednesday, but I know that there are many Members of this House who have been working on alternative solutions, and we must debate them to find a consensus. This House must also consider whether any deal should be put to the people for a confirmatory vote. Where this Government have failed, this House must—and I believe will—succeed.

Mr Speaker: No adjudication by the Chair is required.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not wish to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), but since he now seems to have installed himself as a kind of jobbing Prime Minister, could you tell me how we can hold him to account in this House?

Mr Speaker: I have known the hon. Gentleman for a long time, and he is not disorderly, but there is something to be said for observing the precepts of "Erskine May" in terms of moderation and good humour in parliamentary debate, and the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) is always unfailingly courteous in his

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, in accordance with the provisions of section 13(6)(a) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, has considered the Written Statement titled "Statement under Section 13(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018"

[Mr Speaker]

dealings with others. I think that the question was largely rhetorical, but in so far as the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) is seeking a response, what I would say in all seriousness is that the effect of—[*Interruption.*] Order. I do not require any help from the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), who would not have the foggiest idea where to start. He was once a Whip; he wasn't a very good Whip. It would be better if he could keep quiet. That is the reality of the matter. [*Interruption.*] No, it is not outrageous at all. [*Interruption.*] Members can shout as much as they like, it will not make any difference. The right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham is perfectly capable of looking after himself. If he wants to chunter noisily from a sedentary position, he has to expect that there will be a response. I say to the hon. Member for Monmouth that these matters will be aired further in debate on Wednesday, and if he wants to subject the right hon. Member for West Dorset to appropriate scrutiny, the opportunity is there for him to do so.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Tonight's is an important decision for the House, and let me commend Members from across the House who have given us the opportunity to have indicative votes on Wednesday. This House is seeking a way forward when the Government have failed to provide leadership. In the event that the House does come to a determination on Wednesday evening, what can we do to ensure that the Government and the Prime Minister listen to the determination of this House?

Mr Speaker: It is for the right hon. Gentleman—I think he knows this—to probe Ministers who will be on the Treasury Bench during the course of the debate, to air the issues and to ask, “If x, y or z happens, what will the Minister do?” These are not matters that can be adjudicated by the Chair, but they are matters of debate that I am sure will be ventilated, and the right hon. Gentleman will be at the forefront of ensuring that that ventilation takes place.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A few weeks ago, you sent out a message and a letter to all Members of Parliament, asking them to treat each other with respect. Do you think that your comments to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) reflected that?

Mr Speaker: If I have caused offence, I will very happily apologise. I have no difficulty with that. I have no difficulty in apologising to the right hon. Gentleman. I did not think he was a person of tender sensibilities, but if I have caused offence I am very—[*Interruption.*] If people would let me speak, I will happily do so. I am very happy to apologise to the right hon. Gentleman. It does not cause me a problem. He is normally a most genial character, and most of our exchanges are in that vein. I am very happy to tender that apology. It does not cause me any difficulty whatsoever. [*Interruption.*] Well, opinions can differ about qualities—[*Interruption.*] Yes, but I do not need to adjudicate on that. I have said what I have said, and there is nothing that requires to be added.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It may not cause you any great trouble, but it causes us a certain degree of trouble. You, Sir, have just congratulated my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) on treating everybody with courtesy. You, Sir, are the invigilator of this place, and if you insult other Members of Parliament, we have no comeback. Is that not—

Mr Speaker: Order. Resume your seat. What I say to the right hon. Gentleman is this: the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), from a sedentary position, was disorderly. The point was raised by the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin). I have given an apology. I said sorry to the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham and nothing further requires to be added. I thank the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) for underlining his concern, but I said sorry to the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham and it does not need to be said again.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This evening the House has made a major constitutional innovation. In order that it can be a success and that Wednesday is both orderly and meaningful, would you now establish a business committee of the main parties and those who brought forward these proposals in order to organise these events?

Mr Speaker: I think that everybody would hope, or certainly it is to be reasonably assumed that they do, that the process on Wednesday, in the interests of Parliament, is a success. It is my absolute expectation that the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) will communicate with others—and, indeed, quite possibly with the usual channels—about the process to be followed on Wednesday to facilitate the House and try to secure a satisfactory outcome. I do not think in the first instance it is to be expected that I would take the lead on the matter, but the right hon. Gentleman can be expected to do so, and I feel sure that, with others, that is what he will do.

Anna Soubry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would be in order to record that the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) was actually a rather good Whip; and, arguably more importantly, as a member of Her Majesty's Government—as a Minister—resigned on a point of principle?

Mr Speaker: That is absolutely true. Indeed, if memory serves me correctly, I remember having a conversation with the right hon. Gentleman at the Chair at the time, and more recently. He was an exceptionally capable Minister—I do not doubt that. I cannot comment on how good a Whip he was beyond apologising for the offence that I might have caused. He certainly was an immensely capable Minister at the Dispatch Box. I do not dispute that for one moment. I thank the right hon. Lady for what she has said.

Sir William Cash: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) just said that this was a constitutional innovation. I think he may have rather underestimated the fact that it is in fact a constitutional revolution, and the House will come to regret it.

Mr Speaker: I hope the hon. Gentleman will understand if I say that he has made his point and he does not need a response from me. As he knows, I respect his integrity 100%. His view is on the record, and let us see how events play out, but I would always want to acknowledge the force and sincerity of his views.

Ms Angela Eagle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that the House has now voted to have this process, yet the Government Front Bench was promising it anyway, does it not make sense for both Front Benches to work with those who sponsored the amendment so that we can move forward in an orderly manner on Wednesday with the agreement of the House?

Mr Speaker: That might seem eminently reasonable. Nothing is to be taken for granted, but I can certainly see, and many Members might note, the force and logic of what the hon. Lady has said.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Tonight's vote is obviously about the House taking control due to a lack of leadership by the Government. In that vein, we have usually had a point of order or a statement from the Prime Minister after such votes. Have you had any indication of where the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House are hiding and of what the Leader of the House is planning to do about Government business on Wednesday, which needs to be rescheduled? We have not had a statement.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. In fairness, and speaking off the top of my head without the opportunity to consult and without advance knowledge of what the hon. Gentleman would say, I am not sure that that is quite right in procedural terms, because the effect of tonight's vote on the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for West Dorset and then in support of the main motion, as amended, is that what the right hon. Gentleman has commended to the House will have precedence on Wednesday. It does not, however, knock out other Government business of itself; I think that other Government business would follow. So although the hon. Gentleman might want a business statement by the Leader of the House or a response from the Prime Minister, in procedural terms neither of those things is required tonight—he might want it, but neither is required tonight. Perhaps I can leave it there.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that, these days, extensions are in vogue, if the 24 hours of Wednesday are not enough to sort out what the mind of this House is—work that probably should have happened two and a half years ago—will it be possible to extend the work that should be happening on Wednesday into further days so that we do find out definitively what the heck they think in here?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, but I think the best answer to that is, let us take one step at a time; let us see where things go in the consideration by the House of the business. I think I should leave it there. I thank colleagues for their interest and participation in this series of exchanges.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 3 to 12 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (SOCIAL SECURITY)

That the draft Social Security Coordination (Regulation (EC) No 987/2009) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security Coordination (Council Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 and Council Regulation (EC) No 859/2003) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security Coordination (Council Regulation (EC) No 574/72) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security Coordination (Regulation (EC) No 883/2004, EEA Agreement and Swiss Agreement) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS)

That the draft Electronic Commerce and Solvency 2 (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the draft Food and Drink, Veterinary Medicines and Residues (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (COMPANIES)

That the draft International Accounting Standards and European Public Limited-Liability Company (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ANIMALS)

That the draft Zoonotic Disease Eradication and Control (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 14 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the draft European Structural and Investment Funds Common Provisions (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 12 February, be approved.

That the draft European Structural and Investment Funds Common Provisions Rules etc. (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 12 February, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the draft Rural Development (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 February, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 March (Standing Order No. 41A).

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the draft Rural Development (Rules and Decisions) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 February, be approved.—(*Mike Freer.*)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 March (Standing Order No. 41A).

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ordered,

That Catherine West be discharged from the International Trade Committee and Owen Smith be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Policing: Somerset

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

11.3 pm

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): For many reasons, I am pleased to have secured this debate, even though some of what I have to say may be distressing to hear because crime, unfortunately, knows no boundaries.

It will come as no surprise that policing in Somerset is a matter of enormous concern to my constituents and to hundreds of thousands of others across the county. To an outsider, Somerset conjures up the image of a peaceful backwater, full of cider orchards and friendly folk with old-fashioned values. Unfortunately, as in so many other parts of our nation, life is no longer like that. Rather alarmingly, the National Crime Agency says that there are 90 organised crime groups operating in the Avon and Somerset area. It is no longer a few light-fingered thieves we have to worry about; it is big-time crooks. Organised crime in the United Kingdom costs £37 billion every year—that is almost as much as the Brexit divorce bill to Brussels. Organised crime causes more deaths than terrorism, wars and natural disasters put together, and there are 90 organised crime groups in my county alone. Frankly, it does not bear thinking about.

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction has just named Bristol the cocaine capital of Europe. That is not an accolade that any of us locally are proud of. The city has shot up the international cocaine leader board. Twelve months ago, Bristol was No. 5 in the charts; now it is No. 1. There is widespread drug misuse in so many corners of Somerset, which the police confess is way beyond their capacity to handle, let alone solve. Users frequently get off with a caution if they are caught at all. Dealers have to be major players to warrant anything approaching a crackdown. The force simply does not have the manpower to do anything other than cherry-pick at a huge, disastrous and growing problem.

Just a fortnight ago, the Avon and Somerset chief constable admitted that his force was “losing the war” against drugs. That is a very scary public statement to make. I have enormous respect for the foot soldiers of our overworked police force. I have watched them do their jobs in difficult circumstances. I have joined them in civvies on patrol and see them risk life and limb in action. The men and women in the ranks perform miracles, and they defy the odds, but I fear the odds are stacked against them. They are not always well led, and they suffer from the slings and arrows of erratic decision making by the office of the police and crime commissioner.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service will probably know that I have had several bitter spats with the Avon and Somerset police and crime commissioner, Mrs Sue Mountstevens, who has the uncanny knack of opening her mouth and inserting both feet into it—a remarkable achievement. On her first day on the job, she fired the chief constable. A few months later, she fired his successor—the very candidate she had hand-picked as a replacement. The present chief constable must consider himself lucky to have survived a couple of years.

Nobody can relax when the commissioner starts talking. Last week, she offered the benefit of her wisdom on the subject of drug smuggling—"Don't risk Dover," she told her audience, "because you might easily get caught." She added that if anybody was smuggling drugs, her personal recommendation was somewhere safer, like Lyme Regis in Dorset. I am sure that Members representing Dorset are pleased.

The local town exploded with justifiable anger. They call Lyme Regis the pearl of the Jurassic coast, which it is, but Mrs Mountstevens has now renamed it Dope-on-Sea. Bang go her chances of getting a glittering career with the Lyme Regis tourist board. Mrs Mountstevens used to run the famous Mountstevens family bakery. I suspect that it will not come as a great surprise to the Minister that the bakery went bust when she was running it. Last week, after the Lyme Regis booboo, she baked an incredible humble pie and was forced to eat the lot.

Frankly, anyone would find it a bit of a challenge trying to run an effective police force with Sue Mountstevens permanently peering over their shoulder, especially when the arithmetic of crime is rising against her. Everything seems to be going up. Knife crime is up 52% in a single year. That amounts to 634 additional crimes in Avon and Somerset in which knives were used. The police response was to organise Operation Spectre, a campaign aimed at educating young people, targeting hotspots and putting out knife surrender bins. That may sound like the sort of thing that officers should be doing all the time, but Operation Spectre lasted for only seven days, which is nothing like enough to make a difference.

I do not believe that these major problems can be tackled with tokenism. Serious crime demands serious answers. Avon and Somerset police and its commissioner have been trumpeting Operation Remedy, which claims to make 100 extra officers available to fight drug dealers. It certainly looks like the first significant increase in manpower in Somerset for several years and will be paid for by a £24 average council tax rise, but I doubt whether Operation Remedy can ever provide an effective remedy, because it only lasts for three months. The chief constable promised that it would make a "big splash". Really? Operation Remedy comes to an end in June. Unfortunately, as we all know, whether one is a northern or a southern MP, drug barons never stop.

We should remember that the operation is being paid for entirely out of a hefty hike in council tax. The Somerset County Council police panel has given Mrs Mountstevens a hard time, demanding justification for the spending. It wants to ensure that it is not a waste of money, and I think it has very good reason to be cautious.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: With great pleasure.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; I spoke to him beforehand and he will understand where I am coming from. A great benefit of community policing in my constituency, and perhaps in his as well, is having police officers in the community—in the estates, on the streets and in the rural communities—bringing in the intelligence on drugs and other things across the constituency. Does he think that the police force in his constituency could do more of that? If so, what would he like the Minister to do to ensure that it happens?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: I welcome that intervention. This debate is about policing in Somerset, but the issue applies to the whole country. It does not matter whether it is Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland or England: we are all suffering in the same way. There is an epidemic and we are not yet controlling it. I am not blaming the Government, because the issue goes back over the 18 years I have been in Parliament. I think knife crime has gone up, but the rest has not greatly changed. The hon. Gentleman's point is that this is about frontline services and frontline officers. I have spoken to the Minister, who has championed the issue during his time in office, and I welcome his commitment to continue to fight at every level. This has to be about the community, as the hon. Gentleman has rightly said, but it also has to be led from the centre so that it ripples out, even to bad police and crime commissioners, as in my case. That was a great intervention.

Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): South Gloucestershire, of course, falls under the Avon and Somerset constabulary. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we are unable to get a handle on bigger issues such as knife crime and drug-related organised crime, it is much more difficult to tackle low-level antisocial behaviour issues, which are the ones most raised by constituents in South Gloucestershire?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. We cover very similar areas and he makes a valid point. I will come on to that, because the Somerset area has some exciting news and I hope we will be able to reach across the border into South Gloucestershire. I know that his area suffers the same problems as we do: crime takes place up and down the motorway, and he will also find that Bristol sucks in loads of resources.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Bath also falls under the Avon and Somerset constabulary. I do not share entirely the hon. Gentleman's criticism of the police and crime commissioner. Bath experienced a problem when our police station was completely shut, but fortunately, we will get it back. Does he agree that it is important that it is open 24/7 because that is what makes people feel safe and looked after by the police?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: That is an interesting comment. I do not know the situation in Bath, so I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention. I know the feeling that she is experiencing. We lost the police station in Minehead and then in Bridgwater, but a purpose-built police station has been built in Bridgwater. It has been highly successful and that is where the custody suite for Somerset is located. The hon. Lady is right to highlight the fact that we need local policing in our areas, no matter whether it is Bath, South Gloucestershire or elsewhere. I agree with her about that, but I cannot agree with her about Sue Mountstevens. I think she is quite appalling, but that is a personal view.

Of course this is not, and should not be, just a matter of policing. Clearly, as I have said, many agencies need to be involved if the root causes of rising crime are ever going to be tackled. I therefore welcome the approach that the Home Office is pushing.

Sedgemoor, which is part of my constituency, has been selected as one of five national pilot projects to help combat the threat of serious and organised crime.

[Mr Liddell-Grainger]

That is no great surprise to me; it is just another justified feather in the cap for Sedgemoor District Council, which works incredibly closely with the police. As I said in response to the hon. Lady, that is where the police headquarters are located.

The project will tackle the impact of organised drug networks, including the recruitment of vulnerable local youths to push drugs supplied by national dealers—a relatively new threat known by the catchphrase “country lines”.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I hesitate to correct my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, but the phrase is “county lines”. We share a border along constituencies and counties and therefore constabularies: Avon and Somerset police and Devon and Cornwall police. Will my hon. Friend briefly reflect on two things? First, it is vital to tackle the county lines drug running that he mentioned across borders. Secondly, will he join me in thanking the rank and file officers who do such hard work in my constabulary and in his to try to counter that crime?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: My hon. Friend and I share the beauty of Exmoor. He is absolutely right. It is a remote area and there are too many rogues. We know that it is not just drugs, but sheep and cattle and other things. I am grateful for his correction—I meant “county lines”.

The project will also work with health partners to combat the illicit sale of alcohol and cigarettes and review the impact of rural crime. That is a good idea, particularly the rural crime review. Rural crime has become a forgotten crisis in many parts of Somerset. Some people feel that it is forgotten and ignored. Believe it or not, sleepy-sounding places such as Stogumber and Crowcombe have some of the highest crime rates outside Taunton, and they are tiny. I invite hon. Members to listen to what one farmer’s wife said when she wrote to me about life in rural Somerset:

“The countryside is under siege. We’ve been subjected to threats, physical and verbal assault, trespass and criminal damage sometimes on a daily basis, but the response to 999 call outs is absolutely dismal. My husband was tending his livestock when he came across two individuals. He was punched severely in the face, but despite ringing 999 no officer showed up for three hours. How much do we have to be injured before rural crime is taken seriously?”

I assure my right hon. Friend the Minister that, unfortunately, that was by no means an isolated example.

Crime has scarred the beautiful countryside and invaded the respectable areas too, including the county town of Taunton. I have achieved some notoriety in this House for my strident criticisms of Taunton and the way it has been ineptly run by an incompetent council. I recently cited crime figures for parts of Taunton which, without doubt, are shocking. However, tonight, I have come armed with an excellent report and offer a great deal of praise to its cross-party authors. It was compiled by five Taunton Deane borough councillors—two are Conservative, two are Labour and the committee was chaired by an Independent councillor. It throws a harsh spotlight on the way crime is being handled or, in some cases, mishandled.

The councillors were given the task of assessing the impact of crime on the town and recommending action. They took the trouble to obtain evidence from residents

and shopkeepers. One shop in Taunton town centre has been broken into twice by the same man in the last two months, costing £1,000 a time. The shopkeeper said:

“I have had to update security because the insurance people aren’t happy. The security fitter said it was absurd because the only place you’d find this kind of security is a bank.”

A retired policeman, who had served for 23 years, said:

“I feel that it is unsafe to take my young family into the town given the presence of aggressive beggars, street drinking and drunkenness.”

One branch of a big name national clothing store in Taunton reckons that it loses £100,000-worth of goods every year through aggressive shoplifting. Many people related their stories of abuse, assault and harassment from drug pushers, rough sleepers and vandals. It happens even in broad daylight, right in the historic heart of a once proud town.

The evidence in the report is grim and depressing. The council committee’s conclusions are equally blunt:

“Neither the council—as the elected custodians of Taunton’s town centre—or the Police are taking the lead to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. Both need to take robust and expedient action”.

Taunton Deane Borough Council rightly introduced public space protection orders three years ago to get a grip on that. But guess what? There is still no shortage of louts in the town but there has not been a single prosecution. That affects us all.

The committee calls the situation “woeful”. It is appalling. Those Taunton councillors concluded that the police lack presence and do not respond to crimes as they should. There is also criticism of Ms Mountstevens. As for the partnership between Taunton council and the police, the report states:

“It lacks leadership, strategy, and accountability”.

The councillors deliberately grilled Taunton council’s antisocial behaviour team. That was an eye opener. The report concludes:

“The team lacked credibility due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of the issues. Taunton’s antisocial behaviour team suffers from a skillset deficit and poor management.”

I do not blame the council for that. I did not make this stuff up. It is one of the very few decent pieces of work to come out of Taunton council for years and for that reason alone, I wonder if anyone in a position of leadership will take it seriously.

Taunton has many more rough sleepers than anywhere else in Somerset. Taunton has a town centre full of boarded up shops and derelict building sites. No wonder travellers invade with their caravans and no wonder drug dealers congregate there. It is such a shame, because big problems should have simple solutions, but they are not being done.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am a little bit concerned. I have the greatest respect for the hon. Gentleman, but I am a bit worried that he is discussing somebody else’s constituency and the Member is not here. I understand that it is a part of what is being said, but I do feel it is a little bit unfair to the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow).

Mr Liddell-Grainger: Mr Deputy Speaker, I wrote to my hon. Friend this afternoon to say that I would speak about this. I also made it clear that I would talk about

other areas. The report is very good because it reflects on my area, as well my hon. Friend's. It shows that all of us have a problem. It is the only report I have seen in 18 years as an MP that has taken this issue in our county to this level. The report is cross-party and I therefore think I have the right to talk about it, but I have made it clear to my hon. Friend in writing. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, because Mr Speaker has had his concerns about that as well. I will conclude and allow my right hon. Friend the Minister a couple of minutes to respond.

The same council hired street wardens in 2014, but only for a month. The committee report says it would cost less than £114,000 to employ a proper team for a whole year. Taunton Deane Council wants to spend almost £1 million on fences to hide a very nasty site. I do not disagree with that, but it wants to borrow £16 million to build a hotel. Surely it helps my area and all of us to find the money for town wardens.

Policing in Somerset is not cheap: it costs the whole county £284 million a year. I believe it could do more with officers and money. Perhaps they could do that without too much interference from police and crime commissioners. We need much more than a token operation. A one-week clampdown on knife crime does not cut any mustard with anybody. Sticking plasters are not enough. There is a clear role to be played by local authorities. Some are doing it well, but others are lagging way behind. I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will agree with what I have said.

11.21 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) has been in this place for 18 years and we know him to be a tireless champion of the interests of his constituents, as well as the interests of rural areas and the need for, as he put it, a fair share for the shires. I congratulate him on securing the debate.

My hon. Friend asks me where I agree with him. I certainly agree with him and my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) in expressing admiration for the work of frontline officers. They are extremely stretched at the moment. We ask a lot of them. They have to do difficult work under difficult circumstances. It is good to hear local Members of Parliament stand up to express their admiration and thanks for their work. I also thank my hon. Friend for recognising the importance of serious organised crime in the fundamental shift in the threat to public security that we are trying to police and protect our constituents from. He understands that, and I thank him for reflecting it in his comments. I hope he will welcome the updated Government serious organised crime strategy and the increased resources going into that area. They are necessary for exactly the reasons he sets out.

My hon. Friend left the House in no doubt about his view on the police and crime commissioner. All I would say is that she was elected. I hope that he agrees with me that the introduction of police and crime commissioners has sharpened the local accountability of the police. The bottom line is that the police and crime commissioner for Avon and Somerset has a job to do. She is accountable

to the public and if the public of Somerset do not like what she does they can vote her out. That is the strength of the system we have introduced.

My hon. Friend talked about the task and finish group, and the report on Taunton. I very much take on board your point, Mr Deputy Speaker, that my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) is not in her place. I also accept, however, that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset is clear that there are ramifications for his constituents. There are clearly mixed views about the accuracy of the report. I have read it and it raises important questions, both for the police and crime commissioner and the local borough council, about how resources are allocated across the county, the effectiveness of the local crime partnership and the efficacy of the response to 999 calls in rural areas. I am sure that they will be responsive to that report.

My hon. Friend is passionate about the need for proper attention to be paid to rural crime. I hope that he takes some satisfaction from the fact that the National Police Chiefs' Council, which, in my experience, is an extremely powerful body for driving change across the police system, published a rural affairs strategy last July that reflects operational and policing priorities on rural crime. There are six priority themes: farm, machinery, plant and vehicle theft—I know my hon. Friend will welcome that—livestock offences, fuel theft, equine crime, fly-tipping and poaching. I know that the police chiefs are very aware of the need to give appropriate priority to rural crime.

On the specific report, as the House would expect, these are local decisions in a local debate on which it is not for me to opine. In response to my hon. Friend I can say what central Government are doing to support the battle against crime and disorder in Somerset and South Gloucestershire. My hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) is entirely right: the research is very clear about the importance of bearing down on what is sometimes misleadingly called low-level crime, because all the evidence says that if we do not get on top of that, it can escalate to bigger problems.

Since being police Minister, my priority has been to get more resources into policing, because I recognised from a very early stage that the system is too stretched. The reality is that as a result of the actions that we have taken, as a country we will be investing almost £2 billion more next year in our police system than we were three years ago. Police forces up and down the country are recruiting additional officers and staff—almost 3,000, including at least 100 in Avon and Somerset—so we are heading in the right direction. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset and other colleagues who are concerned about this issue that this is a stepping stone towards the spending review, which is the next major event in shaping the resources available to our policing. I have given the undertaking, as has the Home Secretary, that police funding is an absolute priority for us in the spending review. Within that, I have also undertaken to look again at the issue of fair funding. I note, for example, that Avon and Somerset has fewer police officers per head of population than the national average. These are issues that we need to address through the comprehensive spending review.

In the meantime, the Government are investing money to support the police in better co-ordinating their efforts on county lines—that point was raised in the debate—

[Mr Nick Hurd]

because of course this crosses borders. We are already seeing the impact of additional investment through increased arrests and increased safeguarding of vulnerable children. Our support for the police—not just Avon and Somerset, but the whole system—goes further than that in terms of additional powers for the police, as they have requested, whether those are knife crime protection orders or the Offensive Weapons Bill, which is moving through Parliament and will make it even harder to buy and possess the most dangerous weapons. I know that the theft of vehicles is an issue particularly on farms and in rural areas. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are disturbed by the increase in vehicle crime. In fact, I have convened a taskforce to look specifically at it. The taskforce brings together industry, including the insurance industry, and all stakeholders to bear down on the problem.

Finally on our support for our police and our ability to hold them to account for their performance, we continue to attach enormous importance to the system of accountability we have set up, not just with police and crime commissioners but with independent inspection, which means that we can identify what good looks like, where it is and where things need to improve.

Finally, I would point out that Avon and Somerset police, stretched though they are, are rated by Her Majesty's independent inspectorate as good for efficiency, legitimacy and effectiveness. They are also probably best in class across the system for their work in exploring how the police can better manage and use data to predict demand on them, which will be a large part of the future of policing, and we are supporting them actively in that, with significant investment over recent years. I congratulate the leadership of the force and its officers on their leadership in that area and their achievement in being rated good across all pillars of Her Majesty's independent inspection regime.

I acknowledge the points that my hon. Friend has made, which will have been noted in Somerset at the top of the force and by the police and crime commissioner, and I close, as he did, by commending the work of frontline officers across Avon and Somerset for the excellent work they do under extremely demanding circumstances.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 25 March 2019

[SIR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

Knife Crime

4.30 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 233926 relating to knife crime.

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. The petition, which was created by Mr John Perrins, has attracted 104,271 signatures and specifically calls for people

“found with a knife to get 10 years and using a knife 25 years in prison.”

At the outset, I would like to pay my respects to all the victims of knife crime and their grieving families. As we know from the tragic murders of 17-year-old Jodie Chesney in London and 17-year-old Yousef Makki in Manchester, the victims more often than not are younger people, and knife crime is often associated with that demographic. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay my respects to the family of Kelly Franklin, who was stabbed to death aged just 29 on 3 August last year in Hartlepool.

The Government responded to the petition on 14 March, stating in particular:

“Conviction of a knife or offensive weapon offence—threatening or possession—is now more likely to result in some form of custodial sentence, and for longer than at any point in the last ten years.”

They went on:

“In 2015, we introduced minimum custodial sentences for repeat knife possession and offences that involve threatening with a weapon. Adults face a minimum of 6 months’ imprisonment whilst young people aged 16 or 17 face a minimum 4 month Detention and Training Order. Since the introduction of the minimum custodial term people caught carrying a knife or offensive weapon for a second time are now more likely than ever before to go to prison—in the year ending September 2018, 82% of offenders received a custodial sentence for repeat possession offences. These offences carry maximum terms of 4 years’ imprisonment.”

The knife crime statistics for this year alone speak volumes. We are only in March, yet those statistics show there have been 39 fatal stabbings in Britain since the beginning of the year. Since last Friday there have been three more, including of another 17-year-old.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for introducing the debate and I congratulate John Perrins on organising the petition, as well as all those who signed it. A 17-year-old died in my constituency on Friday night after a spike in violent attacks in Isleworth. Does my hon. Friend agree that, although there may be a place for stronger sentences, there is a lot that all agencies can do, and funding is needed for schools, youth provision, police support and so on?

Mike Hill: I absolutely agree, and I will come to those points later.

Ministry of Justice figures released recently show that 21,484 people, including 4,686 here in the capital, were prosecuted or cautioned for knife offences in England

and Wales last year. That is 2,000 up on 2016, 5,000 more than in 2013, and the highest number of arrests and prosecutions since 2009. No wonder people are beginning to describe the situation as an epidemic.

Whether or not they agree with that description, the Government have had to concede that there is a problem. Less than two weeks ago, in his spring statement, the Chancellor announced that the Government will award police forces an extra £100 million over the next year to pay for overtime and to support reductions in knife crime and violent crime.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way; he is making a significant start to the debate. Does he agree that, although investment in the police is good and well meaning, we need investment in other areas, such as youth services, schools and councils? We also need to invest in building relationships with parents and in working with them and their young people.

Mike Hill: I absolutely agree. In fact, part of the Petitions Committee system is outreach work, and on Friday last we went to a school in Hartlepool, where the young people repeated much of that argument.

Many will agree that that £100 million is too little, too late and compare it with the £2.7 billion that has been taken out of the policing system since 2010, but any money targeted at tackling and preventing knife crime is welcome. For the record, my police force, Cleveland police, has had its number of police officers reduced by 500—a 37% reduction in staffing, following cuts of £25.5 million since 2010. The Prime Minister may be of the opinion that there is no correlation between police cuts and knife crime, but senior figures in the policing community, such as Cressida Dick, disagree. Considering that officer ranks have depleted by 20,000 across England, small wonder that people make that link.

The net effect of policing cuts was writ large when my constituency became the focus of a BBC film, which was broadcast on the national news, exposing that, in a town with a population of 92,028 at the last census, only 10 police officers were on duty on a Saturday night. Such a lack of visible police on the streets has resulted in our communities feeling less safe and more under threat. There is a real perception that crime will rise unless the police are better resourced. Cleveland police saw an increase in cautions and convictions for knife crime last year, and there has been a 4% rise since 2015. The police and crime commissioner, Barry Copping, is doing excellent work on crime prevention and intervention, but without the necessary resources he is swimming against the tide.

There truly is an argument not only for resourcing the police better but for increasing the tariff on custodial sentences. Clearly, in the mind of the public, current tariffs are not sufficient to act as a deterrent to criminals. The petition reflects that. The fact that the maximum penalty of four years applies only to reoffenders and not to first offenders is deeply worrying.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing the debate so well. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. Families in my constituency who have

[Neil Coyle]

suffered the tragedy of losing a loved one to knife crime say witnesses have not come forward as a direct result of their lack of confidence that those who committed the crime will receive lengthy convictions. Does my hon. Friend agree that the aims behind the petition would help address that concern by delivering longer sentences, encouraging witnesses to come forward and increasing the chances of securing prosecutions overall?

Mike Hill: I absolutely agree. If anything, the petition opens up a debate about that whole subject, including prevention.

The petitioners' call for mandatory tariffs of 10 years for possession and 25 years for the use of a knife may be seen as excessive, but there can be no doubt that, in the mind of the general public, the courts need to play their part in preventing the proliferation of knife-related criminal activity and, frankly, the murders that occur on our streets day in, day out.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his very good speech. I completely understand the public's feeling that there should be longer sentences—I have heard that many times—but in 2015 the Government introduced a two-strikes policy, which means anyone over 18 who is caught twice gets a minimum six-month jail term. Despite that change, knife crime has rocketed. The number of people who are imprisoned for knife offences has increased at exactly the same rate as the number of people who commit knife offences, so that has had no deterrent impact at all.

Mike Hill: I agree and I thank my hon. Friend for her contributions as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime. She is correct that we need to find some real solutions. To go back to my earlier point, the demographic of those involved in the increase in knife crime tends to be those who are under 18. There needs to be a rethink about custodial and preventive measures.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend—you are making an incredible and impactful speech. We are talking about harsher sentences, but does he agree that they do not always act as a deterrent? We need to focus on more of the drivers that lead our young people into a life of crime, including sheer desperation, pressure or other factors. Prevention is key when we look at those drivers.

Mike Hill: I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution and again I thank the young students at English Martyrs School in Hartlepool. They came out with exactly the same argument, mentioning the lack of youth services and poor mental health support. Young girls, two of whom had witnessed the display of knives in Hartlepool, were concerned about sexual assault as well as the use of weapons. Yes, you are absolutely right that we need to focus on those areas of prevention and gain an understanding of exactly where this problem has arisen.

I pay tribute to the staff of the Petitions Committee, who have engaged in educational and outreach work around the subject. As I have mentioned twice already, I also thank the students from the English Martyrs School in Hartlepool for their input and for adding their voices and opinions to the debate.

Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair): May I remind Members that they should address each other in the third person? Anybody who says “you” is talking to me, and I do not think that was what was intended.

4.42 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for bringing this debate to Westminster Hall. All of us here, but particularly those from Greater London, are affected in some way by what seems to be an epidemic of knife crime. I share the horror that others will express in this debate and which the hon. Gentleman articulated so well.

Everyone in the House will be united in grief by the tragic events we have recently seen, particularly the devastating murder of 17-year-old Jodie Chesney, which took place in Harold Hill, in the London Borough of Havering and in the constituency of Hornchurch and Upminster, represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez). Although it is in my neighbouring constituency, Harold Hill is considered by most people to be part of Romford. Therefore, my hon. Friend and I are working together, united in fighting against this horrendous attack on an innocent young girl and in bringing the community together. The whole community has unified to work together to eradicate such awful attacks. An innocent young girl, who was sitting in a park with friends and had done nothing wrong, was brutally murdered, which has had a huge effect on our community.

My heart, and those of everyone in the Chamber, goes out to Jodie's family and friends today and in the future. I am wearing a purple ribbon in her memory. Purple was her favourite colour, and any hon. Members passing through the London Borough of Havering will notice such ribbons tied to trees, lampposts and fences, which is a mark of how hugely this has affected our community. I say to the hon. Member for Hartlepool that today's debate means a great deal to the people of Havering, who have gone through a terrible trauma in the last few weeks.

While the debate was secured by worried citizens all over the country, it is telling that the biggest proportion of those signing the petition came from the three constituencies in the London Borough of Havering: Romford, Hornchurch and Upminster, and Dagenham and Rainham. When I raised the issue with the Prime Minister recently in a private meeting in her office here in the House of Commons, she rightly highlighted that the law already provides for mandatory prison sentencing for a second offence of carrying a knife, and that conviction for a knife or offensive weapon offence is now more likely to result in some form of custodial sentence than in recent years. The hon. Member for Hartlepool also made that point.

However, the figures reveal why the public still have little or no faith in our justice system. As it stands, two thirds of those carrying a knife escape a custodial sentence, and one in five repeat offenders avoid prison. People are frankly fed up with soft sentencing, and it is quite clear why. In Havering, knife offences have doubled since 2014, with 339 recorded cases last year alone. Although we are a Greater London borough, we are really in Essex, on the outer edges of London. We hear

about this kind of crime in city centres, but in areas like ours we are not used to it. It has come as a terrible shock that these crimes are coming out as far as areas like ours, and indeed further afield.

Such is the desperation felt that people from across Havering have established a community group called Take a Knife, Save a Life. They are a completely independent group of local people who are now patrolling the streets and local parks, talking to young people, spending time with them, trying to understand what is in their minds and giving them the opportunity to anonymously hand over any knives or offensive weapons. That shows how people are desperate to do something. There is not the police cover that we want or expect, so people are taking things into their own hands in a law abiding way.

Some people may think this is dangerous, but it is no longer sufficient to merely request that the public be more vigilant. More work must be done to tackle these criminals, who simply have no respect for the law, authority or the communities in which they live. It is an issue not just of funding and numbers, but of police policy. Most people in my constituency favour a much more robust approach to dealing with violent criminals. We now have gang culture and youths coming from outside Havering, causing fear on the streets. It has got to the point where the Metropolitan police violence reduction unit will have to come to Havering, as confirmed by my recent meeting with Sophie Linden, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime.

I am glad that the Government's push for knife crime prevention orders is taking place and I believe that the serious violence strategy is a step in the right direction, but we need a collective effort across London. It is no good just blaming the Mayor of London—I can criticise him, but I am not going to do so today, because this is too serious—or just criticising the Government. I criticise them because I disagree with comments the Prime Minister made about cutting police having had no effect on crime. Nobody out there believes that. It is no good making the subject a political football. It affects all our constituencies and our communities, and we have to work together with local communities to find solutions.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I like the points that my hon. Friend is making. He may have heard my urgent question about knife crime. Does he feel that MPs have a positive role to play in this situation rather than being just observers? Does he agree that my request to the Minister to give us information to help us to take action on the streets, such as setting up community groups as he described, is useful?

Andrew Rosindell: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment, because we all have a duty to our communities—we are community leaders. I am working with local groups to fight crime. We do not have a magic wand or a direct solution, but we can play a part. I commend the youth organisations, church groups and faith organisations that are taking a lead, including the Street Pastors and Scouts. Jodie herself was an Explorer Scout—something that has been highlighted about what was a tragic, terrible crime. Community and MPs have a leadership role and it is not just down to the police and social and youth workers. We all have a part to play.

The crime prevention orders were requested directly by the police. They favour a dual approach of tough measures and positive early interventions. I often stress the importance of community policing, with police based in communities, which they know and understand like the back of their hand, as I am sure we know from our constituencies. More importantly, with that kind of policing, the community get to know the police and become familiar with them. With familiar faces of policemen in the community every day of the week, trust and recognition are built, which grow in the locality. That brings people together, with trust in their local police, and it helps to halt or at least curtail crime.

I want to make a serious point that is particularly relevant to Greater London: neighbourhood police are the ones best placed to make interventions to protect residents, when the issue is community-based. I have attempted over and over to make that point in my 18 years as Member of Parliament for Romford, yet models of policing and resources are still outdated. Instead of being based around real communities as they should be, they are based around bureaucratic electoral ward boundaries on a map that bear no relation to actual communities. They are based on electoral numbers, which is crazy and does not make sense. Communities are divided up between police teams. Instead of policing based on true, natural communities, there are lines in a road, and one police team goes to one side but not the other because it is in a different ward. Wards are not the way to fight crime. Criminals do not base their crimes on ward boundaries. They can act anywhere, and the police should police communities on that basis.

Ruth Cadbury: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about the rigidity of ward boundaries, which is why, certainly in west London, we welcome the fact that the new basic command unit set-up has grouped the neighbourhood teams into a town base, bringing several wards together in a more logical way under a single sergeant. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance and value of neighbourhood teams. Does he agree that the number of people in them is important? In Hounslow, their strength has been roughly halved, from five per ward to three and a bit per ward. Is not that regrettable, and a result of the cuts imposed by the Government on the Metropolitan police?

Andrew Rosindell: I agree. I made it clear a moment ago that I do not agree with what the Prime Minister said about cuts in police having no link to crime. However, I do not want to get into a battle today about resources from Government, or whether Sadiq Khan has not allocated as much as he should and the rest of it. We can argue about that but today is not the day. I hope we can agree that both the Government and the Mayor have a duty to allocate as many resources as they can to fighting crime, particularly in inner city areas, but also in outer London areas where crime has recently been rising. We should work together, because the public are losing patience. If we turn the matter into a political football they will not thank us. They want all of us to work together.

The week before last I raised with Sophie Linden my idea of getting rid of bureaucratic, inflexible ward boundaries and creating proper community police, with understanding. Unfortunately she did not say she would

[Andrew Rosindell]

go down that route. I said, “Well, can Havering be an experiment, at least?” She did not agree, so I am disappointed, but we need to look at ways to channel resources to the best possible effect.

Sarah Jones: I agree that we need to look across politics to find the solutions. I just want to ask the hon. Gentleman to consider what organisations say about knife crime prevention orders. There is great concern among magistrates, lawyers, youth offending teams and a lot of charities. In fact, I have not found a single organisation that thinks the orders are a good thing—that they could be a replacement for antisocial behaviour orders, which the Prime Minister got rid of when she was Home Secretary. Actually, they will not work, and we could end up putting 12-year-olds who had committed no crime in prison. I agree with the intent, but will the hon. Gentleman look at the detail, and at the question whether more work is needed before the orders are brought to our streets?

Andrew Rosindell: Absolutely. I will certainly do that, but I am sure that the Minister could respond in his closing remarks. It is important that whatever mechanism we use is effective, not counterproductive. We all need to consider that.

I want to highlight the great success of the Police Scotland violence reduction unit, which has halved the murder rate in a 10-year period. Members will know that it worked closely with partners such as the NHS, education and social workers. However, its work went ahead in conjunction with a no-nonsense approach to those who crossed the line. I think that is what we need. I hope that we can replicate that in Greater London.

Low-level offences must be policed proactively, to challenge the culture of criminality and antisocial behaviour. That is why supporting the police is not just about resourcing. It is also about making sure they have the powers to get on with the job and be effective on the ground. I get deeply worried, as I am sure other hon. Members do, when I hear from constituents that they believe low-level crime such as shoplifting and burglary no longer gets taken as seriously as it should by the police. The Offensive Weapons Bill, which was introduced last year, will make it harder for young people to buy knives and acid online, and that is good. However, the public are wary of legislation that gives a tough narrative but leads to minimal action against violent offenders who will simply be more innovative about getting access to dangerous weapons.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for their positive conduct of the debate. I am sure that the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) is right to concentrate for much of his speech on police resources, how the police are organised, and sentencing. He touched a moment ago on what happened in Glasgow. Does he agree that in addition to proper police resourcing and sentencing, it is necessary to interrupt the activities of organised crime, which often, through the drugs industry, sit behind the rise in knife crime? At the same time,

should there be diversionary activities for the young people who are vulnerable to falling into the trap? All that takes resources.

Andrew Rosindell: I could not agree more. That is the route into much of the crime. There is a drug and gang culture. We see that across London, and although the right hon. Gentleman is not a London MP, I am sure similar cultures are building up in other parts of the country. As I said on the London section of “Daily Politics”, we have to crush that culture, no matter what community, town or borough we come from. If young people get into that culture, that leads to violence and ruins lives. We need to get underneath the problem and ensure that it is curtailed and stopped.

Although I hope that the serious violence strategy will deliver on its promise to provide more funds for such activities, we must provide legal powers to tackle this issue. The policies we put in place for knife crime prevention must not simply paper over the cracks.

I frequently request updates from my local police on Operation Venice, the operation launched to tackle moped-related crime. Naturally, I sought clarification on whether it was true that police were not giving chase to suspects on two-wheeled vehicles. I received countless reports from my constituents that the police were not being allowed to do their job and apprehend those hooligans.

I must tell the Minister that I was dumbfounded by the blame game that ensued. The Government said that guidance is provided by the College of Policing, yet police on the ground simply did not have comfort in the protections given to them. Eventually sense prevailed, and last November saw a massive crackdown on moped thieves, who were regularly threatening innocent people. Alongside the new confidence given to the police in using tactical contacts, the media covered the new approach widely. The result is that we have now seen moped-enabled crimes in the capital fall by 47% in the space of a few months.

A strategy such as that shows that we can tackle crime; where it is evolving and getting out of control, a strategy can be put in place and crime can be knocked on the head. A similar, much more radical strategy is needed to tackle knife crime in London.

Janet Daby: When we talk about knife crime among young people, we are talking about people who are often quite vulnerable. One of the things the hon. Gentleman mentioned was getting underneath the problem. In some cases, the problem is due to coercion, bullying and threats, which lead some young people to get involved in carrying knives. Does he agree?

Andrew Rosindell: I agree. There needs to be a restoration of police in schools; there are still police going into schools, but nothing like so many as there used to be. That has been reduced. Stop and search is also something that my constituents and I fully support. I do not think that any law-abiding person need fear. We all get stopped and searched at the airport, and members of the public are stopped and searched when they come in here. When we are seeing knife crime in our communities I think that, provided the police show respect and do it in a way that does not offend people—I am sure they are able to—knives can be found and confiscated, which will make our communities safer.

Neil Coyle: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman's support for Operation Venice, which has had incredible results in my constituency as well, and I totally support his call for greater action on this issue across the board. The Prime Minister suggested last week that Brexit was blocking Parliament from taking action on NHS, education and knife crime issues. Does he agree that that premise is unacceptable? It is not an either/or for any Government; knife crime must be acted on. Having met with the Prime Minister, as he has already outlined, when does he expect further action?

Andrew Rosindell: I cannot speak for the Prime Minister, although I am sure the Minister will be able to speak for the Government later, but whatever is going on with Brexit cannot be an excuse for doing nothing on knife crime. It does not necessarily require legislation; it requires strategies, more resources and communities working together, so a lot can be done without necessarily having to pass new laws. However, in this instance, we are talking about increasing the penalties for carrying and using a knife, and I am totally in favour of that.

I can tell hon. Members that there is not a single constituent in my area—I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster will have had the same experience—who feels the current penalties are sufficient. They want to see much tougher action, much stricter penalties and a real deterrent, so that people fear being caught, apprehended and imprisoned for a long time if they carry and use a knife.

Returning to my comments, stopping low-level disorder and petty crime helps to curtail the invitation to more serious crime, which is why I hope that knife crime prevention orders will help. Yet we must not turn away from difficult questions. My constituents are particularly fortunate that Havering starts from a base of historically low crime, and they want to keep it that way. As legislators, we cannot throw money at a problem and expect that that will solve everything, that no questions need be asked and no reforms are required. That is simply not the answer; more needs to be done.

We must smash the myth on some estates that carrying a knife is a normal thing to do, and we should take a long hard look at compulsory custodial sentences for knife crimes. I hope the Minister will address that later. Law-abiding citizens, fearful for their children when they walk home from school or simply relax in a park with their friends, are sick of seeing soft sentencing for knife offenders.

I therefore call on the Government urgently to consider a minimum custodial sentence for a knife or offensive weapon offence. What do we say to the parent of a victim who is in despair at the cautions handed down to the perpetrators of these horrifying crimes? How have we arrived at the stage where a man who tries to smash a car window and attack an individual with a huge zombie knife in broad daylight is given a suspended sentence? The Minister needs to ask himself how that kind of sentence can be justified. The decision was only overturned after public outrage, when appeal judges replaced that notoriously lenient sentence with jail time.

Legislators and the courts are at real risk of becoming detached from public opinion on what is fast becoming a national crisis. We in this place have a duty to ensure that an effective deterrent exists to combat this evil culture, and to do everything in our power to prevent

more young people from being slaughtered in our communities. We must now take action and, in so doing, honour the memory of Jodie Chesney.

5.6 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) on his introduction to the debate.

I will start with this and get it out of the way: there is an issue with police resources and numbers of police, and there is an issue with the cuts there have been to local authority services and youth services. We will leave that for another day, but I do not want people to forget it, because there is a debate to be had. On neighbourhood policing, I say gently to the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) that there used to be huge numbers of neighbourhood and community police officers, backed by police staff, and that that made a huge difference.

In order to try to take this forward from where we are, and as my hon. Friends and other hon. Members will have heard me say countless times over the past few months, I say to the Minister that this is a national crisis. It is a national emergency. If it were any other type of national emergency, irrespective of what else was going on, the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary or the Secretary of State for Justice would be in the House of Commons at the Dispatch Box day after day after day, outlining what had happened and what the Government were doing about it.

That is why I called a few weeks ago for knife crime to be treated like terrorism—not to underestimate terrorism or decry the importance of dealing with it, but to give that sense of urgency. Instead, frankly, we drift on. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) alluded to, the Prime Minister promised a knife crime summit nearly three weeks ago at the Dispatch Box. We are now told that one will take place sometime next week. I say to every hon. Member present that, in the face of a national emergency, a month's delay—as it will be by then—is simply and utterly unacceptable and will be bewildering to the people of this country.

Virtually certainly, three or four times a week, not just in London but across the country, people are killed, horrifically, and we have to do something about it. We have to speak up and speak out about it more. It is absolutely astonishing that the House of Commons Chamber does not reverberate with the roar of MPs demanding action from the Government. The Government will say, "We are doing this, we are doing that," but—as was certainly said by my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool and I think by the hon. Member for Romford—where is the urgency? Where is the passion? Where is the anger? Where is the desire to get a hold of this? The public do not see that, and I do not feel it.

People say it is ridiculous, but I have said, as did former Prime Minister Tony Blair this morning, that Cobra should meet because, irrespective of resources, cross-Government co-ordination is lacking. I will say something about sentencing in a minute to illustrate what I mean. Solving this is not only about police numbers—that is ridiculous—but a long-term public health plan will not prevent somebody from being stabbed tonight. Increased police resources and an increased police presence on the ground will stop that. That is not

[Vernon Coaker]

the overall answer of course, but that is where we have to go in the short term—the increase that the Chancellor announced will help.

The Government's evidence in the serious violence strategy and the leaked Home Office memo—I know that the Minister is a Justice Minister—show that hotspot policing reduces knife crime. That is evidentially based. It also does not displace that crime to nearby areas; it stops the crime, because it tackles the people who commit those offences. Am I saying, “Lock them up and throw the key away?” Of course not. All I am saying is that we have lost control and there is no short-term alternative. Where are the intervention and prevention measures that were there before? Where have the youth clubs gone? Where are the street workers?

The hon. Member for Romford is right: when I was the Policing Minister, the most effective people on the street, alongside police officers, were street pastors, and particularly the older ones. There are countless examples. They stop stupid incidents outside shops or in precincts, when there are issues between stupid kids and their stupid gangs. Somebody might look at somebody else, or bump into their bike—for Christ's sake—and get stabbed. The street pastors get involved and prevent that. That sounds almost pathetic in the face of the huge rises in knife crime, but it actually works and makes a difference.

I will come to sentencing, but I would love the Minister to say that he and the Justice Department recognise that the Government have to more effectively co-ordinate what happens across Government rather than there being individual, compartmentalised elements. I hope the Minister brings the urgency I have seen in his reflecting on other things to dealing with this problem.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent series of points. I was hoping that we would cover that the breakdown of the fabric of society is part of this. We cannot point to only one thing such as the 21,000 reduction in police officers. There are also schools exclusions, including unofficial exclusions. Kids are out on the streets, and there is a lack of youth provision and other preventive stuff. All that should be looked at in the round. Does he agree that austerity has had an effect, and that this issue could be a consequence of it?

Vernon Coaker: I absolutely agree. I am making the point that it is not only about policing. However, in the short term, that is where we have to go. That is all I am saying. It should never have got to this point, with the breakdown of all that.

The system—this is true of Justice or whatever—does not look at what works. For example, on youth crime, exclusions and kids not being in school have an impact. That is a no-brainer. We do not need a research project on that costing millions of pounds. Everybody knows it. People on the street know it, every Member knows it and everybody watching our proceedings will know that it has an effect. We have a problem in how we deal with those young people. There are brilliant examples of pupil referral units and activity with young people excluded from school, but many of those young people disappear. Everybody is responsible but nobody is.

That has to change, otherwise those young people just drift into a twilight zone where they are exploited by criminals or associate with people who parade around estates saying, “Do you want to make some money? I'll show you how to make some money. Don't listen to them.” We know that that goes on. We have to take that culture on, but we cannot do it without being honest. My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) is absolutely right: proper provision for excluded young people is fundamental. Some of it works, and some of it does not. We have to find a way of ensuring that good practice is spread much more widely.

Mr Howarth: My hon. Friend speaks with his normal passion and insight. He is right on exclusions from school and young people disappearing, but there is another problem. When some youngsters are sent to alternative provision because they are too much of a nuisance in school, some of it is very good, but some of it is nothing more than poor childminding. We need to urgently look at alternative provision.

Vernon Coaker: I absolutely agree. The Minister will know, because his Department will report to him, that some of the alternatives to prison or custodial sentences are rubbish, but other alternatives are brilliant. If we know what works, why are we not replicating it instead of the Justice Department funding alternative provision outside some schools or inside others? Why do we not replicate those things that work and that prevent young people who have been excluded from school from getting involved? I know that this is not a fashionable thing to say in a time of localism. Localism is absolutely right, but sometimes the Government have to pick it up and drive it. This is one area in which they should drive it forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool and the hon. Member for Romford made the point, as I am sure will others, that the Minister has a tough job. The public will say that anybody carrying a knife—I am not talking about the use of a knife—is completely unacceptable, and that they should be jailed straight away. They will also say that people should not have a second chance when it comes to something as serious as that.

All Governments, including the last Labour Government, write into every bit of legislation that courts have discretion to look at circumstances, but that is the bit of the mandatory sentencing guidelines that nobody reads. I am appalled by repeat cautioning and the fact that the courts seem in many instances to fail to act on persistent offending. However, even I can see that, if somebody stuffs a knife in the pocket of an idiotic 12-year-old lad but he cannot prove it, we have to let the court try to find out whether he deliberately carried the knife or whether somebody had put it on him, or had threatened to beat him up unless he took it. We have to be careful about saying that, in every single circumstance and in every single case, the first time a pathetic girl or boy—that is what they are—carries a knife, they should be jailed forever and the key should be thrown away. I do not accept the inability of the state or the Government to explain that to people. Everybody says, “We're going to be tough. We're going to have mandatory sentencing. We're going to lock all of them up.” Of course, that does not happen, because rightly in a democracy we have the legal system and the independence of the judiciary. The judiciary, including any of us if we were

magistrates, would look at the circumstances of an individual case and say that in that instance they do not want to send the person to a place like that described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), because they deserve a chance.

There are not many people in our Parliament who would not allow the courts discretion, but I say to the Minister—again, the Government should be shouting this—that he should explain that and tell people. He should not hide behind harsh rhetoric. He should do what I have just done and explain that, even in a national emergency—a knife crime epidemic—there will be circumstances in which the courts will want to exercise discretion. The Minister no doubt has that in the notes for his speech at the conclusion of the debate.

The legislation talks about mandatory sentencing except in exceptional circumstances. What does that mean? The Minister is brandishing the guidelines at us, but they are not interpreted across the judicial system in a fair and consistent way. That drives people mad—it drives me mad—and undermines the system. Alongside all the things that I have discussed, the sentencing by the courts is crucial. There has to be an expectation that people are jailed, whether they be young children, older children or adults, but there has to be more consistency. Figures were given by the hon. Member for Romford. It cannot be right that huge numbers of people are being cautioned again and again. It cannot be right that between different courts some people are going to jail and others are not. It cannot be right that nobody among the public properly understands what “exceptional circumstances” means—no Minister has properly gone out there to articulate and explain it. This Minister will have an opportunity to do that when he winds up the debate.

Mrs Hodgson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. When I was chair of the all-party parliamentary group on basketball, we did an inquiry into how basketball could be harnessed as a sport that appeals to certain demographics. It attracts a high number of inner-city and black, Asian and minority ethnic participants. Basketball could be used as a sentencing tool. That might seem a crazy idea, but evidence was given by police and crime commissioners in Leicester and in one of the London boroughs—I think it was Newham—which were using things such as basketball to sentence some of the young people who were at risk of being the ones to get into knife crime. They were looking for alternative provision, and basketball was one of the things that it was deemed would work, so much so that, in the London Borough of Newham there is an initiative called “Carry a Ball, not a Blade”. Does my hon. Friend think that more initiatives such as that should be looked at as a means of prevention in sentencing?

Vernon Coaker: I absolutely do think that more initiatives such as that should be introduced.

Let me finish with a personal account. I have been an MP for nearly 22 years. Before becoming an MP, I taught for 20 years, mainly in inner-city schools in Nottingham. They had the challenges that anybody here could recount. Much of the time, when I started teaching, it was possible for somebody to choose where they went. It was possible to say, “I would like to go here,” and I always said that I wanted to teach in an inner-city school. Some people stereotype me—for good

reason or not—but talking in the way I do helped in Nottingham. This is a point for the Government. When we went there to raise standards—without being arrogant, in all the schools I worked at, we raised standards—we did certain things. Among the things that we put in place was certainty that, if someone broke the rules, there would be a consequence. It was not a case of locking somebody up and throwing away the key, but people knew that there would be a consequence.

There was a lot of the alternative provision to which my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West has referred. I was the harshest disciplinarian in the school. I was not going to have people coming in who were not in uniform. People may laugh about it, but the truth is that out on our streets the police need to ensure the same certainty. Alongside that we need the sort of provision that my hon. Friend has talked about and opportunities for young people to get work, to have social mobility and to prosper. That is what will stop knife crime. I say again to the Minister that this is a national crisis and a national emergency, and the Government simply have to treat it as such by co-ordinating and driving forward change, rather than just making a series of compartmentalised, well-intentioned announcements that do not have the passion, drive and enthusiasm needed to effect change in the country.

5.26 pm

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this vital debate, which was secured by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) and which is derived from the public outrage and utter despair about what is happening to young people on our streets and the intense worry felt by parents. I entirely echo the passionate view expressed by the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) that this is nothing short of a national emergency.

It is perhaps no surprise that my constituency topped the signature count for this petition, with the other two Havering constituencies not far behind. Three weeks ago, Hornchurch and Upminster saw the brutal and utterly senseless murder of 17-year-old Jodie Chesney in a Harold Hill park. We have heard this afternoon from my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) just how badly that has affected the community. The community response to Jodie’s murder has been profound, with marches and memorials, purple ribbons tied to trees, railings and lampposts in tribute to her, and a community vigil in Harold Hill. There has also been practical action, whether through support for a stronger Harold Hill street watch team or new initiatives such as the “Take a Knife, Save a Life” campaign, which seeks to collect weapons from the streets.

Havering remains, as we have heard, a comparatively low-crime borough. That partly explains the shock and utter outrage at Jodie’s murder. However, that kind of incident feeds into concerns that the kind of crime that we may once have associated with inner boroughs is seeping into the capital’s further reaches. I know that we were all hugely disheartened and worried by the fact that only last week in the Harold Hill area a young man was chased down a road and stabbed.

If young people begin to feel unsafe, the temptation only increases for them to carry a weapon too, so it is important not to let such perceptions escalate. On Friday,

[*Julia Lopez*]

I met Rachel Grimwood, who works on alternative provision in schools. She showed me photographs of the kinds of weapon that children are bringing into local schools; many are concealed as pens, hairbrushes and so on. That is creating such fear among the local school community. She also talked to me about how young people are being coerced into crime, which feeds into the whole idea of whether it is right immediately to issue a sentence when a lot of young people are finding themselves in very frightening situations in which they are being threatened with violence if they do not also engage in criminal activity.

It is no use quoting statistics at communities about comparatively low crime rates. These kinds of incident reverberate because of their severity and they lead to a particularly rapid loss of confidence in law and order in suburban areas. I think it is a tragedy that the Conservative party is losing people's confidence in that respect.

I have been an MP not much longer than 18 months, but I have already met two parents who have lost a child to knife violence. Jamil Sarki from Hornchurch was murdered in January 2018. He suffered a fatal stab wound to his heart after accompanying a friend to recover money lost from a scam. He was a beautiful young man, an engineering graduate from a good family, with so much promise and so much life un-lived. Jamil lost his life not in our borough but in Welwyn Garden City, and his case highlights the issue of the support levels available to families who are not connected into the community and systems of the area in which their child's murder took place.

Today's debate is fundamentally about the sentencing for carrying knives, however, and new sentencing guidelines brought in over the summer are expected to lead to more people going to jail for carrying knives, even though average sentences for such a crime have already been going up. There is a mandatory minimum sentence of six months' imprisonment for an adult or four months for a young person if someone is convicted of a second bladed article offence, but if an offender is convicted of threatening with a bladed article, there is a prison sentence straightaway even if it is a first offence. The jail sentence can go up to a maximum of four years. As we have heard, the Government are bringing in new knife crime prevention orders, which are meant to give the police more tools in the fight, such as curfews, geographical restrictions and mandatory knife crime courses. However, I accept the need for caution as the orders are rolled out to ensure that they are a new solution rather than a new problem.

Many of my constituents want a far tougher regime, because they have lost confidence in the deterrent effect of the existing sentences. I appreciate that the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice may have concerns about getting the balance right, to give people a last chance to step away from crime and the criminal justice system. I would appreciate it if the Minister told us what has been done to review that balance, given that knife crime statistics are going in the wrong direction, and what intensive work is being carried out with young people who are caught for the first time carrying a blade.

In a previous debate on knife crime, I raised my concerns about referrals to youth offending teams—I have written to the Minister about that as well—and

whether the young criminals who are sent down that route have any fear of it. I am keen to get the Minister's comments on whether the effectiveness of YOTs is under review. I know from shopkeepers across my constituency that all too many young people are now going into their stores with a complete sense of omnipotence when it comes to intimidating people, shoplifting and then mugging people on the streets.

Beyond sentencing, we must accept that there is an issue of resource and attitude, which is why I have focused on trying to secure additional police funding for the Met. Policing has become a much more complex activity over the past decade, with officers asked to carry out a much broader range of activities, as gangs' business models adapt rapidly with technological change. Following private meetings with the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, we have secured extra money for the Met, and the Chancellor has recently added an extra £100 million for knife crime since Jodie's murder. That resource is welcome, and it is already making an impact, but we now need to see much more consistency in that funding, so that officers can plan much further into the future.

Constituents will always want more bobbies on the beat, and they are absolutely vital in gathering critical intelligence through the building of trust. However, we also need to ensure that the resource is going into the right places. I see it as equally important that we have officers who can work on collecting evidence and securing safe convictions. I note the important intervention by the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) in that regard. Witnesses need to be confident that trials in which they testify will lead to convictions.

We also need to ensure that we are building robust cases against criminals much higher up the food chain who are ruthlessly exploiting young people as an expendable resource. Similarly, the police cannot be expected to plug gaps in other services, so the resourcing of social and children's services is critical in stemming a young person's descent into crime. However, as I have said before in this House, that resource must be accompanied by leadership at every level, to ensure that extra cash is directed in the right way and bolstered by a sense of political focus, which gives the police and all other agencies the confidence to use the full range of their powers. I asked about that directly in Prime Minister's questions recently. I would be grateful for an update from the Minister on the knife crime summit that was committed to.

I do not seek to be partisan, so I will ask the same of the Mayor of London. The mayoral system was designed, in part, to bring greater democratic accountability to issues such as policing, and to provide drive, co-ordination and focus on performance when required. I appreciate that the Mayor is concerned about policing budgets, but I would also like to hear from him how he is articulating to Londoners what he is doing with his budget, and what his strategy is to change the weather on these issues.

When it comes to leadership and attitude, the police need to know that they are supported. In Havering, we are deploying greater use of stop and search, as well as facial recognition technology in our urban centres. However, there also needs to be a political focus on pulling all parts of the system together and making them talk to one another. From my work in the borough, it is clear

that councillors, policing teams, charities, community members and churchgoers are all doing fantastic work on school exclusions, family breakdowns and flagging at-risk youngsters.

Most recently, I met Hornchurch-based charities Say It With Your Chest and You and Me Counselling, which focus respectively on excluded children, and on parents who feel at a loss as to how to best handle their disruptive children. We need to ensure that such work is directed into a broader local strategy to ensure that it is not just piecemeal or overlapping with existing initiatives. Council consultation on youth violence, for instance, will carry much less weight if it is not engaging with the right people and the right young people in the area who are most affected by it. Those charities with a presence on the ground are much more likely to be able to identify and relate to those children.

When I carry out school visits I am struck by the consistency with which mental health is brought up as an issue. Young people are struggling to understand their purpose, worth and value. That is often derived from a negative family and home environment, and fuelled by a lack of belonging or greater community around them. That is why they are so often vulnerable to a gang structure, where they get sucked into a spiral of negative activity. I recently met one of our Harold Hill councillors, who herself experienced that sense of dislocation during her school years. She highlighted to me the need for engagement programmes that are relevant to the particular communities that they are trying to plug into. For instance, she was British-Nigerian, and she said that it is much more effective if people from those communities are talking to those communities, rather than having that sense of somebody trying to interfere from the outside.

Nobody should pretend that these issues are easy to solve, because they are not. After all, the perverse sense of entitlement that allows someone to see it as their right to take someone's life in a brutal way, such as with the murder of Jodie Chesney, betrays a complete absence of values, decency and human empathy. However, we have been here before when it comes to knife crime and we know what works. Criminals need to know that our attempts to understand their path to violence will be complemented with a hard-nosed intolerance of the mindless destruction they mete out.

One reason my constituents support tougher knife sentencing is that people believe it is time we showed that communities are back within our control, and a key part of that will be taking criminals off the streets, but that is not solution enough. I would be grateful for the Minister's assurances that knife crime will be the subject of relentless political focus, so that in criminal justice, education, policing and community outreach, we get the system firing on every cylinder.

5.36 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Ind): I thank the Petitions Committee and the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for bringing this debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) and to hear what she had to say. Ryan Passey, Christina Edkins and Jaskaran Kang, young people from Dudley, were tragically murdered with knives. Last year, Yasir Hussain and Christopher Harm both lost their lives. Elsewhere in the Black Country last year,

Reagan Asbury and James Brindley were both tragically killed on nights out. Our hearts go out to their families and friends.

People in Dudley are furious about the increase in knife crime. They want tougher action and more police on the streets to deal with it. The responsibility obviously lies with the people who go out with a knife and then use it, but we would not have needed a crystal ball to predict that cutting the number of police officers, huge cuts to neighbourhood policing teams, the closure of youth centres, sports projects, community centres and other organisations that keep young people off the streets, and sending fewer people to prison would mean that crime—tragically, violent crime—would increase.

It is shocking to read the results of an investigation in today's *Express and Star*:

"Less than one in three criminals arrested with a knife in the West Midlands are sent to prison".

The paper is completely right to describe the situation in the west midlands as a knife crime epidemic, with the number of cases up 20% over the last year. The points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) are completely right, of course, but how can it be the case that criminals are being spared jail despite committing dozens of offences? According to media reports this weekend, one dangerous offender was convicted 21 times for possession of a knife without being sent to prison and another committed 33 assaults before eventually being jailed for the 34th.

West Midlands Chief Constable Dave Thompson has declared knife crime across the region an "emergency". He has implemented extensive stop-and-search powers in Birmingham following a spate of fatal stabbings. The force said that it had stopped and searched 408 people using its new powers over four days earlier this month, arresting 24 people and seizing 14 weapons.

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is highlighting the situation in the west midlands. Does he agree that the proportion of people who are being sent to prison for knife offences had doubled in recent years? We lock up more people than any other European country. About 400 children are serving life sentences or sentences of more than 14 years in this country, compared with just two children serving life sentences in the rest of the EU combined. Although I absolutely understand my hon. Friend's point and his frustration, at a national level we need to accept that we put a lot of people in prison and so should carefully consider whether we increase that number.

Ian Austin: I commend my hon. Friend for her work with the all-party group. I understand her point but, in the end, if someone has been caught with a knife 21 times, or has been convicted of 33 assaults, I think they should be in prison. Frankly, as I will talk more about in a minute, there should be strong sentences and tough deterrents. Of course, we also have to have all those other things going on in society to prevent people from being sucked into crime, as she has talked about in the all-party group and I will go on to talk about as well.

When people use knives and behave violently there should be tough sentences. Society needs to send out a strong message that that is completely unacceptable. Although the number of people being imprisoned might have gone up recently, it is fair to say that it certainly fell in the previous few years under this Government.

[*Ian Austin*]

According to Ministry of Justice figures, 1,182 people were cautioned or convicted by the West Midlands police for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon in 2018, but just 347—29%—went to prison. That represents a 7% drop on the previous year and is under the national average. Across the region, 326 knife criminals were handed a community order, 256 were given a suspended sentence and a further 99 were fined or discharged from court without a sentence.

One in four criminals cautioned or convicted were children. It is a tragedy that children are going out with knives.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): For the record, we have gone from approximately 40,000 people in prison in 1995 to 82,000 people in prison now. In that period, the British population grew by about 15%, but the number of people in prison doubled. We have one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, so we have to be cautious about the idea that we are somehow soft on justice in this country.

Ian Austin: I am sure the Minister will quote all sorts of figures as to why the knife crime epidemic is not the Government's fault, is not the result of not sending enough people to prison, and is not because they have not kept the promises they made before they were elected eight or nine years ago—I will come to that. It is all well and good for the Government to claim that people caught with a knife are more likely to be jailed now than at any time in the last 10 years, but that is because the number of people being jailed fell after they came to power almost 10 years ago, despite all the promises they made so loudly and frequently in when they were in opposition. The promise was clear: anyone caught carrying a knife would go to jail.

In 2008, the then leader of the Conservative party gave an interview to *The Sun*, which said that:

“anyone caught carrying a knife will be jailed under a Tory Government, David Cameron vows today. The Conservative leader declares automatic jail terms for carrying a dangerous knife is the only way of smashing the current epidemic gripping broken Britain”.

He repeated the pledge to relatives of high-profile victims, such as the father of Damilola Taylor and the former *EastEnders* star, Brooke Kinsella, whose brother was tragically murdered. The police and crime commissioner for the west midlands says that the courts are still failing to hand out sentences that reflect the public's demands for justice after criminals have been arrested and charged.

Despite a lengthy police investigation and a court case, nobody has been convicted for the death of Ryan Passey, the young man I mentioned earlier who was tragically killed on a night out in Stourbridge. That is a source of huge public concern in Dudley and the Black Country, and there has been a big campaign by his family and friends. Will the Minister meet me and the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James), with whom I have been working, and the people campaigning about that case, so he can examine it in detail?

Of course we need schools, youth services, police support and more opportunities for young people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling said, but

people in Dudley also want to see more police on the streets, tougher sentences and proper punishments to prevent people from going out with a knife in the first place.

5.45 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I thank the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for introducing the debate. I begin where I was going to end, by reinforcing to the Minister that, in this cross-party debate, we are taking the issue seriously, there is a huge amount of commitment to it, and there is an enormous strength of feeling in favour of dealing with it. If he has listened to all the contributions, he will understand that that is the feeling of the Chamber.

Depending on how one looks at the situation in my constituency, it is either not very good or too good. I recently looked at the neighbourhood policing reports for the Henley area and for a number of areas around Thame. In the Henley area, the neighbourhood report gave no examples of knife crime, and in the areas around Thame, there were two examples, so hon. Members may think that I am unable to talk about the issue. My constituency is in the middle of the wide Thames Valley police area, however, which includes Oxford, Abingdon, Reading and Slough. The Minister will be aware of a recent knife attack in Oxford, which brought the issue home to people there and in the surrounding area.

The figures show that the number of knife attacks in the Thames valley was marginally short of 1,300 in 2017-18, which is the highest figure since 2010. That is about a 50% increase on the number of knife crimes committed in 2012-13, which is a number that keeps on coming up in the areas that we are looking at. The Thames Valley police area is the largest area of knife crime in the south-east and far outstrips counties such as Kent, Sussex and Surrey. That stands in marked contrast to the calm and peaceful nature of the area as a whole.

Knife crime has played a part in seven murders, 40 rapes, 10 sexual attacks and 86 threats to kill, so it is not gang warfare, but a much greater set of crimes that involves us all. I agree with the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) that it is not a simple task to overcome that, because in the Thames valley, recruitment is up and a tremendous amount of work is being done to look at intakes. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) that numbers will always make a difference to this situation, but we are asking, “Do they make the difference?” I agree with the hon. Member for Gedling that they do not, because we need to take into account a number of other things.

What the police want above all to tackle this problem is the certainty that the increase in numbers that they are seeing at the moment, which allows them to address recruitment, will continue. At the moment, they do not know that and they need certainty.

An equally big role that the police play—I think it has been mentioned—is in partnership with a number of other organisations. The agencies and organisations that the police are in partnership with include the NHS and others, but the one that I have the most sympathy for is the relationship that the police have set up with schools. There, they have a chance of breaking the link

of knife crime to drugs, and as our deputy police and crime commissioner has said, “Once a young person has a knife, it’s almost too late.” However, working with schools is a way of breaking that link.

We have also heard a lot about stop and search, which has increased dramatically in my area by just over 50%. I have a mixed feeling about stop and search. I have participated in a group that included police and crime commissioners, the police and other politicians. There was a tremendous backlash among the group, including the police, against just carrying on with stop and search as it was. They did not see that that would create a favourable climate in which to tackle this issue because of all the things that are associated with the history of stop and search. We agreed that any stop and search operation needed to be intelligence led, proportionate and appropriate, and I am very pleased that the Thames Valley police initiatives have all been intelligence led and are having great effect.

Yes, we can and should increase sentences, and we have a unique position in this House to be able to comment on new sentencing guidelines—the Justice Committee always comments on them. After what I have heard today, I will certainly take back to that Committee a determination to make a more concentrated effort to ensure that we are as blunt as we can be in giving that information to judges.

As I said in my intervention, we all have a role to play. That is why in my urgent question I asked what role we as MPs can play, because I have noticed that currently many MPs are very much in the role of observers and have not yet found a way to become participants in this. The Minister thought that I had uncovered a pot of gold in saying that. I wish I had and I wish there was a pot of gold. However, if he knows what has happened to that initiative, on which I think there has been some progress, it would be very nice if he told us.

5.54 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon under your chairmanship, Sir Graham.

We were here just a few weeks ago debating this subject, and indeed knife crime has come up regularly—we had the urgent question on Friday in the main Chamber. It is also right, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said in his extraordinarily passionate and persuasive speech, that it is several weeks since we first heard about the knife crime summit, which apparently will happen some time next week. In asking a Minister a question about that on Friday, I said that I sincerely hoped that the summit would not be a talking shop and that we would see resources and action as a consequence of it.

I am glad that we are at last taking this seriously and debating it on a regular basis—I just hope that these debates lead to action—but I cannot help but observe that, since the last knife crime debate in Westminster Hall, and since the knife crime summit was announced, there have been two murders in my borough: one was of a 17-year-old boy, for which offence a 15-year-old has been charged; and the other, just a week ago, was just outside my constituency and was the murder of a 29-year-old man, who was stabbed to death needlessly and pointlessly in an ordinary street. It is often said—this

is one reason we are now taking this very seriously—that for every one of these tragic murders, there are a hundred other stabbings and similar incidents. Some are not even reported to the police, and some are known only to the doctors who treat those involved. There could be thousands of instances of young people carrying weapons.

I do not want to exaggerate, because on the whole our constituencies are still safe places and walking around them at night, or at any time, is a perfectly safe and reasonable thing to do, but there is a cultural change and a change in how communities feel about knife crime. They feel that it is not just about one or two people, or gangs, or known criminals. They feel that it is now inculcating the atmosphere of where we live. That is why I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that knife crime is a national emergency or a matter for Cobra—we have to take it extremely seriously.

One of the young people who died in my borough, Ayub Hassan, was 17 years old. He was born and lived in my constituency, and he was killed in my constituency. As his mother told me, he was her best friend. She is inconsolable at his death. Although there is almost a pyramid, of which the killings are at the top, and although we worry about every offence, there is something absolutely significant about young lives being taken in this way, and the opportunity that is lost, and the way that people did not have a chance to live their lives, and about how it affects their siblings, their parents, their wider family and often the whole community where they live. We have to get to grips with knife crime. It is an incredibly complex, multi-layered issue, and will take a number of years to get right. However, it also requires urgent action.

This debate is about sentencing. That is an important aspect but, as we have heard in all the speeches so far, it is only one element. I suspect that my views on sentencing are probably closer to those of the Minister than they are to those of the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin). I am a former shadow Justice spokesman and have looked into this in some detail. I am not a big fan of mandatory sentencing. As has been pointed out, mandatory sentencing itself often has a degree of discretion of which the courts make due and proper use. There are sentencing guidelines, but we have to leave individual cases to the judiciary. We have a very competent judiciary—it is not a soft judiciary—in this country. As we have heard, we have one of the highest incarceration rates. Yes, there should be appropriate sentencing and, yes, people should be locked up for many offences, whether it is for carrying a knife, using a knife, or for any serious violence that results from knife crime. However, we will not solve this problem by sentencing policy.

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

We need to start with something a number of Members have mentioned: proper community policing. The loss of that in London over the past few years has made a dramatic difference. When it started, it was an experiment—we were told it was about reassurance. Those were times of greater plenty as far as public funds go, and it was felt that, in addition to everything that was supposed to work, including response policing and detection, we could afford the luxury of putting police back on the streets—bobbies on the beat, community officers.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

Then the police would have told us, “We’re not going to catch people doing crimes. We’re not going to solve crimes, but it’s an important community role.” Many senior police officers now admit that they were wrong about that, and that community policing has played a valuable role in reducing crime. A dedicated, in both senses of the word, group of police, even a small group—it was typically six per ward—got to know the community and which people were good and bad. The intelligence they collected and their knowledge of what was going on meant that it was not about just reassurance; it was about policing in the way we do best in this country, by consent and with the support of the community. It was resource intensive, and it is impossible for those who agree about that policing, whichever party they come from, not to acknowledge that the resources were just taken away.

The Mayor of London has done a very good job in putting resources back—we were down to one officer per ward at one point. It is a semantic thing to say that ward boundaries are the problem. The resources are the problem, and they need to be increased quickly. If that prevents further serious injury and death, it will go at least some way to turning this juggernaut around—all the indications are that we are going in the wrong direction.

I will make a pact with Government Members if they concede that resources have been cut back too far. Local authorities have lost 50% of their funding, meaning that things that are often discretionary, such as youth centres and youth funding, have been cut by even more than that. Most of the youth clubs in my constituency have closed over time. When they were being closed, it was fashionable for some politicians to say, “How on earth does youth work—diversionary activity—decide whether people will go out with a piece of metal and stab someone?” Such comparisons are crass. The opposite argument is that if young people are given something useful to do, are made to feel they are worth while and are shown that there is investment in them, their neighbourhoods and their communities, they have a different outlook on life. Life does not become hopeless. It does not become just a wasting of time and getting into trouble. If Members on both sides will admit that we must reverse that absolute drain on resources in our local communities, I will not make a party political issue of it. I concede that I think everyone is of goodwill whatever their views on aspects such as sentencing, penal policy or investment. I believe that there is a will across political parties to get this right in response to the horrific things we have seen. Having that intention is a good start, but it is not where we need to go.

The second thing we need to do is engage some of the expertise and knowledge that is out there. Part of that is in our policing and our judiciary, and among our medics and the experts in the field, but part is in the community. I spent half an hour at surgery this morning with the mother of a young boy in my constituency. She had not come to ask me to do anything. In fact, the surgery was almost the other way around—I learned far more from her than she did from me.

We spent half an hour talking about exactly this problem. Her son had a very late diagnosis of special needs, and all the trouble he was having at primary school was put down to bad behaviour. He ended up

being excluded from secondary school at an early stage and going into alternative provision, which, his mother said, was dreadful and dire. It was not just that he was not being properly educated and his needs were not being identified and no action taken; before he was a teenager even, he had been cast out—he was now excluded, no longer part of acceptable society.

The second thing that happened, of course, was that he was put with all the other naughty boys, and when naughty boys go around together, perhaps not doing terribly bad things to begin with, after a while one or two of them will get into trouble and get convictions for this, that or the other—a bit of criminal damage perhaps. My constituent’s son now has a conviction for carrying a knife. That comes about either from neglect, bureaucracy or lack of intervention by, or resources from, statutory bodies of all different kinds.

Where does that leave the parents? My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who is no longer in the room—she tragically had a death in her constituency over the weekend—said to me, “Where is the support for parents of victims but also for parents who have tried to do their best to keep their children out of trouble and who worry every night about where their sons or daughters are?”

Mrs Hodgson: On my hon. Friend’s powerful point about who people come into contact with when they are first getting into trouble, if there was an automatic 10-year sentence on first arrest for carrying a knife, a young person who had not been in trouble at all could find him or herself not just in a young offenders institution but among the prison population, with some very, very bad people who had done much worse things. Turning someone who is carrying a knife because they are scared into a hardened criminal eventually could be an unintended consequence of what we hope to achieve with sentencing.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend shows a lot of compassion and understanding.

I do not advocate a soft approach; on the contrary, we need rigour in the system, but not the knee-jerk reaction that we will suddenly cure this by sentencing. How often have we heard that in relation to every possible offence? Is that not what has driven the prison population to double, and the conditions in prisons and the assistance for those leaving to be so dire in this country that this is an international embarrassment?

I do not want to say much more. I believe not just that we are well-intentioned but that we are resolved to tackle the issue. The expertise is there, and part of that is listening to our communities.

I am almost dreading the summit next week, because I fear it will be a talking shop, a couple of press releases and not much more to get the Government through another week or two. I hope the Minister will tell us that that is not the case. I also hope that we will hear from him before 7 o’clock—I apologise, Mr Davies, that I will not be here after that. If I miss the end of his speech, I will read it diligently, as I always do. I know that it will be worth reading because he shares that view.

I respect what the people who drafted, motivated and signed this petition are trying to achieve, because they are expressing the same frustration as the mother who came to see me today: that Members are standing around,

looking powerless—they might think we are uninterested, but we are not—and are not solving problems that are solvable. Those problems are getting worse and worse: they are now affecting not just individuals, but whole communities. This is a national emergency, and we need to act.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I invite my successor, Sarah Jones, to make a contribution.

6.10 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Davies, and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) on having secured a really good cross-party debate, in which we are agreeing on a lot of issues. I wish that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) had been my teacher; I had not realised that he was a teacher for 20 years, and I feel that I would have listened a lot more in school if he had been teaching me.

It is right for us to pay tribute to the family of Jodie Chesney, who Members have spoken about being from their area. I also want us to think about the people who have died in my constituency: Kelva Smith, Andre Aderemi and Jermaine Goupall, three people who lost their lives recently through knife crime. I am not going to talk about the need for funding, because we have established that, and I think we all agree on it. I will just say that there is a need to fund not just youth work and education, but housing. I currently have a mother and her eight-year-old daughter in my office who have been refused housing by everybody, and are completely destitute; we are desperately trying to get them somewhere to sleep tonight. Those wider issues massively impact on the life chances of our children, and we must never forget about them.

I will focus on sentencing, which is what we are debating. This issue is too important for us to not look at the facts about what impact sentencing has. We know that knife crime is at epidemic levels, with over 100 knife offences a day. Fatalities are at the highest level on record, with 285 people dead last year, and knife crime has gone up across virtually every area and police force in the country. Young people are disproportionately affected: 39 young people were killed last year, the highest level for 10 years, and according to NHS figures, there has been more than a 50% increase in stabbings of teenagers. More than 1,000 teenagers were admitted to hospital with stab wounds last year, and we know that many others do not go to A&E because they are scared of what might happen.

People are rightly concerned about this national crisis, but my view is that dramatically increasing sentences for knife offences is not the answer. We cannot enforce our way out of this problem by increasing sentences. We already have a tough regime for knife offenders, which has been getting tougher over the past decade. As I have said, we lock more people up than any EU country, and 400 children are in prison serving life sentences or sentences over 14 years. The proportion of people being sent to prison for knife offences has almost doubled: in 2010, about 40% of people caught with a knife were given a custodial sentence, but today, the proportion of knife possession offences receiving a custodial sentence is closer to 70%. Last year, more than a third of knife

offenders received an immediate jail sentence, and in 2015, the Government introduced their two-strikes policy, which I mentioned earlier. That policy means that anyone over 18 who is caught twice gets a minimum six-month jail term. Despite those changes, knife offences have risen from 25,000 to over 40,000 since 2013. Contrary to what might seem to be the case, the evidence shows that tougher sentences do not deter people from committing crime.

Four main factors go into sentencing decisions: punishment, deterrence, public protection and rehabilitation. We are debating all those factors today. To begin with punishment, people who commit knife offences—particularly attacks on other people—absolutely need to receive strict punishments, but those are already available under the law. The types of punishment we are debating are not proportionate or appropriate for the vast majority of knife crime, particularly as those involved are disproportionately young people. The majority of children carrying knives are extremely vulnerable, and it is increasingly evident that many are being criminally exploited, groomed and coerced. Punishing them with punitive sentences risks turning this generation of young people into a generation in prison.

Mrs Hodgson: Will my hon. Friend give some details about why some of those young people are carrying knives—details that she will have picked up through all her work in this area? I know there has been lots of coverage of that point in some of our news media, and fear seems to be the main reason, but I wonder whether my hon. Friend could give some more details.

Sarah Jones: I could, and I could speak for far too long about that issue. It is not possible to say “all young people carry knives for this reason”: everybody has a different story to tell. In many of the tales shared by the young people who I have met, vulnerability is given as a reason, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right that fear is another. We know that knife crime is contagious. It acts like a disease; it spreads. As I have seen in Croydon, if some people in a school are known to be carrying knives, others will start to carry knives. That results in situations in which people are not in gangs and are not dealing drugs, but are carrying knives because they feel that they need to, so when there is a fight, instead of using their fists, they use a knife. There is a raft of issues involved; we have already talked about involvement in drugs and gangs, as well as violence in the home and in the family during a child’s early years. All kinds of things lead to people carrying knives, but fear is definitely a big one.

Turning to deterrence, a large body of research on knife crime over the past few years shows that simply setting longer sentences does not deter crime, as the Minister knows very well; I am sure he will talk about that. Research consistently shows that, if anything, it is the certainty of being caught that acts as a deterrent, not how severe the sentence is. A recent evidence review concluded that lengthy prison sentences and mandatory minimum sentencing cannot be justified on the grounds of deterrence. For sentences to be a factor in deterring crime, people need to know what the punishment for the crime is and then make a rational choice about whether to offend. However, awareness of sentencing is very low, and many people involved in knife crime—particularly young people—do not act rationally. People who have

[Sarah Jones]

been in and out of prison for carrying knives have attended meetings of the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime, and they say that prison is not a deterrent at all: it is a break from the streets, somewhere they can be safe for a while before they have to go back.

Public protection is very important; we must of course keep the public safe by making sure that dangerous people are not on our streets. Home Office research found that a 15% increase in the use of custody would be required to produce just a 1% decrease in crime, and as we have talked about, our prisons are already overflowing. Surely it would be better for the Government to build on their recent £100 million boost to police funding and set a strong new basis for police funding in the autumn statement, in order to deter people through policing on the streets, rather than funding a huge increase in custodial sentences that would lead to a very small decrease in crime.

When it comes to rehabilitation, we know that dealing with children and young people outside the formal justice system is more effective at reducing offending than punitive responses. Involving a young person in custody makes them more likely to commit crime in the future. Young people who spoke to us at meetings of the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime talked about prison as a training camp, as the things that their colleagues could teach them were likely to increase crime, rather than reduce it. As the Minister also knows, conditions in prisons do not lend themselves to positive rehabilitation. Young people can be locked in their cells for 23 hours a day, and research has found that they face

“hunger, denial of fresh air, cramped and dirty cells, strip-searching, segregation, the authorised infliction of severe pain, uncivilised conditions for suicidal children”

and bullying and intimidation.

Mrs Hodgson: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend’s excellent speech, but I would have thought that part of the problem with rehabilitation is the recidivism of repeat offenders. Does she have an opinion about the part played by our now poorly functioning privatised probation service, through which offenders are probably not being rehabilitated as well as they should be?

Sarah Jones: I absolutely agree. There is a cycle. Surgeons in King’s College Hospital say that they are seeing the same children coming back again and again. The prison system says that the same children are going back time and again. There is the same cycle of going into prison, coming out of prison, committing a crime and getting stabbed. That is awful, and we need to break that cycle and get children and young people away from the situation they are in.

In terms of the four factors considered in sentencing, the evidence is just not there for harsher sentencing in this area. I will not talk about the public health approach and what we should be doing on prevention, but I want to highlight some work done in my borough of Croydon that paints the picture of where we need to go with our young people. Croydon completed what I think is a landmark report investigating the cases of 60 vulnerable adolescents. Those 60 children had all been involved in serious cases of violence or exploitation. Five had lost

their lives. Three had been convicted of murder. One third of the boys had been victims of knife crime and three quarters were involved with gangs. More than half the girls in the cohort had been victims of sexual exploitation.

Of the 60 people who had been deeply involved in violence, half were known to children’s social services before the age of five. We knew who these children were from the very beginning. In all the cases, there were many interventions by the state, but they did not work. The state was involved in crisis management—when something happened, there was an intervention, but the state did not do the right thing to help those children.

Half those 60 children had witnessed or experienced domestic violence. We know that violence breeds violence. It is learned behaviour. If children see it in the home, they do it later on in life. Three quarters of the children had a parental absence on the father’s side, and a quarter had an absence on the mother’s side. There were many parental issues around drug or alcohol misuse and mental health funding. A third of the children had already been excluded by the time they left primary school, and every single child who was later convicted of a crime had been excluded from school.

I will not talk more about what that says, other than to say that they are vulnerable children growing up in difficult situations. That does not excuse the crime at all, but in so many of the cases I have come across, who is the victim and who is the perpetrator is the luck of the fight. It is not right to categorise some children as the evil ones perpetrating the crimes and some as the victims, because there is often crossover. In some cases, people are being harmed when they have absolutely nothing to do with anything, but in other cases, they are all in a difficult situation because they are all vulnerable. I would argue that putting them in prison for longer is not the answer. In Scotland, they are putting far fewer young people in prison and focusing on the ones who are there. In the youth offending prison, they are giving them lots of training, teaching them to read and write and giving them education and skills, and that has to be the right approach for the long term.

This is a national crisis. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling put it correctly when he said that the Government need to come together to tackle the issue. In terms of this debate, sentencing is not the answer; many other things are.

6.23 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. It is a real delight to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), who has done so much detailed work in this area. I put on record the work of the Youth Violence Commission, which my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) has been working on during this Parliament. I also put on record how much I appreciate the passion with which my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) spoke about his personal experience. I remember attending his conference speech in 1999 in Bournemouth when he was Policing Minister. He had people along to talk about young people and positive involvement with the police. He has a wealth of experience in the area, and it is pleasing to hear that he has not lost that passion for young people and social justice.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for introducing this debate, in which we have had many interesting speeches from both Opposition and Government Members. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for her interventions and her expert knowledge, particularly about young children, nutrition and all the elements that go to make up positive primary schools, which we hear make such a difference for people's long-term outcomes and whether they are caught up in the criminal justice system.

The debate is about sentencing, but I want to talk about enforcement and prevention, just to set the scene. There can be no more difficult thing for a Member of Parliament than to meet the grieving family of a youngster lost to knife crime. On 22 February this year, Kamali Gabbidon-Lynck was stabbed multiple times and lost his life. That was a real tragedy. I have been very involved, going to the gold groups with the police and working with the council and the Wood Green business improvement district to talk about our high street and how we can use its physical surrounds to improve our environment.

At its heart, this is a tragedy not only for the young man's family—his mother is grieving and his son has lost a father—but for all the youngsters who knew him and loved him. The hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) has met relatives, too, and brings it home to us just how many more people are affected now compared with perhaps 10 years ago. Those of us who have been involved with public policy for 10 or 15 years remember when it was perhaps one terrible thing over a three or four-year period. Now, it seems far too regular. The number of people now facing the impacts of knife crime make this the national emergency we all agree it to be.

In the terrible case of Kamali Gabbidon-Lynck, he passed away from loss of blood, in a hair salon. There were a number of children having their hair cut or whose parents were having their hair cut, and they witnessed this dreadful loss of life and heard the young man's last words. Those people just getting their hair cut—an eight-year-old, a four-year-old, a mother with a tiny baby—will never forget that. That points to this feeling that it has become the wild west, and we need to bear in mind the number of people now affected.

Our victim support works according to a rigid model. Those people were considered to be witnesses to a crime, but in actual fact they were victims of that crime, too, because they suffered trauma and stress. It took an intervention by me at a roundtable at my advice surgery to gain expert counselling support for those families. If I had not intervened, I do not believe they would be receiving the expertise and counselling that they need. Our victim support needs to be much more holistic in its approach and to look at who is affected by knife crime.

We have been through the statistics on the lack of police. As other Members have said, because we are in a national emergency, we need to look at the enforcement side and talk about sentencing, police numbers and the lack of police in our schools. In London schools, we always used to have a full-time police officer in the school who the children knew. That developed a great relationship of trust. Those officers are now spread much more thinly, and often it is not the same police

officer in the same school all the time. We need to put that right. For what it is worth, my view on funding is that if we can spend £800 million a week on Brexit, we can spend more on the safety of our families and young people.

I want to briefly talk about the work being done throughout the rest of the criminal justice system. Like many Members who have spoken today, I believe the legislation is probably right. Given their expertise in this area, I trust their views. As it is the Prisons Minister who is with us, will he say what he thinks constitutes a positive prison experience? I am one of the Members involved in the MPs scheme to visit prisons. I look forward to my first visit to HMP and YOI Isis next Friday. What does the Minister feel is the key to a positive prison experience? Some people say a short experience in prison is worse than a longer one, because some of the excellent prison officers working in our prison system have a really positive impact on many of our young people, particularly in our youth offender institutions. I am interested in hearing the Minister's views on that.

To expand on the view put by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central, we know that literacy rates in our prison system are low. What is being done during sentences to push up the rates? Are there proper college courses? What are we doing so that when young people come out of prison they are ready to go into jobs and employment?

I cannot mention prisons without mentioning the use of drugs and how they have a negative effect on the staff inside prisons. Drug use can lead to attacks on staff, and staff themselves can become high as a result of Spice and other drugs being used in the prison system. The hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) mentioned that the *Express* has called for longer sentences. If longer sentences mean more low-quality experience with more drug use and attacks on staff, low morale and a lack of skills training, literacy or other meaningful, purposeful activities, I cannot support more and more and longer and longer sentences if they do not address the problem.

The National Audit Office has commented on the privatised service; it is poor value for money and is not leading to the outcomes that we want to see. We have very high rates of recidivism, as my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West mentioned earlier, and, unfortunately, a revolving-door system. I want to make a brief point about the prevention strategy. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central mentioned social services' involvement with young people, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and I work closely in the London Borough of Haringey. We met the Home Secretary several months ago and he promised to look at the resources and the interconnection between the numbers of police, the probation service and the prison experience, yet we still have a crisis on our hands. It is an absolute tragedy that we are not able to get a grip on the situation.

There is the bigger picture on funding when it comes to what local authorities can do. However, specifically on the point that has been made about even primary school children beginning a journey into a life of crime at the end of primary and the beginning of secondary school, I have sought a meeting with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

[Catherine West]

to discuss Haringey. Incidentally, Haringey has the highest level of police resource of any London borough because of our problems. I want to ask him for a special fund for a buddying and mentoring scheme for the families described by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central. Rather than a social services punitive approach, we need a friendly approach so that when the first letters come home from school saying that the youngster is not coping, the buddying and mentoring scheme can help the family and perhaps help with other siblings or whatever it is that stops that youngster thriving in school. We need to keep young people in school for as long as possible. We know that many of the prison population have been expelled or excluded from school from an early age.

Although it is tempting to jump on the bandwagon of longer sentences, I think the Minister has realised that what is important is the quality of rehabilitation in prisons and that we have to look much more closely at resources in schools and early intervention. We need also to look at what local strategies there are. A lot of good practice is carried out in Glasgow, which is certainly worth considering for other local authority areas. I want to emphasise that with Brexit costing £800 million a week, there must be more that we can spend on such a crucial situation.

I want to re-emphasise how pleased I am to see Members of all parties joining together to look at the problem as a national emergency. There is excellent police work in parts, but we must improve and increase that and bring together the passion that some Members have for this crucial area. We must not lose hope because that would be giving in. We must redouble our efforts to concentrate on the crucial question of young people and knife violence.

6.35 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the petitioners and the Petitions Committee for bringing this urgent issue to our attention. I also thank the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for his very able and comprehensive introduction to the subject, and I thank all hon. Members for their thoughtful and thought-provoking speeches. As others have done, I want to start by reflecting on the horror and the personal tragedy that each instance of knife crime represents. Our thoughts and our hearts go out to all who have been impacted, including whole communities such as Havering, Dudley, Hammersmith, Croydon, Wood Green and many others across the country.

The petition—like the debates that we might have tomorrow on the Offensive Weapons Bill—asks where the balance should lie between different policy responses to knife crime. The petitioners have placed their focus on sentencing, and that is entirely understandable, particularly for those who have experienced or been affected by knife crime. Of course, there must be proper and appropriate punishment of offenders. In Scotland, sentencing has been a small part of the response, as the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) mentioned earlier. Maximum sentences for possession have been increased to five years, and the average length of custodial sentences for knife possession and offences has increased,

too, albeit without the introduction of mandatory prison sentences, about which I share the scepticism of the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter).

The key point is that sentencing policy in Scotland is broadly in the same ballpark as that in England and Wales. I do not agree that the upsurge in knife crime in too many areas of England and Wales is down to a lack of appropriate sanctions. There is no evidence for that. As the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) said, there is little or no evidence that increasing the length of sentences will have any significant deterrent effect.

I share the views of the hon. Member for Hammersmith. We tend to put far too much faith in sentencing and harsh sentences to fix all of society's ills, whereas prison often causes more problems than it solves. Short sentences in particular often operate almost as a training camp, as the hon. Member for Croydon Central said. The focus should be on other policy areas, many of which were touched on during the debate and which I will refer to briefly now.

Policing numbers are also relevant, despite the Prime Minister's protestations. Hon. Members have been almost unanimous about that today, and senior officers have said the same thing. Although I am always reluctant to compare apples and oranges—it can be a crude way to do things—I was struck when I read the other day that in September 2018 there were roughly 32 officers per 10,000 of the population in Scotland, compared with around 21 officers per 10,000 in England and Wales. That is a hugely significant difference. There might be other explanations for it, but if I were an MP in England and Wales, I would ask questions about how that gap had arisen. Members referred to the need for local policing or hotspot policing. That is necessary and we need to see resources invested in it.

I turn to austerity and resources more generally. Last week, witnesses before the Home Affairs Committee were clear that austerity and cuts to services were having a significant impact. The witnesses said that safe spaces, youth clubs and council-funded sports facilities and teams have faced the brunt of the cuts. Those are places where young people find diversion and meet role models, and the cuts undoubtedly have an impact. Services such as social work, employability and mental health are all buckling under the strain, and all those services count in the battle to stem the tide of knife crime.

Some hon. Members referred to stop and search. I agree that that can play a role, but it is far from an answer in itself, and it must be used extremely carefully and in a way that does not risk undermining trust in the role of police. It must be done on the basis of reasonable suspicion. “Intelligence led” and “proportionate” were the words that the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) wisely used.

Tomorrow, or soon, we will debate knife crime prevention orders. We heard some differing views on that subject today. We do not have them in Scotland, and based on what I have heard so far I severely doubt that I would like them to be introduced. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Croydon Central for all the work that she does with the all-party group on knife crime, and for the event that she organised this lunchtime at which we heard from a range of actors about why knife crime prevention orders appear to be filling a gap that does not really exist and that lacks an evidence base. Instead, they risk seriously counterproductive unintended consequences.

Putting that aside, more generally I welcome most of the provisions in the Offensive Weapons Bill. However, it is a small piece of a much bigger picture, and the area where we can make a significant long-term difference is away from purely criminal justice measures. That is where Scotland has already seen some success, if only because we experienced horrendous levels of violence not so long ago that required an urgent response. It is important to remember just how bad the position was. As recently as 2005, the UN talked of Scotland as among the most violent countries in the developed world, and the World Health Organisation referred to Glasgow as one of the murder capitals of the world. Although we still have a long way to go, the evidence points to significant success in reducing violence, as the hon. Member for Romford pointed out.

Recorded violent crime in Scotland came down by 49% over the decade to 2016-17. The homicide rate halved over the decade from 2008 to 2018. Offending by young people has halved since 2008, and various other dramatic statistics show that a long-term public health approach can make a difference. Although other policies have undoubtedly played a part, including those related to sentencing, I think we all know that that public health approach has been responsible for turning the tide.

Such an approach is about addressing the underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that people will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence. It means an evidence-based, whole-of-Government approach that seeks to tackle the causes of violence, rather than just the symptoms. It is about prevention and early intervention, rather than action after tragic events.

Members know about the work of the violence reduction unit, together with organisations and campaigns such as No Knives, Better Lives and Mentors in Violence Prevention. On the ground, it is about seeking opportunities to divert from prosecution, community alternatives to secure care and custody, and improving reintegration back into the community. That means improving life chances, promoting school inclusions, strengthening relationships and engagement, building life skills, improving health and wellbeing, and trying to improve employability.

None of that is new, much of it is common sense, and all of it has been learned from other cities such as New York and Chicago, and tweaked and honed to work in Glasgow and other parts of Scotland. I hope that the same thing can work over the longer term in parts of England. It is about not directly copying what has gone on elsewhere, but learning what works and what can work, and tailoring it to local circumstances. I welcome, for example, the fact that Mayor Khan has established a violence reduction unit in London.

The UK Government have published their serious violence strategy, which includes a move towards a public health approach. Whether that is a modest change of emphasis or a full-scale rethink, only time will tell; however, to save lives there should be a genuine and cross-Government commitment to pursue that approach, making available the funds that are needed.

I support what the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said when he raised what seems almost to be a lack of urgency in the response to this national crisis—or epidemic, as hon. Members have described it. The problem has been getting worse for the best part of two years, but until now the response has largely been local and operational, rather than strategic and at a national level.

If not through Cobra, there has to be another type of serious, cross-Government co-ordination. This matter needs national direction, and it needs it urgently.

6.43 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I too thank the petitioners and the Petitions Committee, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for opening the debate and making very important points, along with the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), who rightly set a measured tone across the Floor. Some broader political points need ironing out, but today may not be the day for that. I will refer to them briefly, but in the light of what the hon. Gentleman said I have altered huge parts of my speech—I thought he made a good point about that.

I join many of my hon. Friends in remembering all the tragic victims of knife crime—those who have been mentioned, and those who have not.

Mrs Hodgson: It would be remiss of me not to mention two young people from Sunderland who were also victims. In the north-east, we do not have an epidemic of knife crime. There is a regional element to it, but none the less 31-year-old father Gavin Moon from my constituency was a victim, as was 18-year-old Connor Brown, from the neighbouring constituency of Sunderland Central. As my hon. Friend was talking about victims, I thought I should mention those two.

This has been an excellent debate. I did not intend to stay for long, but it has been so good I have stayed for the wind-ups.

Imran Hussain: I join my hon. Friend in remembering the victims she refers to, and all other victims. Our thoughts and hearts go out to the grieving families. These are tragedies beyond words.

We have heard moving accounts from hon. Members from their constituencies—from communities coming together to deal with the issues to the broader impact and trauma, which is sometimes not acknowledged, on society as a whole and on communities. All those things happen in the aftermath, and are sometimes not given as much thought as they should be. I thank all hon. Members for their valuable contributions.

The rise in knife crime and the number of young people who have been killed should keep us all awake at night. This is deeply complex. Although we support robust sentencing, the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), made pertinent and persuasive points. I do not wish to repeat them, but I believe that she set the tone regarding the broader impacts by giving some hard facts. In particular, she referred to the record numbers of offenders sentenced for knife crime, with more people being given an immediate custodial sentence. She rightly pointed out that we must realise that we cannot achieve lower levels of crime through sentencing alone. We need an approach that is rooted in effectiveness. Only then can we begin to stop the rise in violent crime.

In taking such an approach, we need to understand what is driving knife crime. Although, as we have seen today, there is little consensus on what has been the

[Imran Hussain]

trigger for the marked increase in knife crime, the drivers and issues that have created the conditions in which this epidemic has been able to grow are difficult to dispute. The clearest is that, with such a dramatic rise in knife crime, young people are now more scared of becoming victims than ever. They have seen friends wounded or killed and fear that the same will happen to them. They even feel ignored by authorities when they raise that fear, particularly since those who are most likely to be victims live in high-crime neighbourhoods where police are sometimes seen as unable to protect them. That is compounded by a rise in violence and a fall in the proportion of crimes for which an offender is identified.

We cannot get away from the fact that police numbers have been slashed: there are 20,000 fewer police officers than there were in 2010, and police community support officers, who are so vital to building relations, have also been lost. At the same time, there are serious issues in our schools: as schools face significant funding pressures, interventions for vulnerable children are being cut and there has been a marked increase in exclusions and illegal off-rolling. We know that vulnerable children are more likely to be off-rolled or excluded, and the Children's Commissioner has reported that those who are excluded are 200 times more likely to be involved in gangs, which demonstrates that we simply cannot ignore the correlation between the rise in exclusions and the rise in knife crime.

There have also been huge reductions in the services available for young people. Again, I am not making a political point out of this but just giving the hard facts. Some 3,500 youth service jobs have been lost and 600 centres have closed, with 130,000 places lost. There have been sweeping cuts to education, and teachers and vital early intervention services have been lost as councils face unprecedented funding cuts. Youth offending team budgets have been cut in half, curbing interventions and degrading services that help to prevent young people from becoming victims and offenders in the first place. All those services assist people who are already disaffected and vulnerable. It is no coincidence that victims and offenders are from areas of huge social disadvantage.

We cannot address the drivers of offending with more sentencing alone. We can address them only with an interdepartmental approach, because sentencing is a downstream solution that is applied when it is already too late. We need an upstream solution that identifies the root causes of crime, brings together organisations across central Government, local government, the police and the community sector, and is built on the well-documented public health approach that many hon. Members have referred to, which involves collecting data, identifying the factors at play, implementing solutions and rolling out the ones that work.

More broadly, solving the issue requires the stimulation of housing, employment opportunities and community facilities, as the Association of Directors of Children's Services suggests. It also requires investment in young people, who are overwhelmingly the most affected, and a cross-departmental approach like that of Police Scotland's violence reduction unit in Scotland, with close co-operation among partners in the NHS, education and social work. That will help to give young people the future they deserve and lift them out of the dire situations in which they find themselves, which all too often lead them to fall into a life of crime.

Such an approach is far from being soft on crime but, as the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) says, it gets results. The considerable success of the approach taken in Scotland, with homicide rates halving between 2004-05 and 2016-17, has led the Youth Violence Commission, the Select Committee on Home Affairs and the head of Scotland Yard to call for it to be implemented in England. Even the Home Secretary has said that we need to treat knife crime "like a disease". Unfortunately, he has offered to tackle the symptoms—stabblings and possessions—but not the causes.

We need to do more. We need to shift the focus of our model away from purely specific interventions for high-risk individuals and cast the net wider, to focus on low and medium-risk offenders, from whom most of the cases arise, and avoid a prevention paradox. We need joint ownership to be taken of the problems that lead to knife crime, because responsibility does not lie just with police—we have to be clear about that. Ultimately, we need to adopt an approach that recognises violence as preventable, not inevitable. We need a meaningful public health approach that can address knife crime and its causes.

6.55 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for introducing the debate and to the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) for the compassion and empathy of his speech. In a debate that has lasted for two and a half hours now, I cannot help but reflect on how committed all hon. Members are to the issue. As a Justice Minister, I have learned an enormous amount, from many different angles. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for the extraordinary passion with which he spoke about victims in his area, and to the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who is a real firecracker—he made a great speech with huge energy and passion, and I am sure that the issues can only ever be gripped in the way that he described.

I have picked up the sense of frustration around this Chamber. The situation is very disturbing and has been getting steadily worse, so I completely understand why people feel infuriated and frustrated and want more action more quickly. I can reassure hon. Members on one particular question by confirming that the Prime Minister will hold the summit at Chequers next week. In her defence, there is a reason that in the past two weeks she has found it difficult to organise a meeting there: Brexit has not stopped everything else happening in the Government, but it has stopped many of the things that might otherwise be in her diary.

To get a grip on the situation, we have set up an inter-ministerial group on serious violence, which meets regularly and is chaired by the Home Secretary. I am a member of that group and we are making a lot of rapid progress; as the hon. Member for Gedling implied, such a Cobra-style approach is vital to bringing everybody together. In thinking about the problem, we need to be realistic and, above all, practical. The Government's serious violence strategy contains any number of ideas—probably 200 or 300, all of which are good and all of which make a difference.

Sarah Jones: Interestingly, knife crime prevention orders are not part of that strategy. A lot of the organisations that I have spoken to suspect that the orders were partly a knee-jerk response to show that the Government were acting, and that they were never part of the strategy that the Minister is talking about, which is comprehensive in its diagnosis—if not in setting out a solution.

Rory Stewart: I will come back to knife crime prevention orders. The interesting thing about this debate is that although we all share a horror of knife crime, not everybody in this Chamber agrees on the particulars, such as knife crime prevention orders, sentence lengths or whether courts should have discretion. In a sense, the debate in this Chamber is a reflection of the debate among the public.

The core question is which of the dozens of suggestions in the serious violence strategy will make most difference as quickly as possible and be most effective. There may be many individual initiatives that are fantastic at a community level, but others may be even better, and those are the ones that we need to focus on. I want to focus on four areas in particular. The first is sentencing—this is a debate on sentencing, and I am here as a representative of the Ministry of Justice to talk about sentencing. It is true to say that following on from the 2015 two-strike rule, more people are now going to jail for knife possession offences, and they are going there for longer. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) raised the question whether we have got that balance right, and it is a difficult balance.

The hon. Member for Gedling, a very experienced ex-Policing Minister, asked exactly how these exceptions are defined. They are defined quite closely. Some 82% of people found in a double possession will find their way towards a sentence. Who are the 18% who are not getting sentences? The guidelines stipulate very clearly what the mitigating factors are and lay them out. In extreme cases, it could be somebody with learning difficulties, mental health problems or a serious medical problem, or it could be somebody who has co-operated with the police—all these things are mitigating factors that might lead to someone not receiving such a sentence.

Vernon Coaker: The Minister talks about 82% of people being given a sentence by the court. Does he mean suspended sentences as well as custodial sentences?

Rory Stewart: I am including suspended sentences as well as immediate custodial sentences. In the case of a suspended sentence, if somebody breaks their licence conditions, they will be recalled to court for the remainder of their custodial sentence.

Ian Austin: What proportion of the 82% get suspended sentences, and what proportion receive immediate custodial sentences?

Rory Stewart: Out of that 82%, approximately 22% of the cohort do not receive a full custodial sentence. All that goes to the core of what the mitigating and aggravating factors in the judge's hands are. As the hon. Member for Gedling pointed out, this is absolutely standard in any legislation that we bring forward—we leave some discretion for the judges.

One of the questions at the core of this issue has been raised again and again by the hon. Members for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) and for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova): deterrence. In order to be practical, we need to focus on the fact that the main thing that the evidence suggests makes a difference to somebody who is considering committing a crime is their chance of being caught. Their receiving a six-month, nine-month or 12-month sentence, or even a five-year sentence, is much less likely to motivate their behaviour than the chance of being caught. In burglary, for example, it is almost certainly the very low rate of conviction, rather than the length of sentence, which has made the difference. If someone feels that they have a 3% chance of being caught, it does not really matter how long the sentence is, which is why most of our focus is now going into putting another £100 million behind the police to focus on knife crime, rather than on increasing this form of sentence length.

There is another reason that we have to be cautious in response to the suggestions for a 25-year sentence for using a knife and a 10-year sentence for possessing a knife: any sentencing needs to balance with other forms of sentencing, otherwise victims and their families will feel that justice has not been done. What do I mean by that? If someone gets a 25-year sentence for using a knife in any way—cutting somebody with a knife—while the minimum custodial sentence for murder is 15 years, it would be very understandable that a family would look at somebody getting 15 years for murder and wonder why somebody else was getting 25 years for using a knife. The same would be true if someone got 25 years for using a knife and another person got 25 years for killing somebody with a knife; the family would understandably ask, “How come this person is getting 25 years for using a knife to wound, when here is another person getting 25 years for committing murder with a knife?”

It is a fundamental principle of our law that we look at the consequence of the crime and the culpability of the criminal; we do not look at the weapon used. We do not determine whether somebody used a crossbow, a gun or a knife; we look at whether it was murder or grievous bodily harm. What form of offence was committed? That is really important, because if we start introducing offences based purely on the type of weapon that is used, we will end up with injustice being felt all the way through our legal system. That does not mean that we cannot look at sentencing, but this particular proposal does not make sense.

Let me address the proposed 10-year sentence for possessing a knife. Currently the minimum sentence for possessing a firearm is five years. The public would feel a deep injustice if someone were to get 10 years for a knife and another person got five years for a firearm—it simply does not make sense. In thinking about sentencing, we cannot think about just one type of offence; we have to think about the effect on the whole system.

I shall move on quickly, because I am aware that we have trespassed on your patience for a very long time, Mr Davies. I want to discuss early intervention and prevention, supporting communities, and effective law enforcement, which are the three central planks of any response to knife crime. On early intervention and prevention, the hon. Members for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and for Croydon Central made very eloquent interventions and speeches. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth

[Rory Stewart]

and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) for—given Scotland's extraordinary success in this area—a very modest and charming speech. I thought it was a very intelligent speech, which demonstrated that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution and that we can learn from Scotland without replicating their approach. I pay tribute to what Scotland has done and the spirit with which the hon. Gentleman approached this debate.

Clearly we have to look at risk factors. The key risk factor in an individual involved in knife crime is the individual themselves. As the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) has pointed out, that could mean an acquired brain injury, or neglect, or abuse in the home. The second factor is the family context, which is central. In a recent study, 47% of people who had committed homicide had been in care—almost half of them. The third factor is the community context in which people operate. Living in a deprived neighbourhood makes someone much more likely to commit knife crime.

Another important factor is the school that someone attends. Serious risk factors include an individual being caught up in bullying at school or playing truant, and we need to do more to work with schools. Schools are quite good at picking up on children who are victims of domestic abuse, but are they good enough at identifying people who are being sucked into knife crime? Should we be working with Ofsted to try to assess schools on how good they are at identifying people who are being sucked into knife crime?

Someone's peer group—the people with whom they spend their time—is the fifth biggest risk factor in determining whether they get sucked into knife crime. We can respond; this is not just touchy-feely nonsense. We can prove that a targeted approach, not a universal approach, is most effective. It is about being really smart with public money. The answer is not to lecture every child in the country on knife crime, but to ensure that we target those who are most at risk with the most serious support. The likelihood of a child going on to commit a violent offence can be reduced by 25% by bringing in a therapist with a case load of five or six children and ensuring that the therapist spends time with the family once a week. That one thing makes a huge difference. As we begin to build up these different things, we can begin to address some of the underlying causes of knife crime.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East spoke eloquently about supporting communities. We need a multi-agency public protection arrangement-style approach, which is something that, again, the hon. Member for Gedling referred to. We need to think about comms and how we get a proper media approach. We need to think about how that could be a digital media approach. How do we communicate to people the dangers of knife crime? We need to think about what we do with retailers who sell knives, which involves bringing in trading standards. If we are going to wrap up different bits of Government, we need trading standards to get under-18-year-olds to try to buy knives online. We need under-18-year-olds to go into shops—even small retailers—to try to buy knives and then report back to the retailer if somebody on the shop floor has sold a knife to someone who is under age.

We need to think about victim support, as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) said. The answer to her specific question is that anybody who witnessed the attack is entitled to victim support. They do not need to be related to the victim. I am very pleased that she champions that issue.

Catherine West: Does the Minister agree that victim support is inconsistent? It is very good in some places but not so good in others. What measures are the Government putting in place to monitor where it is not good, and what are they doing about it?

Rory Stewart: The answer is that we have just published a victims strategy, and we are investing more in victim support—more than £90 million a year—as part of a broader spectrum of support. We now have £200 million going into a youth endowment fund, which is directly driven by the strategy and responds to the public health approach pioneered in Scotland. We have another £22 million going into an early intervention fund to respond to the stuff that we have been talking about in relation to schools and families.

That brings me to effective law enforcement, where my hon. Friend the Member for Romford is pushing us. He makes a very interesting point about the way in which community policing does or does not overlap with ward boundaries. The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) also spoke in some detail about community policing. We need to balance that with very specific stuff on knife crime, which means ensuring that there are plain clothes officers in hot spot areas. Hot spot areas are central. In Peterborough, we discovered that taking a hot spot approach, getting the right data and finding where the problems are coming from reduced violence by 37% without displacing it to any other area, so hot spot policing is central.

Sarah Jones: The Minister is making a very thoughtful speech. Although we do not agree on everything, he is talking a lot of sense. A piece of work on that has just been done in Croydon. There are 10 areas in Croydon where most violence outside occurs. It is in the places we would expect, such as outside the supermarkets. He is absolutely right that targeting them with effective policing would be an incredibly sensible way to spend public money.

Rory Stewart: The answer to everyone in the Chamber who spoke about law enforcement is that community policing plays a part. There is a 10 am meeting of the violent crime taskforce every day in Lambeth, where it gets the intelligence from the previous 12 hours about where people have gathered and where the weapons are moving. It then targets its intervention for the day. It has its own team of uniformed officers who back up the plain clothes officers on the ground. They go in and do weapons sweeps and community weapons sweeps. They use section 1 orders to go after individuals and section 60 orders to go after geographical areas. They go after habitual knife carriers. They conduct searches with search warrants, based on drug suspicion in houses. By doing that, and through Operation Sceptre, through which we have 42 police forces across the country doing this at the same time for week-long periods, we are able to Hoover up astonishing quantities of knives.

The community part is the real key to that, because it is the local community leader, the head of the local boxing club or somebody who wants to speak for the community who is out there doing the community sweep, finding the knives concealed in hedges and cars. That is far more effective than police officers just doing it on their own.

Julia Lopez: I am curious to know, in the light of those kinds of activities in boroughs such as Lambeth, whether the Minister has seen any displacement activity. Does he see people move into neighbouring boroughs, or does it have a real impact on knife crime over a much wider area?

Rory Stewart: Strangely, the experience is that there has not been displacement activity. We have looked at that very carefully, and it seems that, by targeting those areas, we grab it and do not push it on to neighbouring areas. There are different theories about that. One is that some of this is gang-related, and some gangs are geographically limited, so it is not likely to be displaced into other areas.

At the core of all this is crack cocaine and crack cocaine gangs, although the innocent victims have nothing to do with crack cocaine. Although drug use in general is coming down, crack cocaine use is going up. It went up 18% between 2016-17 and 2017-18. County lines, which are an incredibly important part of this, are also contributing. The same gangs are involved in both. That means that we have to get on top of mobile phones. We have had to bring in new ways of intercepting mobiles, which are central to the way that county lines gangs operate. We have set up a new National Crime Agency taskforce to focus on county lines, and we have had to be much smarter about data. In partial response to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), who made a very good speech about that, one of the things we are learning is that our data has not been good enough. For example, we have not been coding knife crimes properly. Setting up smart software that allows us to pick out as knife crime something that was simply registered as grievous bodily harm makes a huge difference to our ability to target hotspot areas.

All the stuff that I have been talking about so far is about preventing somebody from being dragged into these gangs from early childhood onward. Then it is about the violent crime taskforce moving into an area to make sure that if somebody picks up a knife, we get them as soon as possible, particularly on possession. Then—God forbid—if somebody is convicted or uses a knife, we move on to the question of what happens in the courts, prisons and probation. There, too, we have to look at all these other issues. We have to take on board the fact that the real protection for the public is ensuring that the person who has offended once does not reoffend.

Statistically, we are doing a bit better on knife crime than on other crimes. Generally, short-term offenders reoffend at a rate of nearly 60%. Knife crime offenders reoffend at about half that rate. Half that rate is still too high, so we need to address addiction issues, get them jobs and help them into accommodation.

Catherine West: I thank the Minister for giving way a second time. Does he agree that the current approach to drug rehabilitation services in prison is not robust enough? Not enough people have access to those crucial treatments and are cured of drug and alcohol issues.

Rory Stewart: Yes, that is absolutely right. We should do much, much more on addiction. Shoplifting is a big problem. We have a lot of shoplifting, and the majority of people get short sentences of less than six months. The highest single offence is shoplifting by a very large margin. Of those offenders, 76% are crack cocaine or heroin addicts. The real way of dealing with the problem is to deal with their crack cocaine or heroin addiction.

Vernon Coaker: The Minister has given a very thoughtful, measured and informed response, and people listening to it will say, “That’s great. How will the Government and Parliament make that happen?” As part of that, will he tell the House that he will go back, wake up the people who need waking up and introduce regular statements to Parliament, every single week at least, about what is happening, what progress is being made and what is or is not being done? It should be a regular statement to Parliament, not a response to an urgent question.

Rory Stewart: I have enormous admiration for the hon. Gentleman, and I would be very proud to have him as part of our team dealing with this. I am sure he would deal with it very well. I am not in the business of committing colleagues in the Home Office to making statements, but I assure him that we take this very seriously. I have not spoken enough to the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), but we are putting another £100 million into policing, particularly driven by violent crime and knife crime, in addition to our investment in the youth endowment fund.

Action is not just what happens in Parliament. It is not just about the inter-ministerial group that has been set up and the meeting that the Prime Minister is holding next week. It is about setting up the violent crime taskforce and that 10 am meeting every morning in Lambeth, and about ensuring the money and resources begin to flow in behind this. I believe that this will make a significant difference, but I absolutely agree to sit down with the hon. Member for Gedling. The only way of doing this or anything in Government is with urgency, grip, imagination and passion. Above all, it should be rooted in realism. I thank the hon. Member for Hartlepool very much indeed for this incredibly informative debate.

7.19 pm

Mike Hill: I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), and the hon. Members for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Henley (John Howell) for contributing to this important debate. I also thank those who made important interventions—not least my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson)—and the Front-Bench representatives, who all made incredible contributions.

I am sure that many more people would have been in this Chamber were it not for the business in the main Chamber. The subject areas that we covered were important and diverse: deterrence, prevention, and cause and effect, as well as the sentencing element of the petition. I could not end this debate without paying homage to one of

[Mike Hill]

our own: PC Keith Palmer, who was a victim of knife crime only a couple of yards outside this very building.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 233926 relating to knife crime.

7.21 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 25 March 2019

TREASURY

Convergence Programme

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):

Article 121 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) requires the UK to send an annual convergence programme to the European Commission reporting upon its fiscal situation and policies. The United Kingdom will continue to apply the *acquis* so long as it remains a member state and, as set out in the withdrawal agreement, for the duration of the implementation period, if the withdrawal agreement is ratified by both the UK and EU.

The UK's convergence programme will be sent to the European Commission by 30 April. This deadline was set in accordance with the European semester timetable for both convergence and national reform programmes.

Section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 requires that the content of the convergence programme must be drawn from an assessment of the UK's economic and budgetary position which has been presented to Parliament by the Government for its approval. This assessment is based on the autumn Budget 2018 report and the most recent Office for Budget Responsibility's "Economic and Fiscal Outlook" and it is this content, not the convergence programme itself, which requires the approval of the House for the purposes of the Act.

Article 121, along with article 126 of the TFEU, is the legal basis for the stability and growth pact, which is the co-ordination mechanism for EU fiscal policies and requires member states to avoid excessive Government deficits. Although the UK participates in the stability and growth pact, by virtue of its protocol to the treaty opting out of the euro, it is only required to "endeavour to avoid" excessive deficits. Unlike the euro area member states, the UK is not subject to sanctions at any stage of the European semester process.

Subject to the progress of parliamentary business, debates will be held soon in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, in order for both Houses to approve this assessment before the convergence programme is sent to the Commission. I will deposit a copy of a document to inform these debates in the Libraries of both Houses and copies will be available through the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office in advance of the debates.

The UK's convergence programme will be available electronically via HM Treasury's website prior to it being sent to the European Commission.

[HCWS1444]

FCA: Retained Provisions of the Consumer Credit Act

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

In 2014, the Government fundamentally reformed the consumer credit market, by transferring regulation from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to the Financial Conduct

Authority (FCA). This more robust regulatory system is helping to deliver the Government's vision for a well-functioning and sustainable consumer credit market which is able to meet consumers' needs.

As part of the transfer, the FCA was required in regulation 20 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2014 to undertake a review of the "retained provisions" of the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

In February 2016 the FCA published a Call for Input setting out its approach and seeking responses from stakeholders. In August 2018, the FCA published an interim report, which set out initial views and invited feedback. The FCA has now completed this review, and the Treasury has laid the final report before Parliament. Copies of the document are available in the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office.

The Government welcome the FCA's report, and the significant analysis undertaken by the FCA during the course of the review. The Government will consider the report and whether further reform of the consumer credit regulatory regime is needed.

[HCWS1442]

Asset Sales Disclosure Guidance

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):

The Treasury is today publishing new technical guidance concerning the disclosure to Parliament of Government asset sales.

The guidance is a further output of the Government's balance sheet review and responds to issues raised in the Office for Budget Responsibility's 2017 fiscal risks report, as well as recommendations from the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee about improving transparency and accountability for major assets sales. The guidance fulfils the commitment to fiscal transparency and accountability made in the Treasury's 2018 managing fiscal risks to require Departments to disclose the impact of major assets sales on their balance sheets and the public finances as a whole.

The disclosure will take the form of a written ministerial statement (WMS) made to Parliament following the sale of an asset. The WMS will include the rationale for the sale, a justification of its timing and format, whether the sale was above, within, or below the retention value range, and the impacts of the sale on public sector net borrowing (PSNB), public sector net debt (PSND), public sector net financial liabilities (PSNFL) and public sector net liabilities (PSNL—the accounting impact).

A copy of the guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asset-sale-disclosures-guidance-for-government>.

[HCWS1446]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU Withdrawal Joint Committee: Oversight

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng):

In my response to an urgent question on Wednesday 20 March, I stated that during the implementation period, we will "technically be a member state [of the European Union]", that "payments or penalties [for non-compliance with the

withdrawal agreement] would be imposed only by mutual consent”, and that “the CJEU will have some role in interpreting EU law, but we will be outside its jurisdiction”.

The correct position is that, first, during the implementation period, the UK will no longer be a member state of the European Union, but market access will continue on current terms.

Secondly, my statement that the Joint Committee cannot unilaterally impose financial penalties was correct: all decisions of the Joint Committee are mutual and, under the withdrawal agreement, neither party is allowed to impose financial penalties on the other, whether through the Joint Committee or not. However, for clarity I wish to confirm that the independent arbitration panel set up under article 171—which was referred to by right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Owen Paterson)—can impose a financial penalty where a party has failed to comply with a ruling made against it.

This is not a unilateral imposition of a penalty by one party against the other, as it would be done by the arbitration panel, which is independent of both parties and made up of experts in both international and EU law, qualified for high judicial office. It could only occur under certain conditions as set out in the WA, and after all other stages of dispute resolution and crucially must be proportionate to the continuing breach that has been identified by the arbitration panel.

Thirdly, I also said that we would be “outside [the] jurisdiction [of the CJEU] ” after the end of the implementation period. While that is of course very largely the case, I should also remind the House that, in bringing the CJEU’s jurisdiction to an orderly end, there are a small number of limited areas where we have agreed we will continue to accept rulings for a time-limited period in order to facilitate legal certainty.

[HCWS1447]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill: EVEL and Commons Consideration of Lords Amendments

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I am today placing in the Library of the House the Department’s analysis on the application of Standing Order N^o. 83L in respect of the Government amendments tabled for Commons consideration of Lords amendments for the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill.

[HCWS1441]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): At autumn Budget 2016, the Government asked the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission to develop an ambitious vision and delivery plan for North Kent, South Essex and East London up to 2050. In June 2018, the commission, led originally by Lord Heseltine and concluded by Sir John Armitt, announced their vision for the estuary. I sincerely

thank Sir John and all the members of the commission for their expertise and scrutiny across the duration of the commission.

Comparable in scale to the midlands engine, northern powerhouse and Oxford-Cambridge arc, the Thames estuary has the potential to deliver growth to support the success of the whole of the UK economy. The Commission envisioned that by 2050 the

Thames estuary will be a tapestry of productive places along a global river. The estuary will create 1.3 million new jobs and generate £190 billion additional gross value added.

The Thames estuary has long been a gateway to the wider UK economy but there remain pockets of entrenched deprivation within the region. And this area is not yet fully delivering on its great potential.

I welcome the vision for growth that the commission has set out. I am pleased to announce further commitments from this Government to support the delivery of the commission’s vision, including: £1 million to support a new Thames estuary growth board; appointing a Cabinet-level ministerial champion; £4.85 million to support local partners to develop low-cost proposals for enhancing transport services between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet, subject to suitable housing ambition; exploring the potential for at least two new locally-led development corporations; launching a strategic communications campaign to promote the Thames estuary as a great place to live, work and do business; funding for the creation of masterplans and feasibility studies on key sites in the Thames estuary creative production corridor; and bringing together relevant authorities to collaborate on the Thames estuary 2100 plan, to make sure that growth in the estuary is sustainable and resilient. My full response is available: www.gov.uk.

Our response to the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission marks this Government’s commitment to this important area of the country. The Thames estuary has great potential to provide well-balanced, inclusive economic growth and will remain vital for the UK economy following Brexit.

[HCWS1445]

Rough Sleeping Initiative

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): I am today announcing the allocation of a further £46 million rough sleeping initiative funding to support those sleeping rough and those at risk of sleeping rough in 246 local authorities.

This funding provides continuity from the £30 million fund for 2018-19, which was aimed at an initial 83 local authorities with the highest levels of rough sleeping in 2017.

The 2018 annual rough sleeping statistics showed a decrease of 639 or 19% in numbers of rough sleepers across these areas. While the programme is still in its infancy, the figures continue to demonstrate that the rough sleeping initiative has had a significant impact on the number of people sleeping rough and is working. Therefore, we are providing a further £34 million to these 83 areas in 2019-20.

I want to go further, and so launched a bidding round in December 2018 for those areas not in the initial 83 and I am pleased to announce that I will be providing an additional £12 million to a further 163 local authorities in 2019-20. This will continue to build on the work we have done so far to make sure we continue to support more people off the streets and into safe and secure accommodation.

This funding will provide for over 750 new staff focused on rough sleeping. This will include more outreach workers to engage with people on the streets, specialist mental health and substance misuse workers and dedicated co-ordinators to drive efforts to reduce rough sleeping in their areas. It will also provide for over 2,650 new bed spaces including both emergency, temporary and settled accommodation. The breadth of this funding will provide coverage of 75% of local authorities across England.

The rough sleeping initiative team, made up of expert advisers with knowledge and experience in areas such as mental health, specialist housing, substance misuse and criminal justice will continue to work closely with local areas to implement the plans and to monitor their progress.

I have deposited a full list of the individual amounts allocated to the 246 local authorities in the House Library.

I am confident this package of support will achieve substantial results across England. It will also build upon the work we have already undertaken. This work includes publishing our cross-Government rough sleeping strategy which sets out an ambitious £100 million package to help people who sleep rough now and puts in place the structures that will end rough sleeping once and for all, piloting the housing first approach, which has an internationally proven evidence base for effectiveness, in Greater Manchester, Liverpool city region and the west midlands, allocating over £1.2 billion in order to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, including more upfront funding so local authorities can proactively tackle homelessness pressures in their areas, and, additionally, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act which means that more people now get the help they need and at an earlier stage so preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place.

[HCWS1443]

Petition

Monday 25 March 2019

OBSERVATIONS

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Bedfordia Farms planning application for a high intensity chicken farm should be refused

The Humble Petition of the residents of Rushden, Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas,

Sheweth,

That the Petitioners believe that proposed Bedfordia Farms planning application for high intensity chicken farm should be refused on the grounds of increased pollution, foul odour, effect on local house prices, increased traffic volume; and further that similar farms have a poor record on animal welfare.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your hon. House urges the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Northamptonshire County Council and East Northamptonshire Council to take in account the concerns of the petitioners and refuse to grant the planning application for a high intensity chicken farm to Bedfordia Farms.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.—*[Presented by Mr Peter Bone, Official Report, 12 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 314.]*

[P002435]

Observations from the Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse):

East Northamptonshire Council is responsible for the day-to-day planning in their area. The Government's policy is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of a local planning authority unless it is necessary to do so. This is because local authority councillors are elected to represent the views of local people and, in the main, it is these councillors who are in the best position to decide whether a development should go ahead. In determining a planning application the local planning authority are required to have regard to all material considerations including the development plan, national policies and views expressed by third parties. It is, of course, for local planning authorities to provide whatever justification that it may be appropriate to give for their decisions and procedures.

Should the Secretary of State receive a request to call in a planning application, he would only begin to consider if call-in is appropriate once the planning application has been determined by the local planning authority and they are minded to approve. The Secretary of State will, in general, only consider the use of his call-in powers if planning issues of more than local importance are involved. Such cases may include, for example, those which in his opinion:

may conflict with national policies on important matters;

may have significant long-term impact on economic growth and meeting housing needs across a wider area than a single local authority;

could have significant effects beyond their immediate locality;

give rise to substantial cross-boundary or national controversy;

raise significant architectural and urban design issues; or

may involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments.

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 25 March 2019

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Syria

The following are extracts from responses to questions on a statement on Syria by the Minister for the Middle East, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt).

In response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden):

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman asked about the situation of the Kurdish community on the north-western border.

[Official Report, 11 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 62.]

In response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell):

Alistair Burt: In relation to the extent of aid, I absolutely agree—the £2.81 billion has been an extraordinary contribution. Last year in Brussels, we made the third largest pledge of £750 million, and the £2.81 billion that has been spent by the United Kingdom is indeed, I believe, a stronger sum than that provided by the European Union altogether over this period.

[Official Report, 11 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 63.]

In response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg):

Alistair Burt: However, in the camps, where the women and children of foreign fighters are concerned, there are no cash transfers. The Secretary of State has taken the view that that would not be appropriate. Cash transfers are extremely valuable in many circumstances. They provide some flexibility for refugees and those who are dependent on them and help people to make easier choices. There is little evidence of any abuse, and it can be a most practical way of delivering aid. But in the particular circumstances of the women and children of

foreign fighters, in order to ensure that there was no risk of divergence to terrorist sources, my right hon. Friend took the decision that cash transfers would not be used.

[Official Report, 11 March 2019, Vol. 656, c. 66.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for the Middle East.

Errors have been identified in the responses I gave to questions on the statement on Syria.

The correct responses should have been:

In response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden):

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman asked about the situation of the Kurdish community on the north-eastern border.

In response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell):

Alistair Burt: In relation to the extent of aid, I absolutely agree—the £2.81 billion has been an extraordinary contribution. Last year in Brussels, we made the third largest pledge of £750 million, and the £2.81 billion that has been **pledged** by the United Kingdom is indeed, I believe, a stronger sum than that provided by the European Union altogether over this period.

In response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg):

Alistair Burt: However, in the camps, where the women and children of foreign fighters are concerned, there are no **current plans for new cash programming by DFID**. The Secretary of State has taken the view that that would not be appropriate. Cash transfers are extremely valuable in many circumstances. They provide some flexibility for refugees and those who are dependent on them and help people to make easier choices. There is little evidence of any abuse, and it can be a most practical way of delivering aid. But in the particular circumstances of the women and children of foreign fighters, in order to ensure that there was no risk of divergence to terrorist sources, my right hon. Friend took the decision that **for the moment, new cash programming** would not be used.

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